

20 YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE...

Twenty years ago this year, on a cold, frosty Friday, February 15, 1965, 10 000 Canadians crowded onto the Hill to see history being made — the raising of the new Canadian flag over the Peace Tower. Outwardly a joyous event, yet for those directly involved, it was the culminating act after six months of tension and conflict.

It was mid-May, 1964 when Canadians first learned that Prime Minister Pearson meant to keep his election promise to give the nation a new and distinctive flag. He chose a tough audience before which to make his announcement — the annual meeting in Winnipeg of the super-patriotic Royal Canadian legion. Of all the sketches and designs shown to him, the one that caught his eye was one designed by Alan B. Beddoe of Ottawa with three red maple leaves on a white background with a broad blue bar on either side. (It became known as the "Pearson Pennant".) This, he unveiled that day in May to a chorus of boos that almost drowned out his words.

In June 1964, he put his flag motion before the Commons. The Tories would not accept a flag that didn't include the Union Jack. The NDP didn't object to the exclusion of the Jack but preferred only one leaf. The Creditistes, 24 of them to go with the Liberals' 129 seats, were all for the "Pearson Pennant" ... and so the debate began. It started in June 1964 and with just a brief summer recess, lasted almost until Christmas. 284 speeches were delivered — 210 by Conservatives, 50 by Liberals, and 24 by Creditistes and Socreds. Patriotism ran high and patience ran thin.



When it became obvious that the debate was going nowhere the government established a committee to select a new design. Newfoundland Liberal Herman Batten was selected as chairman.

More than 5 000 designs were submitted (including ones by artists A.Y. Jackson and G.J. Casson) encompassing every imaginable combination of elements.

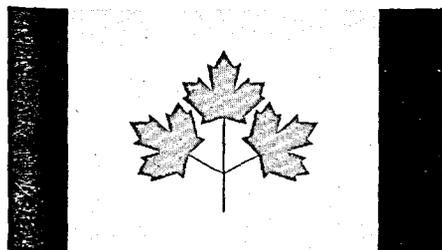
The final vote was between the original "Pearson Pennant" and our present day flag. The "Pennant" was outvoted 14-0. In the House the vote came in the early hours of December 15. With the Tories still opposed, the Maple leaf flag was selected by a vote of 163 to 78.

Senate approval and Royal Assent followed in short order and February 15 was set as the date for proclamation of the legislation.

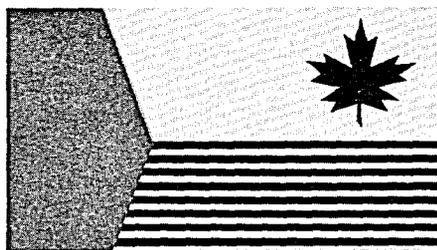
At long last it was over. It was flag day on the Hill. As the Red Ensign slid slowly down the flag staff many, including John Diefenbaker, remained loyal to it. (He, in fact, was buried beneath an Ensign.)

Twenty years have quickly passed (at least so it seems when recalling historic events like these). The Canadian flag soaring above our chanceries abroad is, no doubt, a welcome sight to wandering Canadians. It is made all the more significant when one remembers the circumstances and events that led up to its creation.

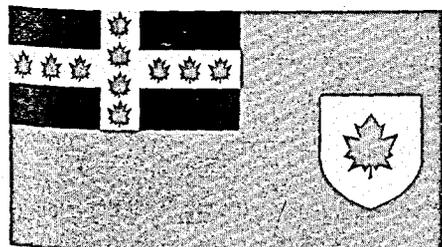
Some of the thousands of losing designs



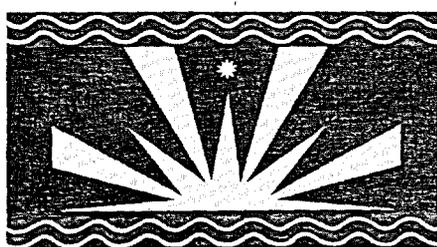
A version of the "Pearson Pennant" by Alan Beddoe.



Designed by Germain Tremblay.



Designed by A.F. MacDonald.



Designed by Victor Wells.

FLAG FACTS

— The area of the white square in the centre is equal to the total area of the two red bands.

— The leaf, designed by Jacques Saint-Cyr, has 11 points because experiments revealed that motion makes the leaf appear to have twice the number of points. The real maple leaf has 22 points.

The Red Ensign

— The Red Ensign (red flag with the Union Jack in the left corner) was first flown in Canada by the Hudson Bay Company. The letters, HBC, were placed in the fly (the furthest place from the shaft).

— In 1921 the newly granted arms of Canada were put in the fly.

— In 1945 an order-in-council allowed it to be flown from government buildings, both at home and abroad, until a Canadian flag was chosen.

(Courtesy of the National Archives of Canada)