



THE ENGINEERING INSTITUTE OF CANADA

and its member societies

L'Institut canadien des ingénieurs

et ses sociétés membres

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**“The Engineering Institute from the 1880's
to the 1960's”**

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One of the preoccupations of the new Engineering Institute of Canada in 1918 was the question of the regulation of engineering practice. In the early days of CSCE, several attempts were made to discuss this but, as Keefer pointed out in his presidential report early in 1888, the general sentiment was against it. Status - many believed - should be earned, not regulated. Also, the British North America Act assigned the regulation of professions to the provinces. As a federally chartered body, CSCE could not undertake this responsibility. So it would remain a 'learned' society as laid down in its Charter, as would EIC. But World War I experience and attitude changes - particularly amongst the younger members - dictated that the Institute should take the lead in the discussion and development of a means for professional regulation for others to administer.

This process began formally with the presentation of a paper "**Legislation Concerning the Status of Engineers**" by F.H. Peters at the Second Professional Meeting of the Institute in August 1918. Peters' views met with the general approval of the meeting, and were also supported by many of the 13 Institute branches then in existence. A special committee was appointed to draft a sample or 'model' licensing law. The September 1919 issue of the **ENGINEERING JOURNAL** noted that 77 percent of the votes cast by the membership in a letter ballot favoured the draft model law. Further action then became a provincial matter. By 1922, seven of the (then) nine provinces had enacted legislation resembling this law. Saskatchewan's legislation was delayed until 1930 and Prince Edward Island's until 1955 - three years after new-comer Newfoundland passed its law. The Yukon also regulated engineering practice in 1955, and the Northwest Territories in 1980.

Meanwhile, The Engineering Institute's membership in all grades had risen past 5000 by 1923 and there were 24 branches across the country. In 1927 the EIC Council organized the First Plenary Meeting designed to involve the branches in the making of Institute policy. During it, a committee was formed to discuss the problem of coordinating Institute activities with those of the professional associations in the provinces. It continued to function until 1931.

During the years of the Depression the Institute offered a 'free-to-members' employment service and established a non-active list for unemployed members - a list that at one time included 700 names. As might be expected, total membership fell during these years, reaching a low point of just under 3800 in 1934. However, by 1939 this number had climbed back to 4800.

In 1935 a Committee on Consolidation was formed under the chairmanship of Gordon M. Pitts to examine how the Institute and the professional associations could be joined in a single organization. This committee deliberated for two years and produced proposals for the amendment of the EIC By-Laws, but failed to gain the approval of the membership.

In 1936 the Dominion (now Canadian) Council of Professional Engineers was established by the provincial associations to coordinate their activities, especially in relation to the federal government and national and international organizations, and to undertake special activities on their joint behalf.

In 1937 the Institute celebrated the Semi-Centennial of the founding of CSCE. The occasion was commemorated in several ways, including the publication of a special issue of the **ENGINEERING JOURNAL**. The Semi-Centennial Banquet was addressed by the Governor General, Lord Tweedsmuir.

EIC gained further strength during World War II. By the end of it, membership in all grades had reached 7000. Again, a large proportion of the members went on active service, and industrial production benefitted. The grade of Associate Member was abolished in 1940.

EIC prospered in many ways during the two decades that followed World War II. These were the peak years of its activity. University enrollments climbed. The economy continued to grow. Engineering activities diversified. By 1947 the total membership exceeded 9000, 58 percent of whom were Members, 17 percent Juniors, and 25 percent Students. There were 28 branches, of which Montreal was the largest with 2640 members in all grades, followed by Toronto with 1200, and Ottawa and Vancouver - both with over 500. Membership reached 10,000 the following year, 20,000 in 1959, and peaked at 22,000 in the early 1960s. The 50th branch was inaugurated in 1958 - there would be over 60 soon thereafter. The **ENGINEERING JOURNAL** grew fatter and attracted a lot of advertisers.

A second attempt to 'confederate' with the Canadian Council and the provincial associations began in 1957, but again ended in failure. A third, short-lived attempt some years later also failed.

By the mid-1960s the situation within the Institute was changing - again. Membership was beginning to fall. Small branches were beginning to close down. Engineers practising in disciplines such as mining, metallurgy, chemical and agricultural engineering were joining the corresponding Canadian societies and foregoing membership in the Institute. Small, new, specialized 'splinter' societies were being established in Canada and the branches of engineering societies of foreign origin were becoming more active. Competition for advertising revenues was forcing the downsizing of the **ENGINEERING JOURNAL** and changes in its subject coverage. Something had to be done. The EIC Council turned to its Committee on Technical Operations for help.

(This historical note was based on the paper **THE ORIGINAL CANADIAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS** by Andrew H. Wilson, which appeared in Volume 1 of the **PROCEEDINGS** of the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering Conference at Sherbrooke, Quebec, in June 1997.)

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