

## **Emigration of Canadians to the United States**

The westward movement of the people during the last thirty years is one of the most familiar themes in the domestic history of Canada. Possessing a population of almost exactly 250,000 in 1891, the four western provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia numbered no less than 2,500,000 at the most recent Census, that of 1921.

It was shortly before the former date that the great enterprise associated with the names of Lords Mountstephen and Strathcona came to fruition: the first Canadian transcontinental dates from 1885. But its decisive vindication was delayed until the middle nineties, when a world-wide revival in the demand for farm products, following a generation of agricultural depression, opened wide the doors of opportunity no less to the western townsman who supplied his needs than to the prairie farmer by the railway.

### **READINESS TO MIGRATE**

From that time till the present the tide of migration from the settled eastern provinces has never flagged. The number of Canadians of eastern birth and education who today live beyond the Manitoba boundary is, probably, not far from half a million. The steadily shrinking population of more than thirty rural ridings in Ontario bears witness eloquently to the strength of this attractive lure.

Not unnaturally, this evidence that the native-born Canadian is of a migratory habit, and shakes off easily the ties of home, has been viewed by many with complacency, and by some with pride. If the romance of pioneering is sometimes hidden from the pioneer, it is seldom overlooked by the spectator. To those who witnessed this tremendous movement the railroad builder was an epic figure; and his vassals the children of the homestead settler were within the covenants. Nor was there any lack of singers to declare their praises; the vendor of western real estate was a self-appointed sagaman. In an age disposed to value fully the things of this world, the success of the migrant was measured by the growth of unearned increment. For a period of years before the war, that success was the history of Canada.

### **ACROSS THE BORDER**

But concurrently with this expansion westward there was a movement of another kind, of equal or more than equal volume, which could not be regarded with the same unbounded satisfaction: the migration of Canadians to the United States.

To the politicians of the seventies and eighties, the tide of emigration from Canada had caused very grave concern. "The Americans may say with truth," wrote Goldwin Smith (1) in 1891, "that if they do not annex Canada, they are annexing the Canadians. They are annexing the very flower of the Canadian population, and in the way most costly to the country from which it is drawn, since the men whom that country has been at the expense of breeding leave it just as they arrive at manhood and begin to produce."

There is good reason to believe that the migration of Canadians to the United States which prompted this gloomy reflection has never been arrested. Over a considerable period it was certainly diminished; but even in the first fourteen years of the present century, when immigrants from overseas were pouring into the Dominion by the hundred thousand, and the West was calling out for population, there was a continuous exodus of young and enterprising men and women, who were born, nurtured, and educated in Canada, only to leave the country when they reached maturity.

Not until lately has there been a general revival of interest in this phenomenon. Too often in the past the tendency has been to consider immigration as an isolated problem — to treat it, not as the substitution, in part, of one racial stock for another, but as a net addition to the total population. The readiness to do so was never, perhaps, more marked than in the first ten years of the present century. Happily, there is warrant for believing that at present a broader view prevails; for it is clear that to take up this narrow standpoint is to leave out of account a complex and important group of impulses — impulses which, by draining away much of the best blood of the nation, have effectively changed its character, and promise further changes in the future.

We have indeed the best of reasons for asking whether we can afford any longer to study the problem of immigration except in close connection with domestic difficulties of a practical character, which affect alike the native-born resident and the newcomer.

No serious attempt has been made by the Canadian Department of Immigration to record the number of emigrants leaving the country. It has been possible in recent years, by the courtesy of the United States Immigration Department, to secure a record of the number departing across the American border, and to classify them according to birthplace; but whether such a record can pretend to great accuracy is at least open to question. The task of distinguishing the settler from the tourist is made infinitely more difficult at border points than at the seaports, both by the freedom of movement between the two countries, and by the fact that they possess the same language. In any case, an enquiry which attempts to cover an extended period must be based on information from some other source.

The source most immediately available is the Census of the United States. Though it tells us nothing of the Canadians moving into the United States in any period, it presents in great detail the number of Canadians living in the United States at the time of each enumeration, distinguishing them by place of residence, and in later years also by language, as French and Other Canadians.

