

The History of the RCMP



Born out of a need for a national police force to implement the law in Canada's newly acquired western territories, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has been Canada's national police service for almost 150 years.

In the 1870s, the great plains of Canada were some of the most lawless and dangerous places in North America.

Sir John A. MacDonald, the Prime Minister of the time, created the North-West Mounted Police to bring justice to the west as well as money and power to the east.



In the fall of 1873, more than 300 untrained men marched from Upper Canada to Fort Dufferin and Lower Fort Garry, to prepare and train for the great March West.

In July 1874, the Mounted Police, now numbering 275 members, marched west, headed for southern Alberta, where American whisky traders were operating among the Indigenous people of Canada.

The officers established a permanent post at Fort Macleod, Alberta, where approximately half of the Force was posted. The remaining members were either sent to Fort Edmonton or to Fort Pelly, Saskatchewan, which had been designated as headquarters.

By 1885, the Force had grown to 1,000 men, but in 1896 its future was threatened by the newly elected Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who wanted to reduce and eventually disband the NWMP. However, support for the Force in the West prevailed, and it gained new prominence policing the Klondike Gold Rush.

In 1904, King Edward VII conferred the title of "Royal" upon the North-West Mounted Police.

From 1905 to 1916, the Force entered into contracts to police the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. These contracts ended due to the provinces' desire to create their own police forces.

Since 1868, the Dominion Police had been the protector of the Parliament Buildings and enforced federal laws across all Canada. On December 12, 1918, the Dominion Police was relieved of its responsibilities in Western Canada, and the Royal North-West Mounted Police took over sole responsibility for Federal security and law enforcement from the Lakehead to the Pacific (Northwestern Ontario to British Columbia).

On February 1, 1920, the Act to amend the Royal North West Mounted Police Act came into force. The Act changed the name of the RNWMP to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and allowed for the move of RCMP headquarters to Ottawa from Regina. In addition, the Dominion Police was terminated and its roles and responsibilities for federal policing in Eastern Canada were taken over by the RCMP.

The RCMP returned to provincial policing with a new contract with Saskatchewan in 1928.

From 1932 to 1938, the RCMP took over provincial policing in Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, nearly doubling in size to 2,350 members.

The years following World War II saw a continued expansion of the RCMP's role as a provincial force. In 1950, it assumed responsibility for provincial policing in Newfoundland and absorbed the British Columbia provincial police.

Women were first accepted as uniformed members in 1974. The 70s also brought an expansion of responsibilities in areas such as airport policing, VIP security and drug enforcement.

In 1989, the RCMP participated in its first United Nations mission, sending 100 police officers to Namibia to monitor national elections.

Today, the RCMP has nearly 30,000 employees, stationed across the country, ranging from the arctic in the north, to the international border to the south and from British Columbia to Newfoundland. The scope of operations includes organized crime, terrorism, illicit drugs, economic crimes and offences that threaten the integrity of Canada's national borders. The RCMP also has jurisdiction in eight provinces and three territories.

In Manitoba, the RCMP has about 1000 police officers and nearly 500 civilian employees, spread from Churchill to Emerson and from Virden to Falcon Lake. Geographically, the Manitoba RCMP is responsible for about 99% of the province. The vastness and the range of policing is incredible; there are cities, small towns, and a number of First Nation communities – some of which are very remote and only accessible by plane, boat or helicopter. The work is wide and varied, and the challenges are constantly changing. But through it all, every employee is committed to the same common goal: the safety and security of the communities we serve.