



CHAPTER 2

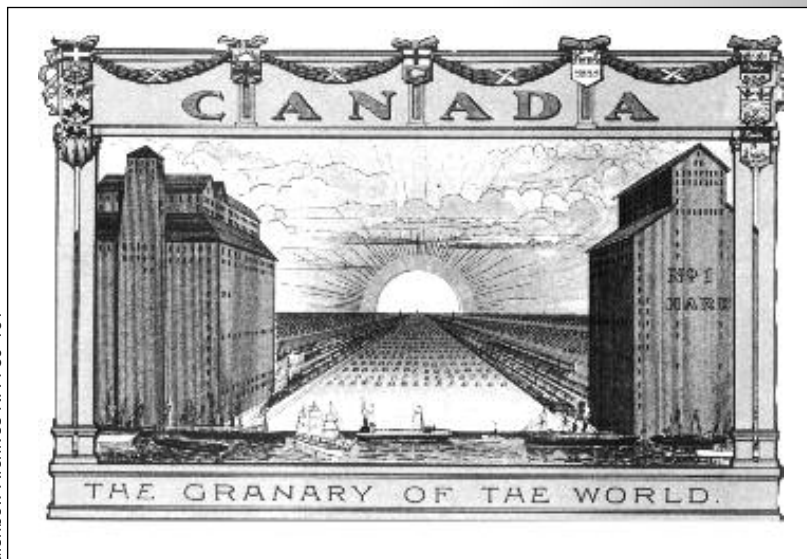
THE Early Years

On New Year's Eve, 1899, Canada was a nation on the threshold of enormous change. A gold rush was underway in the Klondike and startling new technologies had already begun to revolutionize the world of work. The nation's first hydroelectric plant had opened at Niagara Falls. The first magnetic sound recording had been made. No less than three steel mills were now operational in the land, confirming the nation's arrival in the industrial world. The Bank of Montreal already employed close to six hundred people nationwide. Imperial Oil had opened its headquarters in a parlour-sized upstairs room in Winnipeg.

In Toronto, several buildings towered over six storeys high. The city's first telephone exchange—serving forty subscribers—had been installed by none other than Alexander Graham Bell. On the streets, horse-drawn trolleys that had lumbered along tracks crisscrossing the city's main thoroughfares were giving way to electrical streetcars that hurtled along at incredible speeds of up to twenty miles an hour. The factories were still powered by steam, gas lamps lit the city streets and Canada was prosperous. A worldwide boom that had started late in the previous century benefited the new nation enormously; prices of raw materials, its main exports, outstripped the prices of manufactured products, its primary imports.

They were heady days. Under the able direction of its first French Canadian prime minister, the federal government addressed itself to

Glenbow Archives NA-789-161



1903: A government publication describes the country's bounty.

nation building. Eloquent and charming, Wilfrid Laurier was a master of political compromise, continuing and expanding upon the National Policy introduced by his predecessor and political foe, John A. Macdonald.

Canada was a society in the midst of transformation, with largely rural roots and new growing shoots of industry. Up to the turn of the century, well over half the population still worked the land and self-employment was implicit in most people's definition of work.

In the political mindset of the day, immigration was seen as the key to growth. Canada had not proven as popular a destination for settlers as the United States however, and the rush of immigrants anticipated by the Fathers of Confederation in 1867 had been slow to arrive.

Then, in 1896, with the closing of American public land, the Canadian prairies became known as the "Last Best West."¹ Clifford Sifton, Laurier's Minister of the Interior, was the architect of a brilliantly successful immigration campaign. Settlers from Britain, Europe and the U.S. poured into the country. In less than fifteen years, Canada

became a new home for some two million immigrants. Enticed by Sifton's promises of free land, many of these new arrivals headed west.

The country's economic well-being was vastly increased in these years. Thirty thousand new farms were established each year and national wheat production tripled every five. Wheat became Canada's primary export and shipments increased by a factor of ten.

