
The Canadian Region of CPA: A Personal Memoir

by Ian Imrie

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (founded in 1911) is an international association of parliamentarians in the national, state, provincial and territorial legislatures of Commonwealth countries. The CPA organises conferences, seminars, exchanges and other projects designed to assist members in their work as parliamentarians. The Association, which has its own Secretariat in London, is made up of eight geographic regions including Canada, the only country that constitutes a CPA Region. This article outlines the development and activities of the Canadian Region.

My involvement with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association goes back to the 1960s. The minority Liberal Government of Lester Pearson was in office and Alan Macnaughton was Speaker of the House of Commons. He came from a business background and was shocked when he discovered the rather amateur way the House of Commons was organised. He ordered a complete study by a special branch of the Public Service Commission. They made a number of recommendations including creation of three new House of Commons positions – a Director of Finance, a Director of Legislative Services, and a Co-ordinator of Parliamentary Associations.

I was working in the historical sites and monuments division of the Department of Northern Affairs when Speaker Macnaughton interviewed me for the position of Co-ordinator. Shortly thereafter I was offered the job. In those days Canada belonged to only four parliamentary associations – the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the NATO Parlia-

mentary Association and the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group. One of the first things Speaker Macnaughton told me was that two separate Canadian parliamentary delegations had just informed him that they had committed Canada to host major conferences in 1965 and 1966.

The task of co-ordinating Canada's inter-parliamentary relations had fallen to various table officers on a part time basis but with the House sitting almost non stop in those years there was no way they could make the kind of commitment necessary to organise these conferences. I quickly put together a team for this purpose. It included Monty Montgomery a veritable mine of information about CPA. When he retired in 1967 I replaced him as Secretary of the federal Branch.

Macnaughton's successors, Lucien Lamoureux (1966 - 1974) and James Jerome (1974 - 1980) both made it clear to me that they saw great value in Canadian legislators, getting together more frequently. They saw CPA both as an entrée to the international community and an institution devoted to improving the parliamentary profession within Canada. Subsequent Speakers also supported this view but the creation of new parliamentary links with many other legislatures and the increasing demands of the Speakership gave them less time to devote to CPA. Eventually federal Speakers ceased to be Co-Chairmen of the federal branch. This position is filled by election.

Ian Imrie was Executive Secretary of the Canadian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association until his retirement in December 1995.

In most provinces the Speaker is still the head of the CPA Branch although I believe the Quebec branch now also elects a Chairman. These individuals – Speakers or Chairmen as the case may be – make up the Canadian Regional Council, the Executive of the Canadian Region of CPA.

In 1982 the Council appointed a Task Force to study the organisation and activities of the Canadian Region. It was originally chaired by Speaker Claude Vaillancourt of Quebec but following his appointment to the bench he was replaced by Speaker Richard Guay. Other members of the Task Force were Keith Penner of the Federal Branch, Speaker Arthur Donahoe of Nova Scotia, Speaker John M. Turner of Ontario and Speaker Harvey Schroeder of British Columbia who was replaced by Speaker Walter Davidson after Mr. Schroeder was named to cabinet.

The Task Force made a number of recommendations which, with minor adjustments, form the basis for the organisation of the Canadian Region. It recommended establishment of an executive Committee composed of a President who comes from the Branch hosting the annual conference, two Vice-Chairman from the jurisdictions that will be hosting the next two conferences, a Past President and two (later expanded to three) Regional Representatives. One Regional Representative is drawn from the federal branch and two from provincial and territorial branches. The positions are filled by election for a three-year term. There is an understanding that the position should rotate among the provinces and territories in an equitable manner. The Regional Representatives



Allister Grosart (left) was for many years one of the pillars of CPA in Canada.

serve as Canadian delegates to CPA's international Executive Committee.

The Task Force also considered a number of financial and administrative matters including the question of whether the Region should have its own independent secretariat. It concluded that such a step was "premature" and would pose a number of practical and financial problems. The facilities of the federal Parliamentary Relations Secretariat, continued to provide support services for the Region. This arrangement continued until my retirement in 1995. When Paul Bélisle, Clerk of the Senate, was named Executive Secretary Treasurer, some of this administrative support was transferred to the Senate but the House and Senate continue to co-operate in providing administrative support to the Region.

Activities in the Canadian Region of CPA

Over the years I worked with a number of individuals who contributed to the development of both the Canadian Region of CPA and the international association. In addition to the Speakers and members of the Task Force who I have already mentioned I remember the outstanding contribution of the late Senator Allister Grosart. Even though he was an opposition Senator for many years he still was chosen to lead a number of Canadian delegations to international conferences. His financial expertise helped the international CPA to put its affairs in order. He also served on the Constitutional Committee of CPA and was instrumental in obtaining a long-standing Canadian goal of getting all branches placed on an equal footing in the constitution. Previously national branches had a higher status than provincial or state branches which in turn were treated differently than colonial branches. As a result of the changes Canadian provincial and territorial legislators were given more opportunities to participate in activities of the organisation.

