

Union List of Newfoundland and Labrador Related Commissions of Inquiry and Royal Commissions from 1833

Legislative Library | House of Assembly
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

This project aims to create an as-complete-as-possible union list of all Commissions of Inquiry¹ and Royal Commissions conducted for or on Newfoundland and Labrador.

While research has been thorough and every effort made to uncover as many documents as possible, this cannot be regarded as a comprehensive list. As additional documents are uncovered, they will be added to the database maintained by the Legislative Library.

Methodology

To create this listing, collections of the following institutions were searched:

- Legislative Library – House of Assembly, Newfoundland and Labrador;
- Newfoundland & Labrador Collection, Newfoundland & Labrador Public Libraries;
- Memorial University Libraries: Queen Elizabeth II and Centre for Newfoundland Studies;
- The Rooms Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador; and
- Other institutions where leads directed.

To support and supplement collection searches, the following were consulted:

- A list suspected to have been created by Agnes O'Dea, former head of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, which shed light on many late-19th century Commissions that would have otherwise gone unlisted; and
- A list created by Lisa Thomas, The Rooms Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, which included many Commissions from the early to mid-20th century that did not receive wide distribution.

Once these searches were complete, several other sources were also consulted:

- The Journals of the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council were examined between 1833 and 1933. In several instances reports of Commissions were appended to the Journals in the sessional papers or printed in the main body of the Journal; and
- The Newfoundland Gazette, beginning January 1949, was examined for copies of commissions.

Criteria for Inclusion on the List

¹ The term 'Commission of Inquiry' is used in a general sense to refer to both 'Commission of Inquiry' and 'Commission of Enquiry.' At various times both 'Inquiry' and 'Enquiry' have been used interchangeably. Therefore in certain instances, such as when referring to a specific Commission, 'Commission of Enquiry' may be used. Currently 'Inquiry' seems to be the preferred form of the word. Additional confusion is caused by the use of the word 'commission.' This word can refer the group of individuals appointed to conduct a specified piece of work or it can refer to the document appointing the individuals to this task. In this document, a 'commission' will be used to refer to the document and 'Commission' will refer to the individual or individuals tasked with the investigation.

While Commissions of Inquiry and Royal Commissions are only one form of investigation available to a Government that seeks to have a matter examined, this list focuses exclusively on this particular type of investigation.

Included in this database are Newfoundland and Labrador Commissions mandated under the authority of a public inquiries act.² To not inadvertently omit a pertinent inquiry, all reports located that were created by an investigatory Commission from a time prior to the passage of the first public inquiries act are included.

In a limited number of cases Commissions were granted but a report was never received, not released to the public, or not located. To provide as accurate a reflection of how Commissions have been used throughout Newfoundland and Labrador's history, these Commissions were included. These records are limited to information about the Commission that is available from public records.

This list does not include reports from marine courts of inquiry, judicial inquiries, magisterial inquiries, or industrial inquiries, which are investigations that stem from different pieces of legislation.

In several cases, Commissions were included on various lists but reports or official evidence of their existence was not found. In these circumstances, the Commissions were not included in the union list, but a listing is included at the end of this note.

Inclusion of Electronic Documents

In 2021, efforts began to include electronic versions of reports and papers where they are available in participating institutions. In these cases, URLs are provided with the record. As more electronic documents become available, they will be added to the database records.

Acknowledgements

Since 2006, staff of the Legislative Library, as well as from the noted institutions, have contributed to the creation of this database. Particular credit is due to Cameron McKay who undertook the original research for and early creation of this tool, and Sean Dawe, who has subsequently refined it and prepared it for public use.

All summaries and records are written and created by staff of the Legislative Library. Errors or omissions in the content may be reported to the Legislative Library - legislativelibrary@gov.nl.ca or 709-729-3604

² The first of these acts passed in Newfoundland was in 1888 and was entitled *An Respecting Inquiries concerning Public Matters* (SN 1888 c. 18). The *Public Inquiries Act* (see RSNL 1990 c. P-38.1), as it is currently called, has been amended several times since 1888 though still forms the legislative basis for Commissions of Inquiry and Royal Commissions.

Commissions found on a list but for which no other evidence has been located

No.	Title	Chair	Commissioners	Appointment Date
1.	Royal Commission to enquire into Accounts and Management of S. S. 'Fiona'	James Gervé Conroy		Jan. or Feb. 1898
2.	Royal Commission to enquire into Accounts at Port of St. George previous to removal from office of Edward First	Michael E. Dyer		Feb. 16, 1898
3.	Royal Commission of enquiry concerning all matter pertaining to the Lobster Fishery	Alfred B. Morine		July 2, 1899
4.	Royal Commission to enquire into the facts relating to the Escape of a Prisoner from the Gaol at Harbour Grace and the Conduct of the Goal Officials relating thereto	A. H. Seymour		June 12, 1901
5.	Royal Commission to enquire into Certain Irregularities in connection with the Customs service at Bay of Islands and Woods Island	James Gervé Conroy		May 18, 1903
6.	Royal Commission to investigate Certain Charges Made against John, Winter, Sub-Collector of Customs at Burin, by W.I.S. [Sic] Donnelly	Simeon Avery		August 25, 1905
7.	Royal Commission to consider the question of improving the Condition of the Aged Poor, and of those who are helpless and infirm by Means of Pensions		John Harvey, Edgar R. Bowring, W. B. Grieve, E. M. Jackman, R. H. O'Dwyer, James S. Gibbs	December 31, 1907
8.	Royal Commission to enquire into, and report Municipal Bill for the adoption of the Legislature		James Angel, George Knowling, R. K. Bishop, John Harvey, M. P. Gibbs, J. A. Robinson, M. Power, J. S. D. Blandford, S. Milley, E. P. Morris, John R. Bennett, M. P. Cashin, W. F. Coaker, J. A. Clift, W. F. Lloyd, John Dwyer, M. J. Kennedy, W. J. Higgins	May 18, 1916
9.	Royal Commission to enquire into the Railway Accident near Topsail June 21, 1919	Francis J. Morris		June 30, 1919

10.	Royal Commission to enquire into a report on all matter pertaining to Department of Marine and Fisheries from 1913-1919 (A limited quantity of Evidence is available at The Rooms Provincial Archives in GN 2/5 File 153 J that would suggest that this Commission was appointed.)	William F. Lloyd		December 6, 1919
11.	Royal Commission into Matters Pertaining to "Waterford Hospital"	Howard Dyer		July 15, 1975
12.	Royal Commission into the Death of Mrs. Grace Parsons	Clyde K. Wells		May 28, 1976
13.	Commission of Enquiry into the By-Election	R. S. Furlong		November 2, 1976
14.	Royal Commission into Various Employment Problems in Western Labrador			[1977]