The young country's new farmers were consumers as well, buying lumber for their homes from one part of the country and nails and glass from another. The



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At the turn of the century, farming was the principal occupation of many Canadians.

economy grew at an unprecedented rate, stirring John Hobson, a political economist visiting from Britain, to declare in 1906 that, "a single decade has swept away all of [Canada's] diffidence, and has replaced it by a spirit of boundless confidence and booming enterprise."²

In the flush of its new prosperity, the country's infrastructure expanded steadily. The last spike had been driven on the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 but, by the turn of the century, it was clear that a single transcontinental line would not be adequate to the national need, especially for the shipments of grain from the west. New lines were built, providing further links between west and east and, for the first time, pushing toward the northern frontier. In every direction, as the rails advanced, people followed and new industries were created.

Shipping, forestry and mining flourished. Nickel reserves discovered in Sudbury allowed Canada to acquire a near monopoly in global production, while the silver deposits of nearby Cobalt turned out to be the richest in the world. In British Columbia, the fishing industry doubled in size, spawning economic growth throughout the province. And in south-

ern Ontario, the taming of Niagara Falls provided “white coal”—hydro-electric power—for countless new applications including the smelting of steel in Hamilton, Ontario.

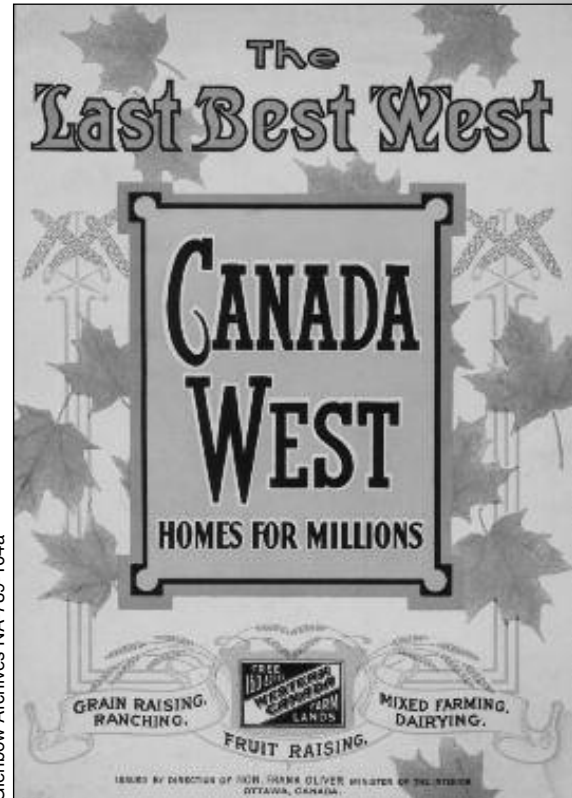
Everywhere Canada’s budding entrepreneurs turned, it seemed, the vast land yielded its riches and new work appeared. For all the bounty it offered, however, the land remained a tough taskmaster. Agriculture was still the primary provider and life on the farm and in rural communities was frequently harsh. Farming was a risky business, complicated by unpredictable weather, tariffs, prices that fluctuated on the speculative free market, arbitrary freight rates and the availability of rail transportation to get the crop to port.

Like farmers, the country’s trappers and fishermen worked the seasonal cycles of the northern climate, the fruits of their labours often going straight from hand to mouth. Others felled trees or worked in mines or canneries. Still others built roads, towns, cities and railways.

Considerable numbers of new immigrants, especially those without agricultural skills or English language ability, ended up doing the dirtiest and most dangerous work of all. Many joined the pool of mobile labourers known as “bunkhouse men,” separated from their families and consigned to dirty shacks, working long hours for meager wages in mining, harvesting, construction and logging.

The work of that frontier era was generally gruelling, sometimes dangerous and frequently poorly paid. Only an elite few had what we think of today as a career, enjoying the luxury of any personal choice in how they were to earn a living. Some families produced politicians and diplomats, as well as professionals, clergy and soldiers, but the majority of people still won their living with their hands. Brawn, muscle and a strong back were the work skills most in demand.

In the more settled areas of the country—in central Canada and to a lesser degree in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick—industrialization, and the free market economy it encouraged, gathered strength. As manufacturing production lines became increasingly common, notably in Ontario and Quebec, the nature of work continued to change.



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Canada was successfully promoted as the “Last Best West” to settlers from Britain, Europe and the U.S.

Migration to the towns and cities

Drawn by the new opportunities, people from the countryside began to move into the growing towns and cities to work in factories, stores and offices. For these people, Canada’s early working class, notions of self-sufficiency began to give way to another way of making a living—the so-called “steady job.”