The results are summarized in Table I.

It will be seen that during a period of sixty years there was a continuous increase in the number of Canadians living in the United States. The period in which this increase was most rapid was the decade from 1880-1890. The number of French Canadians was at the maximum in 1900, and since then has fallen off considerably. The number

of English-speaking Canadians did not reach its maximum till 1910, and had fallen off by scarcely more than 1 per cent in 1920.

Of the total number of native-born Canadians living on this continent, it is probable that the proportion permanently domiciled in the United States was approximately as follows:

**TABLE I**  
**NUMBER OF CANADIAN-BORN RESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES,**  
**1850-1920**

Year	French Canadians	English Canadians	Total
1850 .....			147,711
1860 .....			249,970
1870 .....			493,464
1880 .....			717,157
1890 .....	302,496	678,442	980,938
1900 .....	395,126	784,796	1,179,922
1910 .....	385,083	819,554	1,204,637
1920 .....	307,786	810,092	1,117,878

In 1880, 165 per 1,000  
In 1890, 192 per 1,000  
In 1900, 203 per 1,000  
In 1910, 179 per 1,000

It is unfortunately not yet possible to calculate the probable ratio for 1920.

**ATTEMPTS AT CALCULATION**

Using these figures as a basis, the late Dr. Morley Wickett (2) made an attempt to measure the volume of emigration during the second half of the nineteenth century. His method was interesting, and, so far as I know, original. He took the absolute increase in the number of Canadians living in the United States in each inter-censal period, assumed an average age for the group of twenty-five years at the time of enumeration, and calculated by means of a standard mortality table the probable number of survivors in 1900. The proportion between the net increase from 1850-1900 in the number of Canadians resident in the United States, and the probable number of survivors from the increase of each decade gave him a multiple which he did not hesitate to apply to the total increase from 1850-1900 in the number of persons of Canadian birth. Probably of set purpose, Dr. Wickett made his calculation loosely: the conclusion which emerges from his study is that the net emigration of native-born Canadians to the United States during the whole of the fifty years was rather more than 1,500,000.

The method employed is open to criticism from more than one standpoint; but it will serve. A later calculation based on other methods reaches much the same results. If it be supposed that the crude annual death-rate among Canadians in the United States during the whole period was about 17 per 1,000, it may be shown that the probable emigration during the second half of the nineteenth century was almost exactly 1,550,000.

An advantage of the latter method is that it makes possible an estimate of the movement in each inter-censal period, and a comparison of movements in different periods with one another. (3) The volume of emigration in each inter-censal period calculated to the nearest 5,000 in each case, is as follows:

TABLE II

**CALCULATED NET EMIGRATION OF CANADIAN-BORN CITIZENS TO THE UNITED STATES, 1850-1920**

1850-1860 .....	135,000
1860-1870 .....	305,000
1870-1880 .....	325,000
1880-1890 .....	410,000
1890-1900 .....	380,000
1900-1910 .....	225,000
1910-1920 .....	110,000
Total .....	1,890,000

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Considered in themselves, the figures for the decades 1880-1890 and 1890-1900 are a striking confirmation of the statement already quoted from Dr. Goldwin Smith. But the seriousness of the situation which confronted Canada during these trying years may be shown even more vividly by the presentation of the facts in terms of natural increase.

**EMIGRATION IN TERMS OF NATURAL INCREASE**

A comparison of the calculated volume of emigration in each of these decades with the natural increase of the Canadian-born population living in North America during the same time establishes a strong probability that in each of them at least half of the natural increase, and perhaps rather more than half, was lost to Canada through emigration. The calculated natural increase during the years from 1880-1890 is 775,000 (as compared with an emigration from Canada numbering, as above, 410,000); and the corresponding figures for the decade from 1890-1900 are 685,004 and 380,000.

Even in the years from 1900-1910, it is probable that more than 20 per cent of the natural increase of native-born population was lost in same manner.

