

History of the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag

The story of who and how our beloved Canadian Maple Leaf
Flag was brought to fruition in 1964/65

“THE MANY LOVING HANDS”

by Robert Harper

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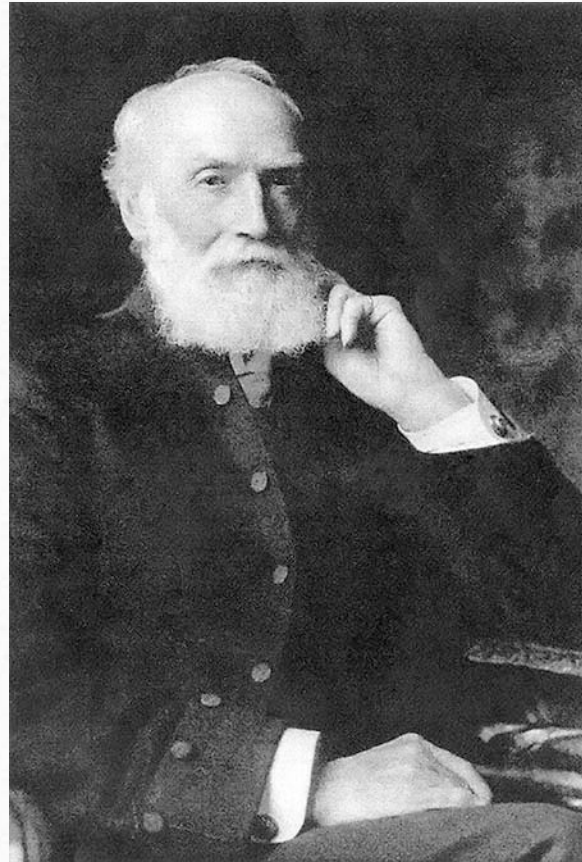
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Lawyer and heraldry enthusiast was the first individual to suggest in detailed writings to the Government of Canada in 1895/96 that Canada should have its very own National Flag and that flag should feature a “maple leaf”



Mr. Chadwick’s biography was completed by Toronto Lawyer and Historian C. Ian Kyer. Further information can be obtained from the University of Toronto archives

Edward M. Chadwick

February 8th 1919

Fiset penned a memo to Undersecretary of Defence Thomas Mulvoy to suggest the emblem of Canada be “a single red maple leaf on a white field” to match the emblem worn by Canadian Olympic athletes since 1904.



This memo can be found in the Library Archives of Canada described by Augustine Vachon in his document *The Dominion Shield* Chapter 3 REF LAC A6

Major-General (Sir) Eugene Fiset

In 1921 King George V of England proclaimed Canada's Official Colours to be Red & White. This proclamation was a guiding force as the creation of a truly Canadian National Flag was being considered

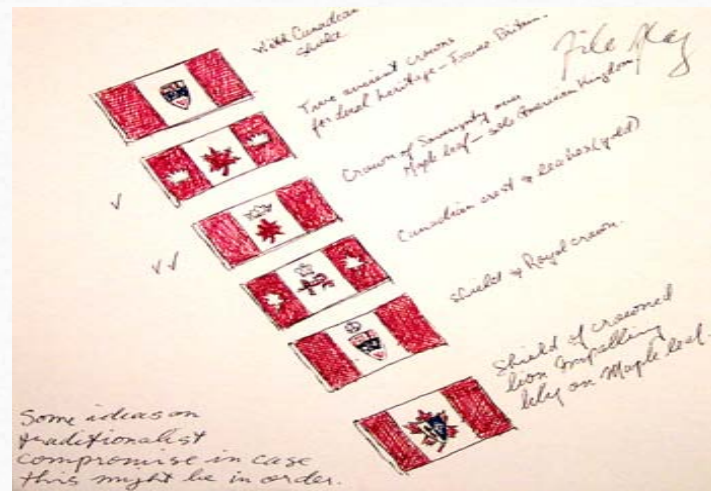


King George V

The red and white colours had been used by Canada in many heraldic and symbols of honours including the ribbon of the General Service Medal

In 1925 and again in 1946 the Government of Canada called on the Canadian public to make suggestions for a National Flag of Canada. In both of these time frames many thousands of suggestions were received. But the Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King decided the issue was too divisive and failed to make any decision of the subject.

The committee appointed in 1946 was headed by Secretary Of State Paul Martin Sr. and did provide some recommendations which should be incorporated into a National Flag of Canada.