The urban centres grew rapidly. During the first two decades of the century, Vancouver’s population increased fivefold. Towns like Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon and Regina sprang up on the sites of former trading posts and small settlements. Toronto and Montreal, already Canada’s

largest cities, doubled in size.³ By 1911, Quebec and Ontario had the largest urban concentrations.

Growth of this kind was largely unregulated however, and civic gov-

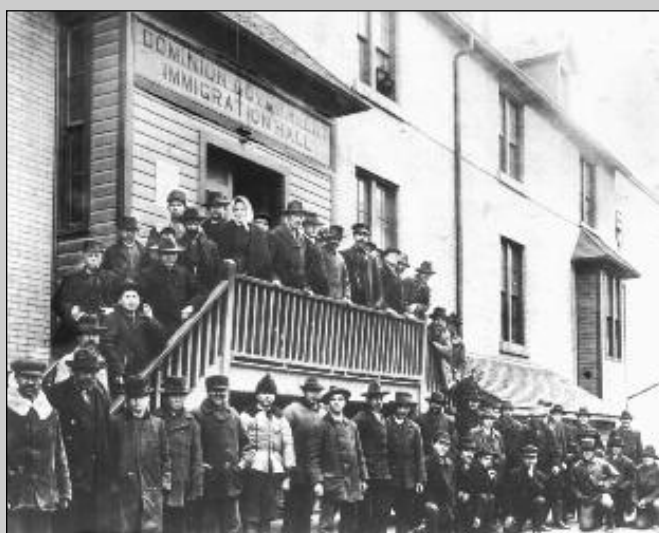


1910: Immigrant families arrive at Toronto's Union Station carrying their belongings in make-shift bundles.

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1911: A father and his sons arrive in Toronto from Britain to begin their new life in Ontario.

Glenbow Archives NA-382-112



Circa 1900: Thousands of immigrants from many countries flocked to Canada including these outside the Dominion Government Immigration Hall in Winnipeg.

United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto 93.049P/2927 N; Immigrants from many countries standing outside the Dominion Government Hall, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

ernments were challenged to meet the demands of the many social problems it created. On one side of town, affluent city dwellers lived a good, sometimes opulent, life, while on the other, ghetto-like slums grew quickly. Class and ethnic divisions divided people. Sanitation was a problem, water was unsafe to drink and infant mortality rates were high.

In the jostle and shove of these competitive hubs, skilled craftspeople enjoyed a higher status among workers, protected by their unions. But as the century progressed, traditional craft shops continued to lose ground to the burgeoning factory system. Investing their faith in the efficient techniques of mass manufacturing, factory employers systemati-

cally reduced the available work to its smallest components, simplifying tasks so that only low-level skills were required. In this manner, employers fought for and imposed a low-wage system, managing their workers according to the profit-and-loss arithmetic of the industrial era, ensuring that costs remained low and production levels high. And steadily, inexorably, independent and skilled craftspeople were replaced by unskilled labourers who were treated as commodities, ledger entries, “units of production.”

As ever greater numbers of people began to exchange their labour for wages, working relationships became more and more impersonal. The managers who ran the company towns, the logging, mining and construction camps, and the coastal fisheries and canneries, imposed strict supervision and production quotas.

People were overworked and labour undervalued. It was a rough and tumble world of sweatshops, poor working conditions and exploitation.

But whatever they did, and wherever they found themselves in the workforce, people needed help to find and keep employment. They needed language skills, agricultural skills and technical skills. They needed direction. And they needed guidance to understand how to function and adapt to a new country and an emerging workplace.

“Their expectations were low, revolving around work and survival. Indeed, they were preoccupied with survival... they were willing to work long hours and endure much discomfort if it allowed them security and a viable future for their offspring.”

Jaroslav Petryshyn,
Peasants in the Promised Land,
Canada and the Ukrainians
1891-1914

Community responses to workers' needs

The laissez-faire philosophy espoused by Laurier's government held that the nation's economic well-being was the responsibility not of bureaucrats but of the marketplace. Relationships between employers and employees were all but unregulated and, in the mood of nation building that gripped the government, few restrictions were placed on businesses. The needs of the poor and unemployed were left largely to charity. Church workers and volunteers affiliated with settlement houses and charitable organizations offered what assistance they could.

