

Territories Act of 1875. The creation of Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1905 and the adjustment of the northern boundaries of Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec by 1912 pushed the Northwest Territories north of the 60th parallel. The 1905 legislation provided for a federally appointed Commissioner with wide executive and legislative powers and a Council of four but no councillors were appointed for 16 years. In 1921 the Council was expanded to six members and, until the first appointment of a territorial resident in 1946, it was composed entirely of senior federal officials.

Defence early warning systems, radio and greatly improved air transportation after World War II ended the extreme isolation of the North and pressures for improved territorial government soon followed. Legislative changes in 1951 and 1952 increased Council membership to eight, three of them elected from the Mackenzie District. A fourth was added in 1954. At least two Council sessions were required to be held in a year, one in the Territories and all others at the seat of government in Ottawa. The subjects on which the Commissioner in Council could legislate were increased to approximate those of the provincial legislatures except that natural resources other than game were reserved to the federal government. A Territorial Court was established in 1952.

Recent constitutional developments. The quickening of federal interest in the North in the 1950s and 1960s stimulated concern and effort to arrange for a resident territorial government and to chart the course of its future development. An amendment to the Northwest Territories Act in 1966 created three new electoral districts in the eastern Arctic and, for the first time, gave elected representation to all residents of the Territories. Also, at the ensuing election the first Eskimo was elected to the territorial Council. A separate consolidated revenue fund was set up for the territorial government and wider powers in other areas of financial administration were introduced.

Meanwhile, in 1965, the federal government had appointed an Advisory Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories which travelled widely in the North to examine the local needs for change. Following receipt of its recommendations in 1966, the federal government acted quickly to provide for a territorial administration resident in the Northwest Territories. Yellowknife was designated as the seat of territorial government. In June 1970, the federal government passed amendments to the Northwest Territories Act changing the number of elected Council members from seven to ten and decreasing the number of appointed members from five to four. The amendments also extended the life of Council from three to four years, permitted Council to set its own indemnities and to establish the voting age in territorial elections (now set at 18 years subject to a one-year residence requirement), and reduced the period of federal disallowance of territorial ordinances from two years to one.

Changes in territorial administration. Unlike the Yukon Territory, which has had its own public service since the turn of the century, the government of the Northwest Territories, until recently, has been largely dependent on the federal government for staff to implement its legislation and to operate its public services. Until 1963, the Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs (now Indian Affairs and Northern Development) was Commissioner, and the Northern Administration Branch of that Department was devoted to operating most government services in the Northwest Territories with federal public servants. In that year, a full-time Commissioner was appointed and charged with building up a territorial administration located initially in Ottawa. In September 1967 the Commissioner and about 50 staff members moved to Yellowknife and immediately assumed responsibility for the game management service, municipal affairs, the issuing of all licences, tax collection and the operation of the liquor system (already staffed by territorial contract employees). Operational responsibility for other government services was transferred from federal to territorial control in the Mackenzie District on April 1, 1969, and in the eastern Arctic on April 1, 1970. The territorial government is structured to carry out its administration through seven line and three service departments, each under the direction of a senior public servant reporting to the Executive which consists of the Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioner. The field staff is organized into four regions with regional directors at Fort Smith, Inuvik, Frobisher Bay and Churchill.

Present government structure. The Northwest Territories Act, 1952, as amended, provides for an executive, legislative and judicial structure. The Commissioner is the chief executive