In 1956 Lester B. Pearson
As Secretary of State in the
Foreign Affairs Department
Of the Canadian Government
brokered a deal to end the Suez
Crisis (of which he won the
Noble Peace prize) only to have
his suggestion of Canadian
soldiers act as Peace keepers
turned down because they wore
A British symbol “The Red Ensign”
and could be mistaken as British
Soldiers.



He was so disappointed by this
he made himself a promise to do
everything he could to bring a
National Flag of Canada to fruition.
In 1963 when Pearson became the
Prime Minister of Canada he
announced Canada would have it's
very own Flag within 2 years.

Prime Minister
Lester B. Pearson

Mr. Matheson MP was asked by Lester B Pearson in July of 1961 to begin researching what it would take to bring a National Flag of Canada to fruition. Mr. Matheson's experience in the study of flags, ensigns, colours, honours and heraldry dated back to 1948 with his close friend George M. Beley in Brockville Ontario.



Mr. Matheson became the person most responsible for the overseeing and coordination of all the research and suggestions relating to the details through the entire Parliamentary process which began in 1963 and concluded on December 15th 1964 when the Parliament of Canada voted 163 to 78 in favour of our Canadian Maple Leaf Flag becoming the National Flag of Canada.

Honourable John Ross Matheson
"Father of our Flag"

Alan Beddoe was a Government of Canada Military Historian, Artist and Heraldry expert. Mr Beddoe worked with John Ross Matheson on the preliminary work to bring a National Flag to being. In the spring of 1964 Mr. Beddoe was invited to a meeting with Prime Minister Pearson by John Ross Matheson to discuss possible flag designs



It was at this meeting Mr. Beddoe reached in his brief case and brought attention to his suggestion for a flag to the Prime Minister. Three conjoined red maple leaves on a white field with 2 blue borders. Pearson liked this and it became known as the “Pearson Pennant” many believe this was the beginning point of the “Great Flag Debate” when Pearson promoted it as being his choice as the “Canadian Flag” but blue is not an official colour of Canada

LT. Commander Alan Beddoe

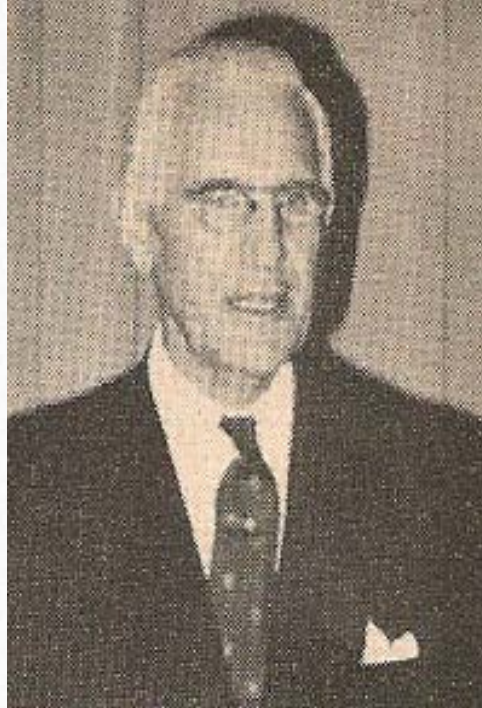
Leader of the Conservative Party and Official Opposition Leader during the Great Flag Debate in 1964.



Mr. Diefenbaker supported the idea of keeping the British Red Ensign as Canada's Flag. He once stated during the "great flag debate" Canada would only have a new flag over his dead body.

Honourable John Diefenbaker

Trusted friend and advisor of John Ross Matheson in all things relating to heraldry, flags, ensigns, colours, honours from 1948 -1975. Mr. Beley was one of the Founding Pioneers of the Heraldry Society of Canada



Mr. Beley was also a member of the Brockville Highland Pipe Band as well as the Founder of the Wee McGregor's Scottish Dance School

George M. Beley

- Dr. George Stanley Dean of Arts at RMC suggested to John Ross Matheson a recycled concept of a “Single Red Maple Leaf on A White Field” be the basis of the National Flag of Canada. This concept was first suggested in 1919 by Major – General (later Sir) Eugene Fiset.
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Mr. Matheson provided credit to the RMC based suggestion to ensure instantaneous institutional credibility for our Canadian Maple Leaf Flag on December 15th 1964.

