

Since the United Province of Canada was the predominant partner in the Canadian Confederation of 1867 and since in its division of legislative powers the British North America Act allocated "the Census and Statistics" to the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, it was natural that the first attempts at the organization of statistical machinery on a national basis should evolve around the Province of Canada's Board of Registration and Statistics, set up in 1847.

Despite the achievement of Confederation in the political sphere, the development of a co-ordinated comprehensive system of general statistics adequate to the needs of the new transcontinental federation was delayed for half a century. Although Canada's Census Commissioner, Dr. J. C. Taché, brought together in Volume IV of the Census of 1871 an invaluable summary of all the preceding censuses over a period of more than two centuries, and Parliament passed a new Census and Statistics Act in 1879 providing for the taking of a census in 1881 and every tenth year thereafter and for the making of regulations concerning the collecting and publishing of vital, agricultural, commercial, criminal and other statistics, the establishment under the Ministry of Agriculture of a permanent Census and Statistics Office in 1905 constituted the first step toward the combination of census and other statistical data into a co-ordinated statistical system for the whole country. The statistical work then being performed in government departments was characterized by frequent overlapping, by some duplication on the part of both federal and provincial departments and by great gaps and lack of uniformity in coverage. Indeed, the existence of these inadequacies was confirmed through an inquiry conducted in 1912 by the Departmental Commission on the Official Statistics of Canada, comprised of representatives from the Civil Service Commission, the Census and Statistics Office, and the Departments of Trade and Commerce, of Labour, and of Customs. The Commission, in its report, recommended the organization of a Central Statistical Office for the co-ordination, unification, extension and general improvement of statistics, and the taking of a quinquennial census. It recommended a thorough examination of methods currently in use in collecting and compiling data, the institution of an annual census of production (embracing the chief products of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining and manufactures), the co-ordination of the work of the statistical branches of the Departments of Customs and Trade and Commerce, the reorganization of canal statistics and the creation of statistics of coastal trade, the creation of wage and consumption statistics, improvement in the statistics of insurance, the development of price statistics, the enlargement of the Canada Year Book, and, in the provincial sphere, the co-ordination of statistics of births, marriages and deaths, public health, education, agriculture, local and municipal governments, industrial accidents, various phases of production, finance, public lands, public works, hospitals and charities.

The first step in the implementation of the report of the Commission was the appointment in 1915 of R. H. Coats to the office of Dominion Statistician and his assumption of responsibility for devising a practical scheme for the organization of a central Canadian statistical office. Three years later, after minute examination of the statistical field by the Dominion Statistician and after discussions and conferences with federal and provincial departmental officials, the Statistics Act, 1918 was passed by