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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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As a result of this action all native Canadians, that is, all people born in Canada, whether belonging to Canada's national societies or not, wore maple leaves and carried branches of this tree in their hands in a parade held in honour of the Prince three weeks later. It was here that the maple leaf first received official public acclaim as Canada's national emblem. And maple leaves were also used extensively during this time of celebration for decorative purposes, such as on pins and brooches.

But apparently England already associated the maple leaf with Canada at this time for "the Worcester china brought by the Prince's party showed a wreath of maple leaves surmounted by a crown and the Prince of Wales feathers".

On July 1, 1867, Canada's Confederation documents were signed. Shortly afterward, in the same year, Alexander Muir, a Toronto school-teacher, wrote the soon-to-become-famous words and music of *The Maple Leaf Forever*, which was first sung publicly at a patriotic demonstration at Beaverton, Ontario, on May 24, 1871. And, on May 26, 1868, Queen Victoria granted permission to Ontario and Quebec to incorporate the maple leaf into their coats of arms.

During both the South African War and the First World War, regimental badges of the Canadian expeditionary forces displayed the maple leaf. During the Second World War Canada's nationality was again represented by the maple leaf on militia uniforms, on ships and on highway signs. And Canada's armed forces and police forces still wear the three-leafed sprig of maple on their badges and buttons today.

A proclamation of King George V on November 21, 1921, established the Canadian coat of arms. This official seal bears a shield divided into five sections: four equal-sized sections represent England, Scotland, Ireland and France with their respective emblems of three lions, a single lion, a harp, and three fleur-de-lis. Below, at the base of the shield, is Canada's emblem -- a three-leafed sprig of green maple leaves on a single stem, similar to that in the coat of arms granted to Ontario and Quebec by Queen Victoria in 1868.

Surmounting the shield is the crest: a golden, crowned lion holding a brilliant red maple leaf in its upraised paw. The shield with the crest is held erect, on the left, by an upright lion flying the Union Jack and, on the right, by an upright unicorn flying the banner of royalist France. Lion and unicorn stand on either end of the inscribed motto "A mari usque ad mare" ("From sea to sea"), which rests on a wreath of roses, thistles, shamrocks and lilies. Completing the total design, at centre top, is the Crown of St. Edward.

In the proclamation of Canada's coat of arms in 1921, white and red were officially designated as the colours of Canada. In 1957 the three green maple leaves in the coat of arms were changed to red in keeping with the national colours of Canada.

And on February 15, 1965, a new Canadian flag was proclaimed by Queen Elizabeth II confirming the maple leaf as Canada's national symbol. This flag is red at either end with a white square in the centre. In the square is a large red, conventionally stylized maple leaf. So national emblem

and national colours are now joined in a simple and distinctive design which represents Canada exclusively.

This new flag was first raised on Parliament Hill in Ottawa at twelve o'clock noon on Canada's national day, July 1 (1965), at which time Governor General Georges P. Vanier, declared: "I hope and pray...that our flag will symbolize to each of us and to the world the unity of purpose and high resolve to which destiny beckons us."

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