

Canada Border Services Agency - A proud heritage of protection, service and integrity

The history of the Canada Border Services Agency and its legacy organizations goes back to a time well before Confederation. This is because customs collection and the securing of borders are among the oldest and most basic roles of government.

The creation of the Department of Customs in 1867, one of CBSA's key legacy organizations, makes our Agency Canada's oldest federal law enforcement organization.

When we think of Canada's history, we can't help but think of large-scale immigration, of bountiful agriculture, of industry, and trade — and the CBSA and our legacy organizations have played a leading role in all these pillars of Canadian success. By safeguarding our borders while facilitating trade and collecting revenue, we have helped build the stable and prosperous Canada we all know today.

So, how did we get from there to here? This is a brief history of the CBSA and its legacy organizations, and of the people who built a world-class border services organization — one that in turn helped build Canada.

In the beginning ...

Well before Europeans came to North America, some of Canada's Indigenous peoples carried out a form of border control by receiving compensation from members of other groups passing through their territories.

The centuries leading up to Confederation: Britain and France outsource the job of collecting revenue to the highest bidder in exchange for an annual payment to the royal treasury. They use this system in their North American colonies.

1671 - 1696: Britain ends outsourcing and starts appointing customs collectors in their colonies in a bid to generate more revenue. There is evidence of a customs collector at Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia as early as 1719.

1787: The British government recommends the Canadian legislature be allowed to regulate inland trade with the United States. The first interior customs office is established in St. Jean, Quebec in 1788 as a means to regulate trade along the Canada-Vermont border.

The 1840s: Customs is becoming more structured and systematic. Each port of entry has an officer in charge, the Collector, who supervises a staff made up of a controller, a surveyor, searchers, landing or tide waiters, and other positions — often including preventive officers who thwart smuggling, intercept smugglers and detect and seize smuggled goods.

1841: The Consolidation Act unites Upper and Lower Canada and creates a single system for the new province of United Canada. The British Board of Customs gives way to a more Canadian customs system. Each province is now responsible for the collection of duties and excise. By 1845 there are 63 customs ports in Canada. The three largest are Quebec City, Montreal, and St. Jean.

1867: Confederation and beyond

1867: On July 1, Sir John A. Macdonald becomes the first Prime Minister of Canada, the head of the first federal government. The provincial customs agencies are merged and fall under federal responsibility. The new government adopts the former Province of Canada's Customs Act of 1866. One of the key pieces of legislation governing the CBSA's mandate, the Customs Act is originally intended to ensure the collection of duties, control the movement of people and goods into and out of Canada, and protect domestic industry from certain imported goods and other unfair competition.

CBSA heritage: did you know...

- The word customs is said to originate from the “custom” of a country to charge a fee on goods entering that land for resale and consumption.
- Until the introduction of income tax in the early 1900s, the main sources of government revenues were customs and excise duties.
- Customs for Canada was once administered from America. By the late 1700s, Britain found it impossible to control customs collection in North America from overseas, so an American Board of Customs was established. Under this system, customs in Canada was run from Massachusetts until America broke from Britain in 1776.

1867-1873: Canada's first federal Minister of Customs is the Honourable Samuel Leonard Tilley, one of the Fathers of Confederation. During Tilley's time as Minister, no other department is as affected by the growth of business that follows Confederation. By 1869, the number of separate ports of entry has grown to 181, compared to 71 at the time of Confederation.

1867-1880s: In the early years of Confederation, most customs and Immigration Activity takes place at seaports and train stations along the land border between Canada and the United States. Then immigration brings the movement of people and goods into Canada's vast interior landmass. This creates the need for more inland customs ports and immigration offices to support travel by rail, then motor vehicles, and eventually aircraft.

1867-1914: The completion of a trans-Canada railroad opens the West for settlement. Millions of immigrant settlers come to Canada in search of a new life and new hope in a new land. This westward immigration boom helps create industries still important to Canada's prosperity today, such as agriculture, mining, and oil.

1868-1883: In 1868 the average tariff (duty) on goods imported into Canada is set at 15 percent. By 1879 the need to protect and promote domestic manufacturing leads to a higher tariff. By 1883 Canada's annual revenue rises to \$23.2 million (over \$500 million in today's money), most of which is generated through customs and excise.

The 1920s and -30s: Enforcement, crime and corruption

The 1920s: In contrast to the previous decades of relatively moderate activity, the outlawing of alcohol in the United States makes smuggling economically attractive. 'Rum running' brings prohibited booze

into America from Canada, as well as through Canada from St. Pierre and Miquelon, the Caribbean, and Europe. By 1921 most Canadian provinces have adopted laws prohibiting the import and sale of alcoholic beverages, and this brings a rapid increase of contraband liquor being landed on Canada's east coast. In particular, 1922 to 1924 sees significant rum-running activity occurring on the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia.

1926: Alcohol smuggling brings great opportunity for criminals, but also for corruption, and in 1926 it is revealed that senior officials in the Department of Customs and Excise have become involved in questionable activities. The ensuing scandal — which temporarily brings down the government — is investigated by a parliamentary committee that recommends the firing, retirement, or prosecution of a number of customs officers.

1932: The Customs Preventive Service is transferred to the RCMP. The Service had been in place since 1892 as a fleet of armed vessels to patrol and protect Canadian waters, later adding high-speed automobiles to its arsenal. Preventive officers had also been stationed at ports of entry across Canada.

