



## THE SWEARING-IN OF PRIVY COUNCILLORS

**Privy councillors** are members of The Queen's Privy Council for Canada, established under the *Constitution Act, 1867* (formerly the *British North America Act*) to advise the Crown. The Privy Council includes all past and present Cabinet ministers, as well as a number of distinguished persons. Members are appointed for life by the governor general, on the recommendation of the prime minister. After being sworn in, privy councillors carry the title "Honourable" as well as the post-nominals 'P.C.' after their family names. The appointment is for life, effective from the date of the swearing-in ceremony.

### **Background:**

The *Constitution Act, 1867* states:

"There shall be a Council to aid and advise in the Government of Canada, to be styled the Queen's Privy Council for Canada; and the Persons who are to be members of that Council shall be from time to time chosen and summoned by the governor general and sworn in as Privy Councillors, and Members thereof may be from time to time removed by the governor general."

The first members of the Council were sworn in by Governor General Viscount Monck, on Monday, July 1, 1867, in Ottawa. They were appointed by the Governor General at a formal meeting of the Council at Rideau Hall. In addition to the oaths of Allegiance and of the Members of the Privy Council, the members took the Oath of Office as heads of departments.

Until 1891, all privy councillors were either Cabinet ministers or former Cabinet ministers. In that year, for the first time, privy councillors were appointed who were not Cabinet ministers when former speakers of both houses were sworn in. There is no legal limitation on those who may be made members, but they must be in a position to take the Oath of Allegiance and the Oath of the Members of the Privy Council.

The entire Privy Council meets rarely and then only on ceremonial occasions. It does not conduct the business of government.

Last Modified October 28, 2015

**Ministers** are privy councillors who, by convention, are members of the House of Commons or the Senate, or who are in the process of being elected to a seat. They are appointed by the governor general on the recommendation of the prime minister, who determines their titles and responsibilities.

Many distinguished Canadians have been among those who are appointed to the Council as an honour, without being made members of the Cabinet. In 1967, on the occasion of Canada's centennial, and in 1982, on the occasion of the patriation of the Constitution, the provincial premiers then in office were summoned and sworn in as members of the Privy Council. This ceremony took place on Parliament Hill, in the presence of Her Majesty The Queen, who signed the *Privy Council Oath Book* and the roll. In addition, on July 1, 1992, on the occasion of The Queen's visit to Canada to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation, Her Majesty presided at a special swearing-in ceremony of privy councillors at Rideau Hall.

The clerk of the Privy Council, or his or her designate, administers the oaths of the Members of the Privy Council as well as the Oath of Allegiance and the Oath of Office to a minister-designate. Each new privy councillor signs the *Privy Council Oath Book*, which is also signed by the governor general and the clerk of the Privy Council or his or her designate.