

*Private Bills*

"O Canada" was originally a chant national of French speaking Canada. From it developed about 20 adaptations in English. However, the most accepted English version proved to be that of Hon. R. Stanley Weir. "O Canada" was originally commissioned as a musical composition by Lieutenant Governor Théodore Robitaille for the occasion of the official visit to Quebec in 1880 of the then governor general, the Marquess of Lorne and Her Royal Highness Princess Louise. He asked Calixa Lavallée, a composer, to set to music a 32 line poem by Sir Adolphe Routhier.

The music was written by Lavallée, reputedly in a single night. Lavallée was born in 1842, the son of a blacksmith. He was a native of Verchères, Quebec, who had received excellent musical training. He was considered a boy wonder of music when he ran away at the age of 15 to join a band in New Orleans, where he loved to play negro spirituals and jazz. During the American civil war he became a bandsman in the northern armies. He toured the United States as a conductor and was artistic director of the New York grand opera from 1870 to 1872. He then went to Paris for three years where he studied piano and composition. He came back to Canada for the five year period between 1875 and 1880, during which time he tried to arouse interest in a conservatory of music and an opera house both in Montreal and Quebec, but without too much success.

Shortly after writing the music for "O Canada" he left for Boston. There he taught music and later became president of the American music teachers national association, from 1886 to 1887. He died in 1891 in Boston at the age of 49.

The stirring music that Lavallée wrote for the lieutenant governor of Quebec was intended to be first heard during an open air mass on the plains of Abraham. Some of Lavallée's friends on learning that this plan might be changed, hastily gathered together 100 trumpets and other brass instruments and "O Canada" was first played at a banquet in the skating pavilion in Quebec a day ahead of the religious service. That day was June 24, 1880.

This fine, pulsating music was received in Quebec with great enthusiasm. The original words in French were written before the music. Credit for them goes to Hon. Sir Adolphe Routhier, a former chief justice of Quebec who was born in 1839 and died in 1920. Routhier was a charter member of the royal society of Canada and its president

from 1856 to 1916. He wrote at least four verses to be sung in French to the music, but the first stanza is the popular one.

Of the 20 English versions which were adaptations rather than translations, the version of Hon. R. Stanley Weir, written on the occasion of the tercentenary of Quebec, in 1908, has attained the most general acceptance and is now most widely sung. Weir was born in 1856 and died in 1926. He was a recorder of Montreal and a judge of the Exchequer Court of Canada.

His words owe their deserved popularity to the fact that they were officially adopted by the association of Canadian clubs and other national bodies and were printed from 1921 onwards in many of the public school readers of the provinces. They were also published in an official form at the time of the diamond jubilee of Canadian federation in 1927 and on the occasion of the royal visit to Canada in 1939.

On February 15 of this year at the ceremony for the inauguration of the national flag of Canada, the program contained the first verse and refrain of "O Canada" from Routhier's version in French and the first verse and refrain of "O Canada" from Weir's version in English, and these two verses and refrains were beautifully sung by a choir of about 19 Ottawa school children. A patriotic surge of feeling for our country was surely felt by every Canadian who heard them.

Lavallée's great music has been specially arranged to be played on the carillon of the peace tower on parliament hill in Ottawa. The hymnary of the United Church of Canada contains a prayerful version by Dr. Albert Durrant Watson. This is the one commonly sung in churches. The first verse and refrain of the Weir version have been translated into Polish and no doubt into many other languages.

The Hadassah-Wizo organization of Canada in 1962 commissioned Bernard Figler, a Montreal lawyer, to write a Hebrew version of "O Canada" with the meter adapted to the music and suitable for singing. This Hebrew version was chanted along with the English and French versions at the organization's official opening of its 19th biennial convention in February 1962 in Jerusalem, Israel.

Since 1948 the regulations of all three armed services of the country have provided that officers and men shall salute during the playing of "O Canada". At the Olympic games and other international sports competitions when a medal is won by a Canadian and the presentation is made, the host coun-