Second World War brings change

1939: The outbreak of the Second World War means that customs and immigration officers now have added responsibilities. One of their many duties is to search for illegal exports that might be of strategic use to Canada's wartime enemies. Customs officials, along with the Royal Canadian Navy, exercise control over all activity in ports. All vessels from neutral nations are searched and secured by Customs. The war effort is not limited to seaports, and officers working at the land border and in railway yards also take on added wartime duties in law enforcement and increased vigilance.

1947: Until the 1940s, almost all customs and immigration officers are men, except a few women on special duty at major ports. In 1947 the government imposes foreign exchange controls. This measure requires more personal searches, which means more women are hired by Customs. By 1982, 39 percent of all Customs and Excise employees are women.

The debt we owe:

Officers who made the ultimate sacrifice

We are proud of the work we do and we are proud of our history. We accept the risks that come with serving Canada and protecting its borders. We remember those who served before us — and especially those who died in the line of duty:

- Andrew Lemond Wilson (1876)
- Hugh MacLean (1881)
- [Herbert George Herbert \(1912\)](#)
- William C. Hopkinson (1914)
- [James Clifford Adams \(1914\)](#)
- [Marshall Jackson \(1917\)](#)
- Turner Ingalls Jr. (1927)

- William George Hughes (1927)
- George A. Jackman (1943)
- [Percy New \(1954\)](#)
- Frederick Francis Harris (1967)
- Georges Alary (1980)
- James Finnamore (1994)
- Ruth Korum (1994)
- David Moore (1994)

These names are inscribed on the Honour Roll at the [Canadian Police and Peace Officers Memorial](#) in Ottawa.

Post-Second World War: Travel to Canada continues to expand, initially due to the arrival of war brides and displaced persons from war-ravaged Europe. Air travel increases, which creates the need for more customs and immigration services at airports.

The 1950s: At ports of entry, customs officials continue to focus on collecting revenue. Immigration, agriculture, and public health (including quarantine) are dealt with by officers of other departments. On arrival, travellers are examined and questioned separately by each of the various departments. This redundancy makes for long delays and unnecessary expense at ports of entry.

The move to integrated border services

The 1960s: The concept of integrated inspections becomes more common as customs, immigration, and health officials share tasks and information. In 1969, Canada Customs officers become responsible for representing all federal departments in examining and questioning travellers at their initial point of arrival.

The 1970s: Further changes arrive for both Canada Customs and Canada Immigration. Snappy new uniforms are issued, and technology expands as more modern equipment is added to assist officers in their duties.

1978: A new Immigration Act and regulations defines “prohibited classes” in much broader terms and gives more power to provinces to set their own immigration laws. Individuals who could become a burden on social welfare or health services can now be refused entry, rather than specific categories of people previously deemed undesirable by circumstances beyond their control. The Act also creates four new classes of immigrants admissible to Canada: refugees, families, assisted relatives, and independent immigrants.

1978: Woof! The Detector Dog Service has its debut, adding a furry new weapon in the fight against smuggling and illegal imports.

1980: Opening of the national customs training facility at Rigaud, Quebec, now known as the CBSA College.

1998: New legislation allows officers to arrest and detain individuals for non-Customs violations of Canadian law at the border, such as impaired driving or child abduction. These expanded responsibilities lead to a requirement for Customs Officers to carry defensive batons, OC (pepper) spray, and handcuffs.

1999: The Canada Customs and Revenue Agency is created with the idea of providing more efficient customs services by operating outside of the traditional federal government department structure.

Borders in the post-9/11 world

2002: The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) comes into force, replacing the Immigration Act as the primary federal legislation regulating immigration to Canada.

2003: The Canada Border Services Agency is created by amalgamating the Customs part of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency with border security and enforcement personnel from the Citizenship and Immigration Canada and border inspection functions of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The CBSA takes on responsibility for border enforcement, immigration enforcement, and customs services. In addition to the traditional focus on revenue collection, the new Agency is created to address heightened security concerns in the post-9/11 world. Under the Canada Border Services Agency Act, the CBSA is responsible for providing integrated border services that support national security priorities and facilitate the free flow of persons and goods, including animals and plants that meet requirements under the program legislation.

2006: The Government of Canada announces a plan to equip CBSA officers with firearms. The Agency implements an advanced firearm training program in 2007.

Today: The CBSA is a fully modern and integrated border services organization. There are approximately 14,000 of us, including over 6,500 frontline Border Services Officers. We operate from hundreds of locations in Canada and around the world—including 117 land border crossings, 13 international airports, three major seaports, and three mail centres.

Following the long trend of greater integration of services at the border, today's BSOs are major multitaskers — federal law enforcement officers with multiple designations under the law: Customs Officers under the Customs Act; Immigration Officers under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act; Screening Officers under the Quarantine Act; and Peace Officers under the Criminal Code of Canada, authorized to enforce the Code and administer more than 90 acts, regulations and international agreements on behalf of other federal, provincial and territorial departments and agencies.

In addition to our BSOs, there are intelligence and inland enforcement officers, criminal investigators, and many other disciplines. And supporting all of these are thousands of their fellow CBSAers, working in diverse fields, in every CBSA branch and region and around the world.