Catholic organizations such as the St. Vincent de Paul, the Benevolent Irish Societies and the Grey Nuns had a long history of providing services to destitute Catholics. Among Protestant organizations, the first Canadian YMCA had made its appearance in Montreal in 1851. By 1900, YMCAs and YWCAs existed in other major centres, including Toronto, Hamilton and Vancouver. The urban unemployed and poor relied heavily on assistance from organizations such as these.

Then, as now, it was understood that personal and working success were inseparably intertwined. And in the not-for-profit sector, with its focus on helping people develop their potential, some form of vocational guidance was seen as essential. There were, of course, no aptitude tests, motivational videos, practice interviews or self-evaluation exercises. But by the turn of the century, the YMCA and YWCA offered training and placement services for men and women. And in 1910, a YWCA Employment Bureau in Vancouver had nearly three thousand job orders

from employers and ultimately placed more than one thousand women in jobs.

Amid the din of urban expansion, massive immigration and advancing industrialization, a frontier mentality held that it was “every man for himself.” As for women, they were expected to be in the labour force only when they were single. That being said, some workers’ unions were vying for position, the collective voice being recognized as more than that of the individual. Compared with the powerful labour movements that had flourished in Europe however, Canada was considered a backwater when it came to union activity.⁴

The union membership that did exist was largely male, white, Anglo-Saxon and skilled. And many of the people most in need of protection—migrant workers on construction sites, in canneries, in mines or on railway maintenance crews—remained outside the labour movement’s influence or concern.

More than half the unionized workers in Canada at the turn of the century were affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, which dominated the Canadian labour scene at the time. Skilled labour moved back and forth across the Canadian-American boundary in all regions. As workers moved from place to place in search of work, with little regard for borders, they depended on their international craft unions to protect their rights.

In the early days of the century, organized labour was effective at calling strikes and workplace disputes were common in a range of industries such as coal mining, cotton processing, communications and railways. When push came to shove, however, little was accomplished, at least from the perspective of workers. Governments often intervened on the side of

employers, even to the extent of calling in the militia to force people back to work.

Capitalist exploitation spawned a new breed of labour leader committed to fight for the rights of industrial age workers. R. B. (Bob) Russell was one such leader. A Scot, Russell worked as a machinist for one of the country’s largest employers, the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway). An early champion of “One Big Union,” he went on to run for the Independent Labour Party in Assiniboia, Manitoba.

In his column in *The Machinists Bulletin*, Russell wrote, “The days of the craft unions are over. The call of the working class for Industrial Union has gone out in order to meet the great change in Industrial Expansion and construction of the new machinery.”



1912: Child labour was accepted, even in the coal mines.

The social reform movement

“Though many will tell you that times are bad, there are now, as always, a certain number of employers looking for workers, and men out of employment seeking work. What can be simpler than to bring them together?”

The year was 1914. The place was Montreal. And the workplace crusader posing the question was Etta St. John Wileman, British expatriate and member of the staunchly conservative and Protestant Imperial Federation League.

Carried in the wake of the waves of British and U.S. immigrants arriving on Canadian shores was an active social reform movement, closely connected with major Protestant churches. Although at times high-minded and patronizing in their views, these reformers lobbied governments for better housing, recreational and health facilities, better sewers and sanitation.

After years of growth, Canada's economy was in the doldrums. Overseas investment had fallen off badly. Urban unemployment had climbed to an estimated 25 percent. To social activists like Miss Wileman, the lack of meaningful government action was intolerable. "What is wrong with the brains of the nation," she railed, "that the labour market is unorganized resulting in idleness and distress?"⁵

Her concerns were well-founded, though they might not have found their mark had it not been for the march of events. A world war had just begun and Canada was committed to play its part. The national job market was already flooded with an excess of workers, but immigrants from Britain, Europe and the United States continued to pour into the country in search of new opportunities, unaware of the strain they were adding to an already difficult situation.

