

A National Flag for Canada was not politically possible until people began to think of themselves as being Canadian.

For nearly a century after Confederation, a persistent colonial mindset required a British flag, albeit often one that included a Canadian symbol. As the Centennial approached, increasing national confidence allowed the creation of a stridently Canadian National Flag.

Our first prime minister, Sir John A. MacDonalld won the 1891 election promising "The Old Flag, The Old Policy, The Old Leader." He said: "...my course is clear. A British subject I was born---a British subject I will die." Indeed, the flag in the election poster does not even include a Canadian emblem.

Two flags were authorized for Canada in 1870 to meet the practical needs of identification at sea, yet each flag was soon displayed on land. The premier flag was that of the Governor General (adjacent wall), while the Canadian Blue Ensign (left) intended for governmental ships. Each bore an emblem showing the shield of the initial four provinces: Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia.

The Governor General's flag of 1870 contained a prescient detail: maple leaves. For the next century, this element would be featured on all major contenders for a National Flag; finally, in 1965 a single maple leaf dominated the flag.

The Canadian Blue Ensign of 1870 was the first Canadian flag to fly in British Columbia. One had been brought from Ottawa to Victoria to welcome the new province into Confederation on July 20, 1871.

Each of the two initial flags displayed here were used at sea on the Dominion Cruiser *Acadia* (upper left, shown in 1888).

Modern descendants of these two flags appear above and below. The Maritime Command's Auxiliary Vessels Jack is above, while the present flag of the Governor General is below (approved in 1981). This latter flag is based upon the crest of the Arms of Canada granted in 1921 (below left) and shows a lion holding a red maple leaf.

From the beginning, the Canadian government casually duplicated the four-province emblem from the blue ensign, placed it onto a red ensign, and encouraged its general use. As no governmental order was ever given approving this, great confusion ensued as to what was appropriate. Indeed, an 1871 Canadian Illustrated News (below) presented solemn nonsense about what was supposedly proper. By 1892, when the four-province Canadian Red Ensign was finally approved for use at sea, few people actually used it anywhere; most people had moved on to composites of other provinces.

As new provinces joined or were created, their symbols (often informal) were added to the ensign. But as nothing was official, whimsy often ruled with the sometime addition of wreaths, crowns, and beavers. The flag above is one form taken by the five-province ensign, which now included Manitoba.

Although informal, all forms were displayed frequently and enthusiastically, as illustrated by the silk print (right) and the cover from an 1877 magazine marking Canada's first decade (left).

The longest-lasting form of the Canadian Red Ensign displayed emblems of seven provinces; it was created in 1873 after BC and PEI had joined Confederation. Often used interchangeably with other forms, this flag continued in use through the Great War. It could be seen in the West Kootenay on buildings, stern wheelers and mine headframes.

Nineteenth-century Britain lacked an official national flag. In 1902, *The Times* editorialized on the benefits of choosing the Union Jack. What was a foreign newspaper's suggestion, became transformed in Canada into a truth and for the next forty years, the Union Jack flew over Parliament. Indeed, Canadians were now told that the Union Jack was, in fact, Canada's national flag---it wasn't. Illustrating the mood of the times, a 1915 poster (left) used the Union Jack to encouraged volunteers during the Great War. Yet, as a 1915 painting of the Battle of Ypres (below) illustrates, use of the Canadian Red Ensign persisted.

By 1907, there were nine provinces each with arms. The resulting ensign offered an indistinguishable jumble

when flown, yet the flag was proudly displayed from homes and businesses on Victoria Day and Dominion Day.

In 1921, Canada gained arms (right) so the ensign could display the shield to represent the country as an entity rather than as a collection of provinces. The initial version (above) used green leaves; it wasn't until 1957 that the leaves were changed to red (left). In 1924, Canada took a timid step and authorized the use of this flag on Canadian buildings abroad---despite still flying the Union Jack over Parliament.

In 1945 this ensign replaced the Union Jack over Parliament and an order-in-council approved its use everywhere, "until such time as action is taken by Parliament for the formal adoption of a national flag," so everyone switched from the Union Jack to the Canadian

Red Ensign. It had been a long parade of jostling pretenders and it wasn't to end until Canada finally approved a national flag in 1965.

Through pamphlets, articles, and contests, a suitable Canadian National Flag was vigorously debated in the 1890s, 1920s, 1940s, and 1960s. In the early years, colonial thinking always included a British symbol. Only during the 1940s did solely Canadian proposals begin to appear.

With the exception of enduring support for the Canadian Red Ensign, all serious proposals for a National Flag prominently featured maple leaves.

A maple leaf as a badge on the red ensign (above) was the favourite in the 1890s, 1920s, and 1940s. And during the years that posturing claimed the Union Jack as our flag, the maple leaf might even be placed upon it (below).