Canadians have solid ground for satisfaction in the steady diminution of the stream during the twentieth century: but since the beginning of the present depression in agriculture (more especially since the beginning of industrial revival in United States), a melancholy series of reports from many parts of Canada bears witness to the fact that the tide is once more flowing freely.

"So far as the western province are concerned," said a member of the House of Commons (4) at the beginning of the present session, "we find the largest crop in our history, and yet we find agriculture in a deplorable financial and economic condition.... An examination of the railway figures indicating the emigration through the port of Kingsgate, which is one only of the avenues of exit from the province of Alberta to the States, shows that in the three months ending December 31<sup>st</sup> last, there has been an excess of emigration over immigration of approximately 5,000 paying passengers.

Not all of these, however, were Canadians.

### **POLITICAL ASPECTS**

Canada is interested for political as well as for obvious social and economic reasons in a question which demands more detailed analysis. Her future must to some extent be determined by the racial composition of this stream of emigration; and her immediate, if not her most important interest in this phase of the question is electoral. Quebec has a fixed membership of sixty-five in the House of Commons. Under the British North America Act, the numerical strength of the members representing other provinces depends on the changing proportion between the population of this province, and that of the Dominion as a whole. About four-fifths of all the French Canadians in Canada live in Quebec; and they constitute in themselves about the same proportion of its total population. It is probable, therefore, that any decisive change in the numerical relationship between French and English-speaking Canadians will react on the political balance of power.

### **Comparisons**

Which of the two peoples composing the native Population of the Dominion has been the more ready to migrate? Until 1890, when the distinction already mentioned between French and Other Canadians was introduced into the Census of the United States, the question remained unanswered. During the last thirty years it appears that the situation has been as follows:

TABLE III

#### **CALCULATED NET EMIGRATION FROM CANADA TO THE UNITED STATES, 1890-1920**

Decades	French Canadians	English Canadians
1890-1900	150,000	230,000
1900-1910	55,000	170,000
1910-1920	20,000 <sup>(5)</sup>	130,000

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It will be seen that in each of these three decades Other Canadians form the bulk of the movement; indeed, in the most recent inter-censal period they seem to constitute the whole of it. But it is not by counting heads that we shall find an answer to the question immediately before us. The French Canadians represent less than 40 per cent of the total native-born population of Canada; that they should supply less than half the total emigration of the native-born is very natural, and not in itself significant. To reach a positive conclusion, we must resort again to the comparison between the natural increase of the people, (6) and their emigration.

It is not possible at present to carry this comparison beyond the year 1910. Fortunately, however, in the years following 1910 no precise comparison is needed. For the two preceding decades the calculated ratios are widely divergent, as is shown in Table IV.

### **FRENCH CANADIANS LESS MIGRATORY**

Making every allowance for possible errors in the choice of an assumed death-rate (and these must in turn be reflected in the figures, if on a scale much smaller) it appears that, great as the migration has been, both of French and Other Canadians, the French have for at least a generation past been the less inclined to move across the border; and that, for a time at least, the "leakage" of French Canadians to the United States ceased altogether. It is something of a paradox that the community whose birth-rate is relatively high seems at present to retain its children; while other communities on either side of it, whose cradles are by no means always full, must still apparently pay human tribute to the modern Minos and annually lose a quota.

The political importance of Quebec is in any case endangered by the coming of each new batch of immigrants; for most of them are destined to find work in English-speaking provinces. Inasmuch, however, as the French Canadians have been for many years less migratory than their neighbors, their greater reluctance to leave Canada has obviously been acting as a counterpoise. It is not to be wondered if their historians dwell with pardonable pride on this attachment, as evidence of enduring vitality in a civilization older than the *Mayflower*. As an element in the present strength of Lower Canada we must not ignore it.

