

Queen Mother wishes Canada a Happy Birthday



H M Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother with Canadian High Commissioner H E and Mrs Roy McMurtry.

Ontario Massed Legion Pipes and Drums

A birthday is a cause for celebration, and the 120th anniversary of a nation like Canada calls for special treatment. In London this year, Canada Day festivities on July 1 were graced by the presence of H M Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother making the occasion particularly memorable.

The morning celebrations were centred on Canada House where guests were entertained by the High Commissioner and the provincial Agents General in the High Commissioner's salon. This was followed by a musical interlude provided by youth choirs from Truro, Nova Scotia, Calgary and Ottawa.

The voices of the choirs were soon replaced not far away by the music of a pipe band, signalling that the celebration had moved out of doors. The band in question was that of the Ontario Massed Legion Pipes and Drums which enjoys a world-wide reputation. Founded in 1974 by Senior Pipe Major Ross Baxter, its musicians are in great demand throughout Canada, and have toured the United States, the Caribbean and South America.

The band has also paid two visits to Scotland, and on the second occasion, at the Argyllshire Highland Gathering, HRH Princess Margaret took the salute. In London, they met another royal personage with a particular fondness for the pipes, so it was a royal company of musicians that marched from Wellington Barracks to Buckingham Palace, accompanied by over 100 members of the Royal Canadian Legion.

Canadian pipers perform at Buckingham Palace
Their mounted escort from the Metropolitan Police included two horses born and bred in Canada, which were presented to the Queen by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Both Centennial and Burmese have become celebrities in their own right. Burmese was HM the Queen's mount for 17 years at the Trooping of the Colour, and this was probably one of the last big ceremonial engagements of the 24-year-old mare.

Guest of honour at the parade was HM the Queen Mother who has a long association with Canada. Her first visit to the country was in 1939 when she embarked on a six-week, coast-to-coast tour with her husband King George VI.

On July 1, however, the Queen Mother's journey took only a matter of minutes. She arrived by carriage from nearby Clarence House and, stopping at the dais in front of the Central Arch, was introduced to the High Commissioner and the Agents General.

After a performance by the Ontario Massed Legion Pipes and Drums Band, five delegates from both the Band and the Royal Canadian Legion came forward to present Addresses of Loyalty, after which Her Majesty made a short speech. Then came a march past, after which the Band and Legion left the grounds of the Palace to march down the Mall to Horseguards Parade.

Young musicians and dancers delight the Queen Mother

The last item of the day took place in the quadrangle of Buckingham Palace, attended by HM the Queen Mother and other dignitaries. This was a performance by the Ontario Youth Concert Band and the Canadian Folk Dancers.

The Band, founded in 1969 by George Houslander, has won international acclaim for its renditions of all types of music from concert classics to Glenn Miller. The eight Canadian Folk Dancers under their choreographer Elyse Hutchinson are equally talented; they aim to reflect Canada's ethnic diversity in their repertoire.

Over the years, around 600 artists, aged between 18 and 21, have had the opportunity to represent Canada in the concert halls of the world through membership of the band or the dance troupe. Their command performance for HM the Queen Mother was the highlight of their current tour.