The inclusion of a maple leaf on a British flag initially had been an expression of an independent spirit in a colonial country; later it became an expression of a colonial spirit in an independent country. But whichever sentiment prevailed, prior to 1964 no government acted on any flag proposals, not even on ones arising from its own committees.

The proposal, left, offered a little something for every leaning: Britain, France, and Canada. It was an unsuccessful contestant in the 1920s and might have died on the spot had there not been another war. In 1939 it was adopted as the *Battle Flag of Canada* and under this flag Canadian troops sailed off to Europe.

However by presenting a mixed message, the Battle Flag proved unpopular with servicemen who thought of themselves as Canadian. The Army quietly replaced it with the Canadian Red Ensign in 1944. This shift in our military flags during the Second World War is illustrated by two posters: before the transition (left), after (right). That such a shift took place at all is evidence for the tenuous status of

these flags.

In 1943, the Ligue du Drapeau National made a proposal anticipating the design proclaimed in 1965. Containing neither the Union Jack nor the Fleur-de-lis, it showed a single maple leaf on a red and white background. Significantly, their pamphlet was the first to be bilingual. This flag was a major contender in 1946 and again in 1964.

The final catharsis took place in 1964. Prime Minister Pearson resolved to have a uniquely Canadian Nation Flag in time for Canada's centennial in 1967. John Diefenbaker resolved to enshrine the Canadian Red Ensign as the National Flag.

Although a segment of the population vigorously promoted the Canadian Red Ensign, the broader sweep of the Canadian public now found the ensign too colonial.

Pearson's favourite, quickly dubbed Pearson's Pennant (right), showed three maple leaves between two blue bars signifying sea to sea. It was a good start, but the blue bars were a hollow

boast when dozens of countries extend from sea to sea. Besides, Canada's colours were red and white, not red, white and blue. Finally, good flag design demands simplicity so why use three leaves when one will do.

After extensive political maneuvering involving protests, pamphlets, speeches and stickers (left), the Parliamentary Committee opted for simple elegance.

National Flag

The National Flag was approved by Parliament on Dec. 15, 1964; proclaimed by the Queen on Jan. 28, 1965; raised on Feb. 15, 1965. 2010 marks the 45th anniversary of the National Flag.

The (reproduction of the) Flag Proclamation (above) specifies "a red flag of the proportions two by length and one by width containing in its centre a white square the width of the flag bearing a single red maple leaf."

So, the many flags of a different proportion (left) that are sold in local shops are as fake as if coloured yellow or green.

The first Canadian flag to fly in BC was the Canadian Blue Ensign of 1870 (shown near the gallery entrance). Subsequently, BC used Canadian Red Ensigns and the Union Jack to represent Canada. However, prior to 1960, BC saw only an occasional need for a flag to distinguish itself as a province.

In 1906, BC was granted arms (plaque below). While this allowed the creation of a BC ensign, the only use such a flag ever seemed to serve was identification abroad. The flag above is a BC ensign used on a provincial trade mission to San Francisco in the 1920s.

The shield from the arms is also used on the flag of the Lieutenant Governor (lower left).

In 1960, BC adopted a flag by political subterfuge.

For the 1958 anniversary of the creation of colonial BC, a cluttered centennial logotype was adopted and placed upon a flag (above).

After the centennial, a Cabinet Minister proposed that this goulash should become the Provincial flag, and an artistically challenged Legislature agreed. Punned the press: The government has been caught committing a flagrant artistic crime--- *in flagrante delicto*.

To extricate his government, Premier W.A.C. Bennett stepped off a plane from London waving what he claimed was a preexisting BC flag he discovered at the College of Arms in London. This flag was quickly adopted and became BC's flag in 1960.

But, what really happened? The story goes back to the 1911 Coronation of George V. BC House in London prepared some small flags apparently for staff to wave as the parade passed. They were in the form of an armorial banner: the BC shield spread over a rectangle. One of these flags survived (upper right) and Mr. Bennett used it as a prototype. He quickly had a larger version manufactured, and then gave it political credence by claiming he found

it during a visit to the College of Arms.

All in all, this minor political subterfuge produced a satisfactory result. 2010 marks the 50th anniversary of the BC flag.

Nelson

In 1960, Nelson was granted arms. In 1969, Nelson placed a small version of its arms in the centre of its flag.

Understandably, this did not prove very recognizable, so the fix was to add the city name. [Note to myself: find the dates for the second versions of the Nelson flag. Talked to Anitra at 352-8204 on Wednesday, 4th.]

Yet, a flag is not a placard; a flag must fly in a strong wind and be easily identifiable from a distance.

Consequently, good flag design stresses large, simple, elements and never includes text. By such measures, the National Flag of Canada is excellent.

Nelson

In 1960, Nelson was granted arms which evoked mountains, water, and Kokanee Salmon. In 1969, the arms were incorporated into a newly created municipal flag. The Nelson arms are complex and the rendering was small, so the flag was not easily identifiable. The problem was addressed in 1990 by adding the words, Nelson BC, to the base of the flag.

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