

CHAPTER VI.—VITAL STATISTICS*

CONSPPECTUS

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NOTE.—The interpretation of the symbols used in the tables throughout the Year Book will be found facing p. 1 of this volume.

Section 1.—Historical Sketch of the Collection of Vital Statistics in Canada

The history of the collection of vital statistics in Canada is covered broadly at pp. 185-188 in the 1948-49 edition of the Year Book.

A review is given below of the collection of vital statistics in Newfoundland prior to union with Canada which is presented as a background for the statistics appearing separately in Section 9 of this Chapter.

Classification of Vital Statistics.—Until recently, vital statistics in Canada were all classified by place of occurrence. In 1944, however, the classification of births and deaths by residence was begun, births being classified by the residence of the mother. A number of special tabulations by residence have been made for a few years prior to 1944: in Tables 1 to 4 and in Tables 9, 10, 11, 21 and 22 the figures are shown for the five-year average 1941-45. Marriages are classified by place of occurrence and in this case comparable averages can be carried back to 1926.

Vital Statistics of Newfoundland Prior to Union.—The collection of vital statistics in Newfoundland has been a history of struggle against continual difficulties. The scattered distribution of isolated settlements along the coastline, where in many places there is not even to-day any regular system of communication or transportation, results each year in long delays in the collection of data. Economic and geographic factors have prevented any effective growth of municipal or local government organization compelling all reporting activity to be organized and administered directly from St. John's City. In recent years, however, doctors have been located at strategic points throughout the Island, but many births and illnesses are still unattended by the medical profession. The small population and low per capita income has resulted in an individual approach being made to most problems. Except for the birth and marriage data statistical information was required, principally, for the issue of passports. The incompleteness of existing vital statistics is also a result of the disastrous fire of 1892 which practically destroyed the city of St. John's with registrar and church records. †

* Revised in the Health and Welfare Division, Vital Statistics Section, Dominion Bureau of Statistics.

† The building up of vital statistic material in 1949 assumed a role of greatly increased importance with the coming into force in the Province of Newfoundland of Family Allowances and the joint Federal-Provincial Old Age Pension Act—both measures have added enormously to the duties of the office of the Registrar General of the Province.