

Timeline of Federal Cultural Policy Milestones – 1849 to 2005

Author's Introduction:

All cultural policy is rooted in both place and time, and this cultural policy timeline is intended to provide a broad overview of the federal government's cultural interventions in Canada over more than a century and a half. It is designed to respond, in part, to George Santayana's dictum that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." On the other hand, it is not intended to cover cultural policy developments at other levels of government in Canada (the provincial and the municipal) or within the private and non-profit sectors. As such, the taxonomy for this project reflects the institutional categories within which federal cultural policies evolved over this period.

Canadian federal government intervention in the cultural sector began modestly with the postal subsidy for newspapers, magazines and books in 1849, and in the years prior to the 1920s was largely limited to heritage institutions, such as the Public Archives, and the regulation of wireless communications. Starting in the 1920s and 1930s, however, the range of federal government cultural policy interventions both expanded and intensified to include broadcasting, copyright policy, the arts and film. By the 1940s, the federal government was considering its cultural policies in the context of the country's postwar plans for reconstruction, but it was not until the 1950s that major federal initiatives, such as the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, the Canada Council for the Arts, the National Library and the Royal Commission on Broadcasting were launched.

The 1960s witnessed the consolidation of the national museums and the establishment of new federal cultural institutions, such as the National Arts Centre, as well as the creation of a *de facto* department of culture in the form of the Department of the Secretary of State. In the 1970s, the federal government began to expand its definition of "culture" to include bilingualism, biculturalism and multiculturalism. It also intensified its focus on support for Canadian cultural content and on the status of the artist, as well as taking the first steps to understand the impact of digital technologies on culture and society.

By the 1980s, federal responsibility for cultural policy had been transferred, at least partially, to the Minister of Communications and efforts began to expand broadcasting and communications to Aboriginal communities in Northern Canada. During this period, a number of major cultural policy reviews were also launched including, most notably, the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee. Several federal museums also moved into new buildings, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography.

The 1990s were years of major change in federal cultural policy. Most of the legislation and responsibilities for cultural policy were transferred to the new Department of Canadian Heritage in 1993, and during this period the cultural sector experienced deep

budget cuts as a result of a federal government-wide Program Review. At the same time, international pressures prompted major reviews of culture and trade and the establishment of culture as the “third pillar” of foreign policy. New technologies were also beginning to have a significant impact on the cultural sector, leading to changes in the *Copyright Act*, the *Broadcasting Act*, and licensing by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) of various new broadcasting services.

In the first decade of the new century, federal cultural policies continued to grapple with the challenges of technological change, while dealing with new demands on both the domestic and international scene. Sharing of cultural content on the internet led to further re-examination of the *Copyright Act*, even as the federal government itself became directly involved in the delivery of digital content through collaborative websites such as Culture.ca, Culturescope.ca and the Virtual Museum of Canada. A major new cultural investment program, *Tomorrow Starts Today*, was announced in 2001 to respond to increases in cultural demand in Canada, while on the international front, Canada became a leader in the development of the new UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions*.

As we move into the second half of the 2000 decade, the Canadian Cultural Observatory will continue to update this Timeline and to maintain it as a tool for informing both the cultural policy and research community and the general public.

M. Sharon Jeannotte
May 2007