The Flag Committee was formed as a Parliamentary Committee by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson on September 10th 1964 to bring a recommendation for a design of a Nation Flag of Canada to Parliament



1964 Flag Committee Room

This committee reviewed thousands of suggestions and on October 22 1964 voted unanimously to have the National Flag of Canada be the “single red maple leaf on a white field with 2 red borders”

This “prototype” Canadian Maple Leaf Flag as displayed by the flag committee members was the basis for the final design which was created and designed on November 9th 1964.



This design shows 13 points on the maple leaf with a slanted stem at the very bottom.

November 1964 Flag Committee Choice

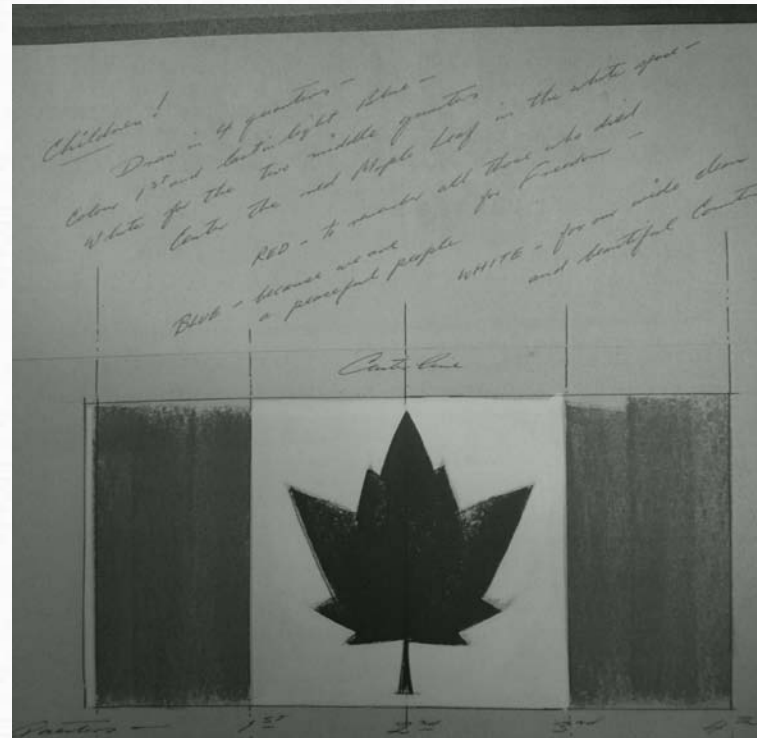
As the head of the Expositions Canada design team in 1964 Patrick Reid was asked to provide assistance on the final design of the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag by John Ross Matheson as the point man for the Prime Minister for all things relating to the “flag project” Mr. Reid brought along his best designer to help with the work.



Honorary Colonel
PL Reid, OC, MC, CD

The final design work began on the week-end of November 7 & 8 at the NRC wind tunnel testing facility. The final design team made some very detailed changes to the prototype which culminated on November 9th 1964. The final design is credited to this team.

George Bist advertising executive communicated with Government of Canada for several years promoting the need for a truly Canadian Flag. It was his suggestion of the 2 times length as height as well as the white pale being twice the size of the red bars. These suggestions were adopted as part of the final design.



Mr. Bist also advocated for a single red maple as the emblem of unity and simplicity. His suggestions were promoted by Reid Scott member of the Flag Committee in 1964.

George Bist Design

As a member of the design team at Expositions Canada Jacques Saint Cyr was asked by his boss Patrick Reid to help with the final design of the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag. Mr. Saint Cyr is credited with the creation and design of the “stylised maple leaf we see on our flag today.



Jacques Saint Cyr's contribution was recognized by John Ross Matheson in writing in 1991 but was only officially given credit by the Government of Canada in 2016. Jacques Saint Cyr's sketch of the final design is now in the Museum of History in Ottawa

Jacques Saint Cyr

The “first Canadian Maple Leaf Flag”

November 9th 1964- the final design of the Canadian Maple leaf Flag was produced around 2:30 PM by the team of Jacques Saint Cyr (artist) Patrick Reid (Manager of Design) and John Ross Matheson MP (flag project coordinator) and sent to the Privy Council Office for approval. Alan Winship then made arrangements on Wed. November 10th to send the sketch to Bruck Mills in Cowansville Quebec to have the first prototype of the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag produced. The first prototype was produced on November 16th 1964 and delivered to the Privy Council Office on November 17th. Approval was given to begin production of the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag on November 23rd 1964. (3 full weeks prior to the final vote in Parliament to adopt the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag as the official National Flag of Canada)

Dr. Wyszecski and his team of scientists from the National Research Council of Canada first became involved with the work being conducted to design the first Canadian Maple Leaf Flag in November of 1964. During the testing of prototype flags in the NRC wind tunnel it was decided by the final design team of Patrick Reid, John Ross Matheson and Jacques Saint Cry to remove 2 of the points on the maple leaf and to straighten the bottom of the stem of the leaf.



