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THE MAPLE LEAF -- CANADA'S NATIONAL EMBLEM

(Based on an article by Clara K. Dyck, and reproduced courtesy of *The Toronto Star*, Toronto, Ontario.)

Why, or how, did the maple leaf come to represent Canada?

Even before 1690, explorers travelling up the St. Lawrence River recorded their impressions of Canada's brilliant autumn colouring. They discovered that this colourful display was primarily due to the sugar, or hard, maple (*A. saccharum Marshall*), which is the largest and most important timber-producer among Canada's ten species of maple.

Thus the maple leaf became Canada's emblem through habitual association with the country as a whole rather than by an official Parliamentary proclamation. According to historians, the maple leaf figured as a possible Canadian symbol as early as 1700.

But it was not until June 24, 1834, at the founding of the Saint Jean Baptiste Society in Lower Canada that Ludger Duvernay proposed that the maple leaf become Canada's emblem and, later in the same year, the leaf was officially adopted as the emblem of the Saint Jean Baptiste Society.

In 1836 the Saint Jean Baptiste Society held a banquet in Montreal at which the hall was decorated with a profusion of sugar-maple branches and leaves. At this occasion speakers praised the tree for its sturdiness in the forest, the substantial character of its wood for fuel and lumber, and its service to the pioneer in supplying an annual harvest of syrup and sugar, as well as for its emblematic significance. And, in 1853, at the inauguration of the Brock Monument at Queenston Heights, Ontario, a large maple leaf appeared on one side of a banner carried in the procession.

It was not until 1860, however, that more specific public recognition was accorded to this native tree of Canada and to its leaf. On August 21 of that year a meeting had been called in the old Saint Lawrence Hall in Toronto to prepare for a procession of national societies in honour of the forthcoming visit to Canada of the Prince of Wales, who later became King Edward VII. At this meeting, Dr. James H. Richardson moved that the maple leaf become Canada's official national emblem, and this motion was unanimously accepted.

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