### **CAUSES OF CHANGE IN TYPE**

It is possible that a strict enquiry into the forces which have brought about the recent rapid diminution in the number of French Canadians living in the United States might yield results which would assist the governments of provinces other than Quebec in the working out of policy. Let it be frankly confessed, however, that this is unlikely; and for two reasons:

(1.) The French Canadians, in the United States as well as in Canada form a compact minority. They are homogeneous alike in religion and in language. Their religion serves as a powerful bond of union between them; their language, to some extent at least, as a barrier restricting intercourse with other peoples. By contrast, the lot of English-speaking Canadians resident in the United States is very different.

Heterogeneous in religion, and hampered by no barriers of language, they are so prone to rapid assimilation with the Americans among whom they settle, that a carefully, planned scheme of repatriation, even if it should achieve a moderate success among the former, might well fail altogether when applied to the latter group.

(2.) Apart from this consideration there are good grounds for believing that while some of the reasons for the changing composition of the Canadian emigrant population are to be sought in Canada, another (perhaps no less important) may be found in the westward and southward expansion of American industry

TABLE IV

**EMIGRATION OF NATIVE-BORN CANADIANS TO THE UNITED STATES:  
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL NATURAL INCREASE**

	PROBABLE NATURAL INCREASE	CALCULATED EMIGRATION	PERCENTAGE
A. 1890-1900			
French	330,000	150,000	46%
Other	355,000	230,000	65%
B. 1900-1910			
French	365,000	55,000	15%
Other	555,000	170,000	31%

In the period from 1890-1920, while the population of the northern and southern states grew by 60 per cent, that of the western states (7) increased by nearly 200 per cent. The change in the distribution of economic opportunity, of which this development is both a consequence and an illustration, must inevitably have lessened the stimulus to migration in certain parts of Canada, while increasing it in others; for distant drums beat faintly.

**GEOGRAPHIC INFLUENCE**

The geographical distribution of the French and English-speaking Canadians in the United States has always been for obvious reasons quite dissimilar. Emigrants from each Canadian province tend naturally to make their first settlement in the state or states immediately to the south of them. The towns and cities of New England have a stronger attraction for men of the Maritime Provinces or Quebec than for those whose birthplace lies west of the river Ottawa. Thus in 1920 there were more than 10,000 French Canadians both in Fall River and in Lowell. The number in New Bedford was slightly less than 10,000. Next in order of the large industrial cities were Worcester,

with 4,300, and Springfield, with 3,700. It is more than a coincidence that all of them lie within the state of Massachusetts; and there is every reason to believe that most of the 40,000 Other Canadians enumerated in Boston hailed originally from New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island or Nova Scotia. In the same way do Detroit and Buffalo make a natural appeal to the native of Ontario; in the former of these there were more than 55,000 English-speaking Canadians at the time of the last Census. Seattle and Los Angeles have a direct attraction for the migrant from British Columbia, where sea communication is direct and easy; the number of Other Canadians in each of them exceeded 13,000 in 199.0.

The facts with regard to distribution are summarized in Tables V, VI, and VII. For the convenience of the reader, the maximum figures for each of the main geographic divisions are printed in italics. It will be noted that in point of time they differ quite considerably.

A further consolidation of the figures shows vividly how the recent develop-

TABLE V

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF FRENCH CANADIANS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1890-1920**

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISIONS	1890	1900	1910	1920
New England	205,761	275,435	<i>278,156</i>	240,385
Middle Atlantic	23,593	29,785	27,012	17,045
East North Central	46,789	<i>55,554</i>	46,614	29,267
West North Central	18,924	<i>21,465</i>	17,920	10,459
South Atlantic	284	636	763	<i>813</i>
East South Central	124	<i>419</i>	331	179
West South Central	270	1,041	<i>1,045</i>	590
Mountain	3,361	5,068	<i>5,276</i>	3,482
Pacific	3,390	5,183	<i>7,966</i>	5,566
United States	302,496	<i>395,126</i>	385,083	307,756

TABLE VI

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF OTHER CANADIANS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1890-1920**

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISIONS	1890	1900	1910	1920
New England	174,406	235,755	<i>248,083</i>	233,971
Middle Atlantic	86,469	109,642	<i>121,357</i>	120,049
East North Central	228,784	<i>242,091</i>	226,526	222,213
West North Central	<i>107,163</i>	103,213	84,929	69,785
South Atlantic	5,128	6,284	7,918	<i>12,059</i>



