

The New Canadians

From 1902 – 1914, approximately 2.85 million people immigrated to Canada. They came from all parts of the world for various reasons. But all of them wanted a chance at a new and better life. Scandinavian immigrants settled in the western provinces in the late 1800s. French-speaking Swiss moved from Quebec to the western prairies and British Columbia.

Czechoslovakian immigrants came in the 1890s and set up homes on the prairies. Dutch, Polish, Austrian, and Belgian immigrants moved to the west in the early 1900s. Some of the largest groups of European immigrants were the German Mennonites, Icelanders, and Ukrainians. Japanese and Chinese also came from Asia.

Germans: Germans have been coming to Canada since the 1750s, but large numbers arrived on the prairies during the 1870s and 80s and into the early twentieth century. **William Hespeler**, a German immigrant, was recruited by the Canadian Government to encourage German people to settle in Canada. Germans are one of the largest ethnic groups in Canada.



European immigrants coming into Canada

Mennonites: Many of the Germans who came to western Canada were Mennonites who were being persecuted in Russia. They preferred Canada to the United States because the land was cheaper and they were not required to serve in the military. Their faith prevented them from going to war.

The Mennonites were used to harsh winter conditions in Russia and were experienced farmers. They were the first European settlers to farm the open prairies and they got some of the best land. From 1874 to 1880, about 7,000 Mennonites arrived in the west.

They knew about farming open spaces and could see that the prairie soil was good for growing grain. The soil was like the rich farmland they had left. The Mennonites lived in villages rather than on individual farms and they supported each other. The farmland was divided evenly among the families of the village. Each farmer got some of the best and worst land, which ensured an equal opportunity for success.

The Mennonites were peace-loving, hard-working Christian people. They were very successful farmers and excellent gardeners. Within two or three years, they had turned much of the prairie into outstanding, highly productive farms.



Mennonites arriving on the prairie

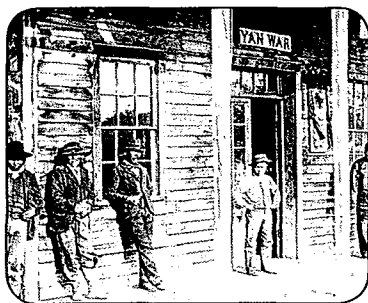


The New Canadians (continued)

Japanese: In 1877, Japanese immigrants began arriving in British Columbia. Many settled in the Fraser Valley working as fishermen or farmers. The first recorded Japanese settler was Manzo Nagano. He arrived in New Westminster, British Columbia in May of 1877.

The Japanese, like other Asian immigrants, were not treated well by the Canadian Government. They were not allowed to vote or hold professional positions. But immigration still continued at a steady pace. By 1894, there were about 1,000 people of Japanese origin living in the west. By 1904, the number had increased to 7,000.

Chinese: Large numbers of Chinese people worked as labourers on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. When the railway was completed in 1885, the Canadian Government tried to force them to leave the country. The government also tried to discourage other Chinese from immigrating.



Chinese immigrants in 1900

In 1886, they put a “head tax” of \$50.00 per person on any new Chinese immigrant. This tax was increased to \$100.00 in 1900 and to \$500.00 in 1904.

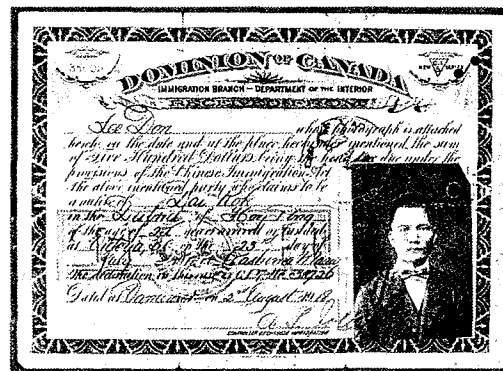
At the beginning of the twentieth century, most Chinese immigrants were working as household servants. Others worked in restaurants, laundries, or small shops. They were not treated well by the rest of the population. They were subjected to racial prejudice, which often turned violent. Many Chinese had their homes and businesses destroyed. But against all odds, they stayed in Canada. Today, more than half a million people of Chinese ancestry live in Canada.

Icelanders: People from Iceland had been driven from their homes by harsh conditions, including volcanic eruptions. The Canadian government encouraged them to settle in Western Canada.

The Icelanders were promised three things:

1. They would have freedom and Canadian citizenship.
2. They would receive a large tract of land where they could farm and fish together.
3. They could keep their own language and customs.

The first Icelandic settler was Sigtryggur Jonasson in 1872. He settled on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg. He played a major role in establishing the Icelandic community in Manitoba. The main settlement was called Gimli after paradise in Norse sagas. The settlement of Gimli remains on the same spot today. By 1890, there were about 7,000 Icelandic people in the west.



Receipt for payment of Chinese head tax

The New Canadians (continued)

Ukrainians: The first Ukrainian community was established in the 1890s when large numbers of immigrants came to Canada. They left their homeland to start a new life. At home there were land shortages, and people had little freedom due to enforced military service and religious persecution. They had little opportunity for education or advancement. The Ukrainian people had no say in running their country.



Ukrainian immigrants arriving in Canada

They liked the western prairies because it reminded them of home and there was plenty of land for them to settle on. Once the immigrants were established in Canada they paid for other family members to join them. They worked hard and prospered. The Ukrainians settled throughout Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan and made many important contributions to the nation.

Treatment of Immigrants

European immigrants were not always warmly welcomed into Canada. The local residents had difficulty pronouncing their names and understanding their languages and customs. Some Canadians felt they were inferior because they were not British. Cultural prejudice and racist attitudes were prevalent during this time. In many places, non-English-speaking settlers were shunned and ridiculed. They suffered many kinds of discrimination. But over time, the immigrants were gradually accepted. They ended up being good neighbors and good farmers.

Effects of Immigration on the Métis

The lives of the Métis were deeply affected by the influx of immigrants to the prairies. Large communities of settlers created bustling cities and towns. Much of the open prairie land had been homesteaded. The well-established Métis communities began to fall apart as many of its members scattered across the prairies looking for available land to hunt game, fish, and trap. Some Métis were cheated by land speculators and lost their opportunity to get good land to settle on. Only a few were able to settle down and successfully farm the land. Without a strong community base to hold them together, the Métis way of life was changed forever.

Benefits of Immigration

Canada became a **multicultural** nation as the population of Western Canada rapidly grew. New roads and railroads were built as immigrants came flooding in. New villages and towns were built to accommodate the increasing population. Small isolated outposts and forts became thriving trading centers. The prairies changed from a wilderness life of trapping to the booming business of growing wheat to feed the world.