Dr. Gunter Wyszecski

Further involvement of Dr. Wyszecski and his team from the NRC came in 1965 through 1966 with research to identify and create the scientific standard for the colour red used for the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag. This scientific standard was the first time in history this type of science was used to set the exact shade of red to be used(there are more than 500,000 shades of red)

Mr. Balcer was a Conservative Member of Parliament from Quebec. His support of having a new flag for Canada was in strong contrast to his boss John Diefenbaker.



Leon Balcer

After months of crueLLing debate on the flag issue Mr. Balcer stood in the House of Commons on December 9th 1964 and requested the Government of Canada invoke closure on debate and call for a vote on the flag issue

Mr. Caoutte was a
Creditiste Member of
Parliament who felt very
strongly Canada should
have it's very own flag.
He felt the debate was
dividing Canada



Mr. Caoutte seconded a
motion to end the “Great
Flag Debate” and have the
Government of Canada
Liberal Party end the
debate by invoking closure

Real Caouette

On December 9th at approximately 2:30 pm Deputy Speaker of The House of Commons, Lucien Lamoureux accepted a motion from Member of Parliament Leon Balcer to end the “Great Flag Debate” by having the Prime Minister invoke closure of the debate and call for a vote.



Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson moved on this motion and announced each Member of Parliament would have 20 minutes to plead their case on the debate and a vote would take place at the conclusion of the 20 minute time allotments

Deputy- Speaker Lucien Lamoureux

On December 15th 1964 a Parliamentary vote was taken which ended one of the most divisive and nasty debates in the history of our Nation.

In a count of 163 to 78 in favour of the National Flag of Canada being accepted as the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag and the “ Great Flag Debate” was over.

The Senate of Canada passed this as law on December 17th 1964 and Queen Elizabeth 11 proclaimed the National Flag of Canada to be the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag officially on January 28th 1965.

The first Canadian Maple Leaf Flag was raised on Parliament Hill and around the world on February 15th 1965.

“A FLAG IS BORN”

One of Canada's most Respected and recognized Pipers. Archie was friends with George Beley and John Ross Matheson. He was chosen to officially Pipe the New National Flag Of Canada into Parliament for the first time.



Major Archie Cairns, MMM, CD (4)

Mr. Cairns contribution to the formal adoption of the Canadian Maple Leaf Flag and its entry into Parliament signified the heritage and historic values of Canada in a most emotional way.

26 year old RCMP Officer Joseph Secours raises the first Canadian Maple Leaf Flag on February 15th 1965 at the ceremony on Parliament Hill



Joseph Secoures



National Flag Of Canada

While deeply grateful to R.M.C. for placing my name with that of Doctor Stanley on the Currie Building, I must assure all persons present that Canada's flag was more than the handiwork of two collaborators. It represents contributions of many loving hands extending over a century. The symbolism is meaningful to veterans, commencing with the red, white, red from the General Service Medal issued by Queen Victoria and worn by early military instructors at this College. Major-General, later the Honourable Sir Eugene Fiset, in 1919 recommended that Canada's emblem be the single red maple leaf on a white field, the device worn by all our Olympic athletes since 1904, later incorporated into the Royal Canadian Legion badge by Lieutenant-Commander Alan Beddoe in 1960. And in 1919, Major-General Willoughby G. Gwatkin, encouraged by Rudyard Kipling, urged that Canada's colours be white and red. This was so proclaimed in the armorial grant of King George 5th on November 21, 1921. Since then Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid became the expert responsible for providing heraldic advice to successive Canadian ministries. Nor must we forget the art of Jacques Saint Cyr for the design of the leaf, nor the expertise of George Bist, a World War 2 veteran, in refining proportions. The decision respecting concept resulted from agonizing deliberations of a fifteen member parliamentary committee. The names, Stanley and Matheson, must represent many others who loved Canada more than life itself and who would pray now for her continued health and felicity.

Sunday, October 6, 1991 at Royal Military College

Written by John Ross Matheson "Father of our flag"