I always worked closely with the Chairman of the Federal Branch, particularly after this became an elected office. Aside from Senator Grosart and Keith Penner whom I have mentioned other Chairmen were James Walker, Maurice Dupras, Maurice Foster, Lloyd Crouse, Senator William Doody and the current Chairman, Bob Speller.

Some milestones in the development of the Canadian Region of CPA are listed in the table on the following page. The Conferences, hosted by one of the Canadian branches, have been held annually since 1958 except in those years when the international CPA Conference met in Canada. Regional Conferences bring together about 100 parliamentarians, including up to ten from the federal branch and up to six from each province or territory. The United Kingdom and one or more Caribbean branches are usually invited to send observers. The busi-

Milestones in the Development of the Canadian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Year	Event
1958	Nova Scotia hosts first meeting of Canadian legislators. Decision taken to hold annual conferences
1966	Canada hosts CPA International Conference
1973	Federal Branch of CPA, hosts first Canadian Regional Seminar
1977	Canada hosts CPA International Conference
1978	Newfoundland hosts first Atlantic Parliamentary Conference
1978	Establishment of <i>Canadian Parliamentary Review</i>
1978	Quebec, with support from Canadian Region of CPA, hosts seminar on "British Parliamentary System: An Anachronism or a Modern Reality".
1979	Ontario hosts first Canadian Regional Seminar outside of Ottawa
1982	Northwest Territories becomes first northern territory to host a CPA Regional Conference
1984	Alberta hosts first Canadian Presiding Officers' Conference
1985	First Washington Seminar for Canadian Region of CPA organised by the Centre for Legislative Exchange
1985	Saskatchewan becomes first provincial branch to host a CPA International Conference
1987	Quebec, with support from Canadian Region of CPA, hosts Conference on the Parliamentary Tradition
1991	Yukon hosts CPA Regional Seminar which has now been held at least once every province and territory.
1992	Quebec, with support from Canadian Region of CPA, hosts International Symposium on Democracy
1994	Canada hosts CPA International Conference
1997	Quebec, with support from Canadian Region of CPA, hosts Parliamentary Conference on the Americas
1998	Prince Edward Island becomes first provincial jurisdiction to host CPA international seminar

ness session of these conferences tend to reflect the location with fisheries on the agenda when the conference meets on the East or West Coast and agriculture or other resources when it meets in the prairies. Conferences rotate among the jurisdictions in a more or less fixed order although sometimes an election will cause a host to re-schedule. As shown in the Table Quebec has, on several occasions proposed an expanded format for a conference or seminar and the other Branches have gone along with the initiative.

The success of the annual conference was the main reason for adding another activity. Since 1973 the annual parliamentary seminar brings together a smaller number of members, 40 or so. It is designed to deal more with procedural or other issues directly related to work of legislators and thus to help new members adjust to their parliamentary responsibilities. Originally held only in Ottawa these seminars now rotate among the provinces and territories.

Since 1984 the Presiding Officers have also organised a separate meeting at which they discuss issues of interest

mainly to Speakers, Deputy Speakers or Chairmen of Committees of the Whole. The Atlantic provinces have been holding their own regular meetings since 1978. I was invited as an observer to several of these and they appear very useful for the members involved. From time to time there is discussion of a similar meeting among legislators from the four western provinces but so far nothing of a permanent nature has materialised. Ontario and Quebec have a programme of legislative exchanges but not under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Since 1985 the Canadian Region of CPA has contributed toward a programme, organised by the Centre for Legislative Exchange, whereby a group of Canadian legislators (maximum of two from each jurisdiction) spend a few days in Washington where they meet congressmen and officials from the administration. These exchanges have dealt with such things as Bilateral and Global Environmental Issues, Education Policy, Trade Policy, Bilateral Agriculture and Fisheries Issues.



Some members of the Canadian Regional Council of CPA attend the 1978 Atlantic Parliamentary Conference in Newfoundland. Ian Imrie is in the last row at the far left. Henry Muggah is at the far right in the last row. The first row includes (l-r) Bettie Duff, Clerk of host province, Gerald Ottenheimer, Speaker of the host province, Speaker Renaude Lapointe of the Senate, Joey Smallwood, Deputy Speaker Harry Blank of Quebec and Maurice Foster, Canadian Regional Representative of CPA.

Establishment of the Canadian Parliamentary Review

I was an original member of the Editorial Board for the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* when it was established. The idea for some sort of newsletter originated in the early 1970s. I had been to a CPA conference in Australia and they produced a newsletter which summarised developments in various Australian legislatures. Several Canadians thought it would be a good idea to have something similar for Canada.