Wileman's vision was clear and uncompromising. For a couple of years, she had been seeking support across Canada, canvassing politicians and business leaders, asking them to "recognize their responsibility for the unemployed. Work," she declared, was "a social obligation, which has to be provided in order that both individual and state may reap the benefit of constant regular productivity."⁶

The need for some form of assistance for individuals in finding and retaining productive work had been obvious to reformers for decades. Employment, jobs and the very meaning of work were changing and people were hard-pressed to keep up. Arguments such as Wileman's, however, ran into the ingrained view that a man who really wanted to find work could always do so. And the limited social assistance available to able-bodied unemployed men at the time reflected this deeply held prejudice. In Ontario, before they could receive food and shelter in a "house of industry," as workhouses were called, unemployed single men had to perform a work test such as breaking rocks. In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, entire families were forced into workhouses since provincial authorities would not accept that a man could not find work and they would not provide assistance to an unemployed man and his family unless they all agreed to enter the workhouse.

Amid the angst and uncertainty of those turbulent years, on the cusp of an agricultural economy and an industrial age, there was precious little help for the unemployed. There were few records of the labour market, no analyses of industries and wages, no official statistics. People trying to find their way in the new country's frontier workplace had few services to guide them. Recent immigrants had little help finding their

"The true makers of Canada were those who, in obscurity and poverty, made it with axe and spade, with plough and scythe, with sweat of face and strength of arm."

Robert Sellar, 1915

way into the workplace. No one had counsellors to help them find the work best suited to them. In fact, a Royal Commission investigating the practises of employment agencies in Montreal found that Italian immigrant labourers were often exploited. The Commission recommended the strict licensing of labour bureaus to regulate the recruitment of immigrants.⁷

In a few of the larger cities, some craft unions ran non-profit employment offices, but only for union members. The so-called “labour agents” and commercial employment agencies of the day worked exclusively on behalf of employers, often at the expense of the individuals they recruited.

The needs of the economy were paramount.

Labour and legislation

Collective organization was somewhat more successful on the prairies than in other regions. Early in the century, Canadian farmers had banded together to lobby the government for better freight rates and the elimination of tariffs. Over the years, cooperative grain growers’ associations had become a strong collective voice for western farmers.

There had been occasional earlier attempts to protect workers’ rights, among them the federal Conciliation Act, which made its debut along with a brand new Department of Labour in 1900. In 1907, as the first McLaughlin motor car came off the line in Oshawa and the country’s first service station opened in Vancouver, Canada’s first significant piece of labour legislation was passed. Written by William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act would define labour relations in Canada for decades to come. Intended to be fair to

both sides, the purpose of the legislation was to prevent industrial conflict from deterring economic growth. It provided for a cooling-off period and conciliation proceedings as the best methods of encouraging industrial peace. But many employers used the no-strike period to build up inventory and locate replacement employees. Passing laws was no solution in itself. Given the inadequate inspection services of the day, applying them was something else again.

An economic downturn in 1907 threw thousands of people out of work. The country slumped into a deep but brief recession. Over the next year or so factories closed, construction ground to a halt and the number of urban unemployed grew. There was little work in rural areas either and, as large numbers of people migrated into Canadian cities, the load was more than the private employment agencies could handle.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 107

1908: Women work alongside men in factories.

A role for government

Some of the provinces began to address the unemployment problem. Ontario opened a government labour employment bureau in Hamilton

and another in Ottawa to place urban workers in jobs. A year later, Quebec followed suit, creating a system of government employment offices, the most advanced in the country at the time. Civic politicians and administrators began to take an active interest in addressing the needs of the employment market. In a few urban centres, municipal labour bureaus were set up and the unemployed were registered and put to work temporarily for the cities. When the economy improved, however, these municipal offices were shut down.

For the most part, people looking for work were on their own. New immigrants, people moving out of rural areas into cities and young people entering the workforce for the first time all found work in the same way: through newspaper advertisements, commercial agencies, charitable organizations and, sometimes, by sheer luck.

None of these methods was adequate, said Etta St. John Wileman who had begun her crusade for a system of federal employment bureaus in 1912, badgering Calgary's city council into creating a civic employment office and making her the manager. Wileman and her compatriots in the Imperial Federation League may have looked upon Canada with a certain blue blood condescension, but her concern for the worker was genuine.

The federal government's involvement in employment bureaus was essential, she believed, to facilitate the movement of people across the country and to create a trustworthy way to help employers and employees find each other. In true imperialist fervour, she lobbied to link Canadian employment bureaus with the Labour Bureaus established in Britain a few years earlier. British workers wishing to immigrate could register in Britain for job placement in Canada, she proposed.