East South Central	3,034	2,960	3,178	2,967
West South Central	4,725	5,842	7,625	8,105
Mountain	22,223	26,582	31,336	30,185
Pacific	46,510	52,427	88,602	110,758
United States	678,442	784,796	819,514	810,092

TABLE VII

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF ALL CANADIANS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1890-1920**

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISIONS	1890	1900	1910	1920
New England	380,167	511,190	526,239	474,356
Middle Atlantic	110,062	139,427	148,369	137,094
East North Central	275,573	297,645	273,140	251,480
West North Central	126,087	124,678	102,849	80,244
South Atlantic	5,412	6,990	8,681	12,872
East South Central	3,158	3,379	3,509	3,146
West South Central	4,995	6,883	8,670	8,695
Mountain	25,584	32,190	36,612	33,667
Pacific	49,900	57,610	96,568	116,324
United States	980,938	1,179,922	1,204,637	1,117,878

A further consolidation of the figures shows vividly how the recent development of the western states has influenced the situation. In Table VIII the two groups of Canadian emigrants are classified in two categories only, those who were living in the northern and southern states at the time of each Census being placed in the former, those who were living in the western states constituting the latter.

TABLE VIII

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF CANADIANS RESIDENT IN THE UNITED STATES**

	NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN STATES	WESTERN STATES	TOTAL
1890			
French .....	295,745	6,751	302,496
Other.....	611,709	66,733	678,442
1900			
French.....	384,355	10,791	395,126
Other.....	705,787	79,009	784,796

1910			
French....	371,841	13,242	385,083
Other.....	699,576	119,938	819,514
1920			
French....	298,738	9,048	307,786
Other.....	669,149	140,943	810,092

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It will be noticed that there was an all-round increase of numbers in the decade from 1890-1900. On the other hand, so far as the northern and southern group is concerned, it is evident that during the whole of the period from 1900-1920 the number of Other Canadians, as well as of French Canadians has been diminishing.

The decline has been as follows:

	1900-1910	1910-1920
French	- 3%	- 20%
Other	- 1%	- 4%

In 1920 there were some 36,500 fewer English-speaking Canadians in this category than had been enumerated in 1900. Only the remarkable attraction of the western states for English-speaking emigrants from Canada sufficed to swell the total during the first ten years of the twentieth century; and even this was insufficient altogether to neutralize the shrinkage which occurred elsewhere in the second decade.

Nevertheless, if the west be left out of consideration, and attention be confined to the larger group of states, it is clear that the ostensible similarity between French and Other Canadians, involved in this contemporary shrinkage in their numbers, masks a difference that is very real. The fact that the French diminished from four to five times as rapidly as the others reinforces the conclusion which has already been drawn that — for whatever reason — they feel the ties of home more strongly than their Anglo-Saxon neighbors.

### **NATIONAL RESTLESSNESS**

Demonstrably more migratory than either the British or Americans, the people of Canada have not yet completely lost the restlessness that marks a race of pioneers. Until within the present generation, the mental attitude of the frontiersman was plainly visible and often dominant in politics: it may be long in disappearing. If some of its manifestations have not been altogether lovely, there are many, nevertheless, who will watch its passing with regret.

When harnessed in the service of the country, that restlessness may prove a source of power. Though he did not always understand the folk with whom he lived, the late Louis Hémon has seized in a vivid phrase and well described "the passion of a man

whose soul was in the clearing, not the tilling of the land." Such a passion sends one man to the wilderness for gold; another to the west in search of oil; a third into the maelstrom of imperial politics in London. These have a consciousness of purpose; not one of them is lost to Canada. But there are many whose tendency to roam is not thus disciplined and governed; men to whom the common round is irksome, the distant prospect bright. The consciousness of nationality has not yet bound them. The prizes which await even a moderate success in the United States have an appeal that will not be denied; they make their homes across the border. Once established there, they soon find reasons for remaining . . . .

