

**Guide to Indian Affairs Field Offices in
Nova Scotia
1871-1997**

About this finding aid:

This finding aid is a *preliminary* attempt to sketch changes in field office structure in Nova Scotia over time. Unlike other "bands and agencies guides" in RG 10, this tool does *not* link specific band and reserve names to particular Indian agencies. As further research is carried out the finding aid will eventually include links between agencies and *reserves*. Links between agency and *band* are more problematic given the fact that the administration of Indian Affairs in Nova Scotia was, historically, unlike that found in other provinces, particularly those of central and western Canada.

Band structure and reserve ownership in Nova Scotia, historically, present a pattern different from that found in other parts of the country. Until the 1950s, the Department of Indian Affairs did not recognize separate bands in the province. Officially at least, the Indian population was considered as a whole (the Micmacs of Nova Scotia) and the Department maintained the position that reserve lands had not been set apart for the exclusive use of any one group within that population. It was not until 1957 (for Cape Breton) and 1958 (for mainland Nova Scotia) that Indian Affairs officially "created" bands and allocated existing reserves to each specifically.

Historical introduction:

Under the terms of the *British North America Act*, responsibility for the administration of Indian Affairs was assigned to the federal government. The delineation of responsibility was given concrete expression in 1868 with the passage of *An Act providing for the organization of the Department of the Secretary of State of Canada and for the management of Indian and Ordnance lands* (31 Vict., Cap. 42). This legislation repealed provincial statutes governing the administration of Indian affairs and vested Indian lands in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in the Crown in right of Canada under the management of the Secretary of State of Canada. Provision was also made in this legislation (section 39) for the appointment of agents to carry out the provisions of the *Act*.

This legislation paved the way for the appointment of federal Indian agents to replace the Commissioners of Indian Affairs in each province. In September 1868 Samuel Fairbanks was appointed "agent for Indian Affairs in the province of Nova Scotia". However, the structure for administering Indian affairs was soon reorganized. In April 1871 Nova Scotia was divided, for Indian administration purposes, into 7 districts (numbered 1 to 7) and agents were appointed for each district. Each agent's jurisdiction was defined in terms of existing county boundaries rather than according to Aboriginal communities or reserves. For example, agent John Harlow was assigned responsibility for the Indian population of Annapolis, Digby, Yarmouth, and Shelburne counties. Over the years this system evolved and agencies were divided where it was recognized that distances precluded an agent giving equal attention to all his charges. In the example of Annapolis, Digby, Yarmouth, and Shelburne counties, originally grouped together as District 1 in 1871, the Indian population of each county had its own agent by 1889. Similarly, in 1912 responsibility for the Indian inhabitants of Hants County was divided between 2 agents

While this system of agencies and agents may appear to parallel the organizational structure in place

elsewhere throughout the country in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such was not the case. The Indian agents appointed in Nova Scotia between 1871 and 1942 served part-time only. They did not maintain an Indian agency office such as was found in Ontario or in the western provinces where the occupation of Indian agent was meant to be, in the majority of cases, a full-time one. It was not until the reorganization of 1942 that full-time Indian agents appear in Nova Scotia.

In addition to the Indian agents, for a number of years the Nova Scotia Indian Affairs administration also included superintendents and inspectors. Periodic inspection of affairs in the province was carried out by officers stationed at headquarters. In 1912 an Office of Inspector of Indian Agencies for Ontario, Quebec, and Maritime reserves was created. This position existed until 1936. In addition to the Ottawa-based inspector, in 1907 a resident Superintendent of Indian Agencies for Nova Scotia, A.J.Boyd, was appointed. He served in this capacity until 1929 (although from 1919 his position was designated Inspector of Indian Agencies). For a brief period in 1914-15 a second Superintendent, W.G.Foster, shared duties for Nova Scotia with Boyd. However, he soon went overseas and was not replaced. On Boyd's retirement in 1929 two full-time Inspectors of Indian Agencies were appointed, J.W.Maxner and Charles McNeil (who operated out of offices in Windsor and Antigonish, respectively). The offices of these resident Inspectors of Indian Agencies were abolished in 1932.

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