The need for employment assistance was a "crying necessity," Wileman believed. "We find honest, intelligent men and women giving way to apathy and despair in the constantly recurring struggle of hunting for jobs. And we see children, new to the game of finding work, thrown onto their own resources."⁸

However sincere her pleas, the federal government found reasons to resist them, for a time. Organized labour was not exactly sold on the idea either. Labour leaders tended to oppose federal involvement of this kind, concerned that Ottawa would use the service, as commercial agencies had, to move immigrant workers into areas of labour dispute. Employers, for their part, worried that employment bureaus would interfere with the free movement of workers between the provinces.⁹

Introduction of career guidance

But Etta St. John Wileman's vision reached far beyond the establishment of a national system of employment offices. In her thoughtful and passionate speeches, Wileman lobbied for what is today known as career guidance and counselling in schools and for the publication of labour market information. "What sustained coordinated effort is made throughout the Dominion to ascertain the abilities and natural bent of the child to fit for occupation after school?" she demanded to know. "What knowledge do parents secure as to conditions of trades and occupations, rates of pay, training necessary to give a child a fair start in the Industrial World?"

In the early days of the century, many Canadian students learned their

three Rs in a single-room schoolhouse, moving in and out of classes in tandem with family needs. Academic training, if and when it happened, was not necessarily tied to a diploma. In many families, formal education simply wasn't considered a priority, even though compulsory schooling to age fourteen or fifteen was the law in all provinces except Quebec.

In agricultural communities, for the most part, work was a family affair; children attended school only when they weren't needed at home on the farm. In communities where mining, logging, fishing or industry, as the century progressed, created jobs, boys were often required to meet family needs and leave school early to look for work.

When a young person did manage to finish school, and began to think about his or her future, career guidance or counselling was unlikely to be much more than a conversation with the teacher after class as she cleaned the blackboard. If the student was bright and the family could afford it, that discussion might focus on which university the student should consider. But as late as the 1930s, only 1 percent of school children was university-bound. Often the family wasn't up to the costs of higher education or the student's academic skills weren't seen to be strong enough, or both. The teacher's questions would most likely be: "Won't your family need you on the farm?" or "What about talking to the blacksmith in town?" or "How about that new hotel they're building in the next county? Maybe they'll need help."

Higher education resists vocational role

Advanced education had been available in Upper Canada as early as the mid-17th century, but in New France, as it was then called, unless you were a male and destined for a profession or the clergy, it simply wasn't open to you. In the period after the British conquest, a number of universities were gradually established, including Dalhousie University in Halifax in 1818, McGill University in Montreal in 1821, and the University of Toronto in 1827. From then until the middle of the 20th century, Canadian universities—in English Canada, at least—were fashioned on their British counterparts, which were class-conscious and conservative.

Well into the 20th century, university remained a privileged environment largely reserved for white Anglo-Saxon males. Most university students were the children of the upper and middle classes, bound for

specific professional careers: academia, law and engineering.

In Canada's institutions of higher learning there was little requirement for, or interest, in career or vocational guidance. Educators in these institutions held to the ideal of "pure education" which imparted the fundamentals of traditional European schools of thought with little consideration of workplace applications.

An early and notable exception to this traditional and rather elitist view of education was Frontier College. Founded in 1899 by Rev. Alfred Fitzpatrick, the college's original aim was to "make education available to



1907: Workers study in a Frontier College classroom. "Education must be obtainable on the farm, in the bush, on the railway and in the mine," said college founder Rev. Alfred Fitzpatrick.

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all.” Frontier College “worker-teachers” were sent out across the country, even into remote workplaces, to work side by side with workers and to go into their homes to teach English and help people build some of the skills they needed. “Education must be obtainable on the farm, in the bush, on the railway and in the mine,” Fitzpatrick believed. “We must educate the whole family wherever they earn their living: teaching them how to earn and, at the same time, how to grow physically, intellectually and spiritually...This is the real education.”

The advent of vocational guidance

The early roots of career and vocational guidance can be found in technical and vocational education. Although the Industrial Revolution didn’t gather steam in Canada until after the First World War, south of the border it had been reshaping the workscape as early as the 1870s.