The other original Board members, all of whom volunteered for the job, were: Henry Muggah, Clerk of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, John Holtby, Clerk Assistant in Ontario, Christian Comeau, a Research Officer with the Quebec National Assembly, Gordon Barnhart, Clerk of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly and Philip Laundy, Director of the Research Branch of the Library of Parliament. We chose Dr. Muggah as Chairman. He brought to the meetings a wealth of parliamentary ex-

perience, typical Maritime civility, a dry wit and the occasional bottle of excellent brandy (purchased at his own expense) to help us pull together an issue of the *Review*. Jacqueline Luskey who was a member of my staff acted as Secretary to the Board and as the first Editor.

This group met 2 or 3 times a year. The first issue of the *Review* was published in June 1978 and a second issue followed in October. The next year three issues were published. In 1980 the Board decided to accept an offer from the Parliamentary Librarian, Erik Spicer, to allow one of its researchers, Gary Levy to act as General Editor. He proposed to make the *Review* a quarterly with a new format and a number of new features. Among other things he suggested, and the Board agreed, to feature historical or parliamentary scenes on the front cover. They are usually by Canadian artists and generally attract favourable comment both in Canada and abroad. A new working relationship was established whereby the

Board continued to establish overall direction but the day to day operation, including the selection of articles, design, and production was left to the Editor who is now retained on contract by the Canadian Region.

The Board met once a year until the 1990s when it began to conduct its business by quarterly telephone conference calls. Face-to-face meetings are held when necessary, usually every two or three years. There are now ten members on the Board divided as follows: Ontario (1), Quebec (1), British Columbia (1), the Atlantic provinces (1), the prairie provinces (1) and the two northern territories (1) plus 3 members come from the federal parliament — one each from the Senate, the House of Commons and the Library of Parliament. The Secretary-Treasurer of the CPA Region is an *ex officio* member of the Editorial Board. The present Chair is Claude DesRosiers, Clerk of the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

Conclusion

Conferences and other inter-parliamentary activities are sometimes criticised as junkets and a waste of public money. I never shared this view for a number of reasons.

If we are going to have a parliamentary form of government it is important that legislators have opportunities to develop an understanding of the parliamentary

process and their role in it. Conferences, seminars and other activities provide such opportunities.

If we are to have a united country it is important that elected members from one part of the country visit other areas and gain an appreciation of the problems and challenges of their fellow citizens. I do not think I ever attended a conference, including those in Ottawa, where there were not a number of legislators visiting that part of the country for the first time. One should not underestimate the value of such experiences.

If Canada is to play a role in the international community it is important that our legislators have opportunities to meet and establish relations with their counterparts in other countries. Contacts should not be limited to just the government and the department of Foreign Affairs.

If we are to help emerging democracies it is important we have institutions that can provide them with both human and material support. The CPA has been doing more in this area lately.

Retirement changes one's perspective on some issues but I am still as much a defender of Canadian participation in parliamentary associations, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, in particular, as I ever was. I look forward to the continued development of the Canadian Region into the next millenium.

A Selection of Related Articles from Previous Issues of the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*

- Bob Andrew. *The Fifth Canadian Regional Seminar*, vol. 3 (1): 12-16, 1980.
Gordon Barnhart. *Interprovincial Exchange Visit to Saskatchewan*, vol.1 (2):13, 1978.
Guy Beaudet. *Interparliamentary Co-operation in Quebec*, vol. 12 (2): 14-18, 1989.
Jean-Pierre Charbonneau. *The Parliamentary Conference of the Americas: An Unprecedented Event*, vol. 20 (2): 4-6, 1997.
Christian Comeau. *The Quebec City Conference on the Parliamentary System*, vol. 2 (2):17-19, 1979.
Christian Comeau. *Plea for Interparliamentary Relations*, vol. 3 (1): 44-46 and vol. 3 (2):23-25, 1980.
Bettie Duff. *First Atlantic Parliamentary Conference*, vol. 1 (2):7, 1978.
Ian Imrie. *Parliamentary Relations Secretariat*, vol. 2 (2):20-21, 1979.
Marc Leman. *Always an Evolving Mission*, vol 14 (2) 28-33, 1991
Gary Levy. *The Origin of Parliamentary Conferences*, vol. 8 (2): 2-5, 1985.
Gary Levy. *Beauchesne, d'Egville and the Empire Parliamentary Association*, vol. 9 (4) 24-27.
Gary Levy. *Canada Hosts 40th CPA Conference*, vol. 17 (3): 5-11, 1994.
Jean-Pierre Saintonge. *Quebec's Involvement in Two American Parliamentary Associations*, vol. 14 (3): 6-7, 1991.
Jean-Pierre Saintonge. *Bicentennial of Representative Government in Quebec*, vol 15 (2): 26-28, 1992.
Joan Sawicki. *CPA and the Parliamentary Profession*, vol. 15 (3): 12-13, 1992.
Lorraine Williams. *East Meets West at the 75th*, vol. 4 (3) 13-17, 1981.