

Municipal Government.—Under the system established by the Constitutional Act of 1791, municipal administration was carried on in the main (as in the England of those days) by the courts of quarter sessions, whose members were appointed by and responsible to the governor in council. As urban communities began to grow, there commenced an agitation for local self-government, which after many rebuffs, resulted in 1832 in the grant to Brockville of a limited measure of control of the local police. In 1833 Hamilton and in 1834 Belleville, Cornwall, Port Hope and Prescott received similar powers, while in the latter year York became a self-governing city with a mayor, aldermen and councillors under the name of Toronto, Kingston receiving in 1838 a similar constitution, though being denied the name of city. These developments secured the cordial approval of Lord Durham, who maintained in his report (1839) that "the establishment of a good system of municipal institutions throughout this Province is a matter of vital importance. . . . The establishment of municipal institutions for the whole country should be made a part of every colonial constitution." Upon the introduction of responsible government, the District Councils Act of 1841 was passed, giving a considerable measure of local self-government with a large measure of control by the central authorities. A more comprehensive measure, the Municipal Act of 1849, provided "by one general law, for the erection of municipal corporations and the establishment of regulations of police in and for the several counties, cities, towns, townships and villages in Upper Canada." This Act has been called the Magna Charta of municipal institutions, not only for Ontario, but for the newer provinces which largely copied Ontario institutions. Its main features are still clearly visible in the municipal system of today.

Under this system there existed in 1868, when the first legislature of Ontario assembled, 539 local self-governing units, including 36 counties, 399 townships, and 104 cities, towns and villages. In 1921 there were in the Province 911 local self-governing units, including 38 county municipalities, 557 townships, 149 villages, 143 towns and 24 cities. There is thus a local self-governing body for every 3,200 of the population of the province, and the general effect has been to initiate the masses of the people in the problems of self-government, so that Ontario has been described by eminent students of democratic governments as one of the most perfect democracies in existence.

The present law respecting municipal institutions is contained in chapter 192 of the Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1914, and its amendments (4 Geo. V, c. 33, 5 Geo. V, c. 34, 6 Geo. V, c. 39).

The territorial division of the province for municipal and judicial purposes is governed by the Territorial Division Act (R.S.O., 1914, c. 3), section 11 of which provides that, subject to the provisions of the Municipal Act, the Lieutenant-Governor may by proclamation constitute and fix the boundaries of new townships in those parts of Ontario in which townships have not been already constituted.