Still, it was not until 1909, when reform activist Frank Parsons’ theories were first used in a Vocations Bureau in Boston, that vocational guidance was defined in a clear and concrete way. Early vocational guidance offered in schools tended to rely on Parsons’ model and, as the years progressed, was augmented by psychometric assessment and tools.

It was Parsons who identified vocational counselling as consisting of three distinct stages. The first stage, he said, was devoted to gaining a full understanding of oneself. The second was centred on the acquisition of a firm base of knowledge about the workplace and the jobs available. And the third stage concentrated on forming a clear mental image of how to bring the two together.

Vocational guidance evolved slowly in Canadian schools largely because education in Canada falls under provincial government jurisdiction, and each provincial department of education has its own way of doing things. In those days, vocational guidance was targeted almost exclusively to students in technical schools and to the skills and abilities they were going to need in the sort of work they were likely to do. The inclusion of personal, social and psychological factors would have to wait until later in the century.

Vocational training in Canada can be traced back to the middle of the 17th century, when artisans and teachers from France were brought to Quebec to teach rug making. And since the beginning of the 19th century, some kind of vocational training has been available in most regions of the country. Legislation governing training of this kind didn’t appear until the early 20th century.

Alongside general training to impart mechanical,

In the early years of the century, few thought about assisting others in their choice of vocation, however here and there voices were echoing the sentiments of Etta St. John Wileman. Commenting on the work of Frank Parsons of the Boston Vocational Bureau, Taylor Statten, the Boys’ Work Secretary for the national YMCA offered this advice:

- Consider what you are best fitted for; ask your parents, teachers and friends what they think.
- Study the men who are in the occupations that you wish to enter.
- Do not let your fascination for a career interfere with your serious consideration as to whether or not you are adapted to that work.
- Do not make your inability to decide on a vocation an excuse for idleness, but go ahead and do something at once. More is learned by action than by reflection.
- Do not wander from one job to another. Stick to your work until you are sure you are getting into something better.
- A good training for any one trade will always contain many elements that are applicable to another trade.
- Do not be discouraged if you do not find your vocation early in life. Many men made false starts, and not until later find their real sphere.

From the YMCA’s publication,
The Triangle, January 1912.



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1914: William Lyon Mackenzie King — a little-known labour expert — became Canada's labour minister.

industrial, clerical and domestic skills, the training provided generally reflected the sort of work available in the region. In Newfoundland, for example, young people were taught navigation and net making. Navigation skills were also taught in Nova Scotia, as were mining techniques. Agricultural skills were taught in most provinces.

Although education was a matter of provincial jurisdiction, the federal government became involved in addressing the need of an industrializing economy for skilled workers. There was the perception that labour shortages could critically stall industrial development, which at the time was seen to be at the top of the list of what was “in the national interest.”

Ottawa's interest in Canada's vocational educational system began ten years into the 20th century, when the federal government appointed a Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education. Some of the commission's recommendations were never implemented: it advised that a federal Ministry of Vocational Education be established, for example. The commission had also criticized

Canadian education. Established by William Lyon Mackenzie King, who, at the time, was Deputy Minister of Labour, the commission had traveled to each of the provinces, to the United States, the United Kingdom and to Europe, and had returned home with a blunt assessment: “Canada is behind the times.”⁹

Canadian education was too “bookish” and not related to “industrial, agricultural or housekeeping life,” the commission's report stated. Federal involvement in vocational education and training was necessary because, as the commission pointed out, it was a federal responsibility to provide Canada, as an industrial nation, with an adequate supply of skilled workers.¹⁰

During the war, many of the country's existing technical and vocational institutions had been conscripted by the federal government to train both military and civilian personnel. Immediately after the conflict, these institutions were returned to the provinces. Nonetheless, the federal government had, for a time, been directly involved in the technical training of adults.

The recommendation that the federal government provide funds to the provinces to encourage vocational education did find its way into federal legislation. In 1913, the federal government passed the Agricultural Instruction Act detailing the ways in which it intended to support provincial vocational training initiatives.

Ottawa stipulated the amount of money available and, to some degree, how it should be spent. In a portent of future federal/provincial collaboration, it also mandated a couple of federal initiatives: a publication initiated in Ottawa would be distributed free to interested parties; and an annual conference in the nation's capital would bring provincial and fed-



Archives of Manitoba/W.J. Sisler Collection 60/N11597

1913: Recent immigrants wait to enter one of Winnipeg's eighteen private employment offices, where they hope to find work.

eral officials together.

