

From Sea to Sea

On July 1, 2011, Canadians at our missions abroad, at regional offices in Canada and at Headquarters will celebrate our country's 144th birthday with pomp and pride. But Canada's birthday wasn't always marked this way. At the beginning of Canadian nationhood in 1867, celebrations were barely an afterthought.

For Canadians at home and around the world, Canada Day is a time to celebrate the blessings of being part of a free and prosperous country. We have been celebrating our national holiday with great enthusiasm since the centennial year in 1967—and even more so since 1982, the year Canada obtained full autonomy with the patriation of the constitution from Britain.

Canada Day falls on July 1, the day that the British North America Act was passed in 1867. The BNA Act brought together Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick into a new country, Canada.

On June 20, 1868, Viscount Monck, governor general from 1867 to 1868, issued a royal proclamation asking Canadians to celebrate the anniversary of Confederation. However, most English-speaking Canadians still considered themselves more British than Canadian and did not take up Monck's suggestion.

It was only in 1879 that the official holiday, named Dominion Day, was created by Parliament. Until 1917, there were no regular festivities.

To commemorate the golden anniversary of Confederation in 1917, the Duke of Devonshire, the governor general of the day, unveiled an inscription carved on the central pillar of Confederation Hall inside the main entrance to the Parliament Buildings. The inscription praised the valour of Canadian soldiers fighting on the battlefields of Europe for the "liberties of Canada, of the Empire and of humanity."

The governor general delivered a speech, and at its conclusion the choir sang "O Canada." Then the governor general released a Union Jack via the touch of a button.

The 60th anniversary celebrations in Ottawa, in 1927, were heard on radio across the nation, marking the first nationwide broadcast of any kind—an



The first large Canada Day celebrations took place on Parliament Hill in 1927, the 60th anniversary of Confederation.

achievement that one newspaper praised as a "marvel of modern science." On Parliament Hill, Viscount Willingdon, governor general from 1926 to 1931, laid the cornerstone of the Confederation Building and inaugurated the carillon in the Peace Tower.

In 1958, the federal government began holding regular Dominion Day celebrations on Parliament Hill, including a band concert and a fireworks display. The centennial celebrations in 1967 unleashed an unabashed patriotism that marked a turning point in the country's history. For the first time, the Queen attended celebrations on Parliament Hill.

In 1980, "O Canada" was finally declared Canada's official national anthem, chosen in preference to such anthems as "God Save the Queen" and "The Maple Leaf Forever." That same year, the federal government began promoting Dominion Day events across the country, and these were covered extensively by Canada's national television networks.

Although the holiday was still officially called Dominion Day, Canadians increasingly began adopting the name Canada Day for the event. Many found that Dominion Day had too strong a British ring for a nation that