"... Evadere  
"Hoc opus, hic labor est."

The decline in the volume of emigration to the United States during the twentieth century suggests that in recent years this restlessness of temper has tended increasingly to find expression in Canada. But the swiftness of the decline is due by no means wholly to the growth of opportunities in the Dominion.

### **EFFECT OF THE WAR**

Involving, as it did, the enlistment of 590,000 men in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (of whom it is only reasonable to suppose, in default of precise information, that at least 50 per cent, and probably more were born within the country) the war affected the stream of emigration in two ways. In the first place, many must have been absorbed in military service who would otherwise have gone in search of fortune to the United States. In the second place, not a few Canadians who had made their homes abroad came back in order to take their places in the ranks. But for the war, it is reasonably certain that there would have been a larger net emigration in the second decade than in fact occurred. It is useless to speculate whether this would have been as great as, or smaller than, that of the period from 1901-1910.

It is to be hoped that the future expansion of Canada will provide attractive opportunities for an increasing proportion of the native population. Nevertheless, we shall do well to recognize that there will be recurring intervals in which the tide of emigration is likely to flow, sometimes with considerable freedom.

(1) The comparatively wide extremes of climate which are to be found in most parts of the Dominion make the problem of seasonal unemployment a matter of greater concern than in countries with a smaller range of variation. In the building industries, for example, there is a slack season which, if it has been shortened considerably within recent years by technical improvements in construction, is unlikely to disappear, at least for many years to come. In so far as building activities are resumed each spring in many parts of the United States a little earlier than in Canada, the temptation to cross the border will always beset the Canadian worker who has already suffered from a spell of winter unemployment in his own country.

(2) In the periodic depressions which mark the trade cycle, it is a matter of observation that industrial revival in the United States precedes, as a rule by some months, industrial revival in Canada. Here again is an influence which tends to foster

emigration, and which (unfortunately) applies not only to the group of industries which is subject to marked seasonal fluctuation, but to the whole range of economic activity.

With these considerations in mind we may contemplate without undue concern the probability that a certain "leakage" of native blood will occur in the future, as it has done in the past. So long as it is small, it need occasion no surprise. If, on the other hand, it should ever again assume the dimensions which distinguished the period from 1870-1900, there would be little consolation for those who remained at home, in the thought that much of the best work done in the United States is to the credit of Canadians. In proportion to their capacity for service, they can ill be spared by their own country.

(1) *Canada and the Canadian Question*. By Goldwin Smith, D.C.L., p. 233.

(2) *Canadians in the United States*. By S. Morley, Wickett, Ph.D. *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, 1906. Subsequently reprinted in the *Annals of the American Academy*.

(3) Limitations of space do not permit a discussion of the reasons which have led to the selection of a death-rate of 17 per 1,000. Lest it be urged, however, that the death-rate is arbitrarily chosen and likely to be wrong, the following considerations are submitted: (a) That a given error in the selection of the death-rate causes an error slightly less than half as large in the calculated volume of migration, i.e., that if the selected death-rate be 20 per cent too high, the calculated volume of migration will be slightly less than 10 per cent too high; (b) that an alteration of the death-rate selected will not affect materially the relative proportions of emigration in different inter-censal periods, to the total.

(4) Mr. Shaw, House of Commons Debates. February 5, 1923.

(5) *Immigration*. There is reason to believe that the number of French Canadians returning from the United States to Canada during the years 1910-1920 was in excess of the number migrating from Canada to the United States. Whether the backward movement is composed mainly of young French Canadians returning to find employment in Canada, or of older men and women returning to spend their declining years among their own people, it is at present impossible to say.

(6) As before, the natural increase is calculated in respect of all the native-born Canadians living on the North American continent, whether in the United States or Canada.

(7) That is, of Montana, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, California, New Mexico and Arizona.

Source: G. E. Jackson, « Emigration of Canadians to the United States », in *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No 196, May 1923, pp. 25-34. The many tables of this article have necessitated considerable reformatting of the text.