For the most part, the provinces welcomed the money, though they jealously guarded their right to spend it as they saw fit and challenged the federal government's right to tie conditions to educational funds, determined to protect their educational "turf" as a provincial responsibility.

For technical and vocational students in schools, the little counselling that was available tended to focus on the needs of the workplace, not the individual. Virtually nowhere in Canada or the U.S. did schools offer instruction or guidance on the best methods for students to examine their own strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes, or come to a decision about the line of work to which they might be best suited.

War, peace and a dream come true

High levels of unemployment during the recession of 1913 compounded the turmoil that characterized Canada's unregulated labour market and increased the demand for a nationally organized service to match employers and employees. On the prairies, in 1913 and again in 1914, the crops failed. More agricultural workers migrated to the cities, and the numbers of jobless people haunting the streets of Canada's urban centres swelled.

Laurier's Liberal government had been defeated in 1911 by Robert Borden's Conservatives. Now, as unemployment increased across the country and people became desperate for work, Borden's government found it could no longer claim that unemployment was not a national issue. Searching for solutions, Ottawa began to take more seriously the pleas of Etta St. John Wileman.

Then, in August 1914, the world went to war. Young Canadian men, many of them out of work and hungry, enlisted, and Canadian charities and volunteers began looking for ways to demonstrate their patriotism. The Great War became a watershed event in Canada, a catalyst for rapid industrial and factory growth. An Imperial Munitions Board was established, fuelling growth in the country's industrial infrastructure. And Canadian factories began producing ships, chemicals, aircraft and explosives.

Wileman stepped up her lobbying efforts, adding a new and persuasive plank to her platform. A federal system was essential, she said, not only to move immigrants to the areas of the country in which their labour was needed, but also to move workers to factories to support the war effort. And once the war had ended, she pointed out, the employment bureaus could help returning veterans and out-of-work munitions facto-



1917: A woman makes fuses in a munitions factory.

ry workers re-establish themselves.

Eventually, doubtless guided by their own self-interests, some senators, provincial premiers and even labour leaders began to climb onto Wileman's bandwagon. Wartime labour radicalism and the apparent popularity among western Canadian workers of Russia's Bolshevik revolution in 1917 had alarmed the traditional elite. They feared that as veterans left military jobs and war industries closed, the unemployed of the nation would pose a threat to political and economic stability.

With the management of Canada's available manpower posing an immediate challenge, the Borden government tentatively began to develop a manpower policy. Compulsory registration of the labour force was mandated. And in the summer of 1918, federal workers won the right to bargain collectively, although strikes and lockouts were banned

Later that year, after lengthy negotiations with the provinces, and just a week after the November 11 armistice, provincial and federal officials met to work out the details of a national employment service. A month later, as 1918 drew to a close, Borden's cabinet, through an order-in-council, created the Employment Service Council of Canada.

Propelled by a sense of urgency and in the first post-war example of "co-operative federalism," Canada began its initial experiment in the manage-

ment of its manpower resources. On November 25, 1918, the *Montreal Gazette* carried the headline: "New National System of Employment Office."

"By this plan," the article went on, "the Dominion of Canada will have always at hand accurate information as to the demand and supply of labour in all parts of the country, the extent to which private industry is absorbing the returned soldier and demobilized war workers, the volume of public employment that must be provided to take away any surplus and the localities and trades in which such employment is required."

One big part of Etta St. John Wileman's dream had come true. But the pronounced and growing need for career and employment assistance throughout the rapidly changing workplace had only begun to be met.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 891

1918: On Armistice Day, the celebration of victory over Germany spills over into the streets of downtown Toronto.

¹ Desmond Morton, *A Short History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992).

² Craig Brown, ed, *History of Canada* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2000).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Desmond Morton, *A Short History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992).

⁵ Etta St. John Wileman, *Government Labour Bureaux: Their Scope and Aims* (Montreal: Mercantile Print).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Canadian Encyclopedia (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart).

⁸ *The Archivist* - Jan/Feb '89.

⁹ John Hunter, *The Employment Challenge* (Ottawa: Government of Canada).

¹⁰ Darius Young, *Historical Survey of Vocational Education in Canada* (North York: Captus Press).