The Nation
Chap I:

CANADA'S NATIONAL SYMBOLS

Canadians don't go in for symbols ... and
ty they treat their flag with a casual disregard.¹
Alan Fotheringham (1986)

To see a maple leaf is to think of Canada. The two are inextricably intertwined in the minds and hearts of a people; over the centuries, the maple leaf has emerged as the dominant visual symbol of Canada. But, the word Canada is, itself, just a symbol: a symbol for a land, a nation, and a people. Linguistically, we identify ourselves with this old Huron-Iroquois word for a village; visually, we use a maple leaf.

Symbols are the material of thought and the tools of communication. Without the symbolic representation of the world around us in the form of words and images, there could be neither civilizations nor nations. Nations have always identified themselves with a name, most have used a visual device as well. The informal visual symbol of a nation (in Canada's case, the maple leaf) is usually incorporated into two different formal symbols: a flag and arms. The use of the two formal symbols is not universal; while no modern nation is without some form of flag, some have not adopted arms. Canada has both.

Contrary to the prevalent Canadian mythology, the Canadian passion for their symbols is deep and abiding; Canadians treat their flag, and have always treated their flags, with reverence and enthusiasm.

The Flag and the Arms

...a nation needs emblems and symbols to preserve traditions and inspire love of country. Of these symbols, the coat of arms and the flag are the chief.²
Charles Frederick Hamilton,
Assistant Comptroller, R.C.M.P (1921)

This book celebrates our flag. However, so closely related are the arms and flags of Canada, that a discussion of the second cannot be made without an understanding of the first. The functions of flags and arms are not identical. One distinction is offered by John Matheson, a person who, in the words of Lester B. Pearson, "had more to do with it [the creation of the National Flag] than any other." Matheson comments:

The function of a flag is to send the simple message of identity. The function of arms is to dignify an individual, or institution, or country by special identifying symbolism and by appropriate reference to ancestry.³

Canada's flag serves to identify something Canadian. More specialized in its use, Canada's arms identify national authority and jurisdiction. Leaving aside strictly decorative uses of either, the flag is used wherever one wishes to make the simple statement: Canada or Canadian; the arms only where the authority of the nation is asserted.⁴

Thus, the arms appear in the courts of law, on the currency, on some governmental stationary, and on all buildings of the federal government. The arms make a clear statement for the official presence of the Crown, or anyone who exercises delegated authority for the Crown in Canada. The federal government makes regular and prominent use of the arms on proclamations, passports and on some rank badges of the armed forces. The flag is often displayed in the same places as the arms, but it is also flown on private, commercial, and public property alike. In no case is authority asserted, only a Canadianness.

Our flag grew out of our arms, and our arms grew out of our informal symbol, the maple leaf. Yet, before tracing this growth, the worthy beaver must not be missed. Although an older symbol of Canada than the maple leaf, the beaver appears on neither the arms nor the flag. Why?

The Beaver
The discovery of the Canadian beaver was almost coincident with the discovery of Canada. Jacques Cartier traded for furs with the Indians of the Gaspé in 1534, and two years later visited Hochelaga (the site of present-day Montréal), a village whose name meant beaver meadows. The subsequent pursuit of the beaver pelt from the Maritimes to the Arctic and Pacific oceans was a major motivation for the exploration of what is now Canada.

The importance of the trade in beaver pelts in New France prompted its governor general, Count Frontenac, to suggest to the royal authorities in 1673 that the beaver was the appropriate symbol for Canada. Indeed, the beaver was used to represent Canada in 1690 when the French Kebeca Liberata medal was struck to mark the repulse of the British attack on Québec of that year.

The symbol was equally compelling to the British of the time. In 1670, the Hudson's Bay Company was formed and given control of Rupert's Land, a vast territory covering 38% of present-day Canada. Sometime during its first decade, the Company began to use arms bearing four beavers on a shield. (Although used throughout the history of the H.B.C., these arms were not made official until 1921.)

After 1821, the popularity of the beaver as a Canadian symbol began to decrease. That was the year that the Hudson's Bay Company absorbed the Northwest Company causing the virtual cessation of fur trading through Montréal. Further, as silk hats became fashionable in the 1830s, the beaver lost its place as the staple of trade; the Hudson's Bay Company turned to fancier fur.

Although the beaver was the main feature in Canada's first postage stamp, issued in 1851, the decline in the use of the symbol was evident. In 1863 Sir William Dawson delivered a lecture entitled "The Duties of Educated Young Men in British America." He explains:

> Canada has two emblems—the beaver and the maple. The beaver in his sagacity, his industry, his ingenuity, and his perseverance, is a most respectable animal: a much better emblem for our country than the rapacious eagle or even the lordly lion; but he is also a type of unwavering instincts and Old World traditions. He does not improve, and becomes extinct rather than change his ways. Some of our artists have the bad taste to represent the beaver as perched on the maple bough, a most unpleasant position for the poor animal, and suggestive of the thought, that he is in the act of gnawing through the trunk of our national tree (the maple).

> Perhaps some more venturous designer may some day reverse the position, and represent the maple branch as fashioned into a club, wherewith to knock the beaver on the head.

Even if that metaphorical club was never fashioned, the maple did largely sweep the beaver aside. When arms were granted to the original four provinces of Confederation in 1868, two bore maple leaves, but none bore a beaver.

As William Dawson noted, artistic renditions of the beaver often included it incongruously sitting on a branch of maple. One such representation, upon a flag, contributed significantly to the beaver's discomfiture. For a quarter of a century, the Beaver Line, a shipping company out of Montréal, used a house flag which proudly displayed a beaver upon a log. What transpired is explained by Thomas Mulvey, K.C., Canada's Under-Secretary of State and member of the committee established to advise on the design of the national arms. When the editor of the Rod and Gun magazine objected to the omission of the beaver from Canada's arms in 1921, Mulvey countered with:

> It was decided that as a member of the Rat Family, a Beaver was not appropriate.... The Canadian Merchant Marine [sic for the Beaver Line] displayed a Beaver on their House-Flag and they have ever since been colloquially known as "The Rat Line."

Apparently some Canadian mariners of the time were sensitive to the teasing of other sailors. Although the Beaver Line had been purchased by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1903, the influence of its flag lived on. In its own right, the Canadian Pacific Railway had displayed the beaver in its logotype across the land from its inception until 1968. However, the beaver could not recapture its once prominent position. Dr. Arthur Lower, a renowned authority on Canadian history and social change, commented ironically in 1964 on its rather stodgy characteristics as:

> The beaver? I do not like the beaver very much. He is very representative of English Canada rather than French; that is to say he is a pretty intelligent animal on a rather low level who is very fond of work and has not much idea beyond that. We are very safe and sane, we English Canadians, in a lot of ways and I think it represents us very well, but I do not like to be represented too much by the beaver, I must say. I would like an animal that gets his nose off the ground a little farther.

Nevertheless, the beaver has retained a position of affection among Canadians and regularly appears in forms ranging from cartoons to children's stuffed animals. In 1975, almost as a national afterthought, the beaver attained official status as a Canadian emblem through an "Act to provide for the recognition of the beaver as a symbol of the sovereignty of Canada."
The Maple Leaf

The scarlet of the maples
can shake me like a cry,
Of bugles going by.
Bliss Carman

The roots of this symbol date back three centuries to the earliest settlements along the St. Lawrence. Just as our linguistic symbol, Canada, was born on the banks of that great river and then extended its applicability mari usque ad mare, so too did our visual symbol, the maple leaf.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the settlements of the New France had attained a population of about 18,000. Also by this time, the maple leaf with its fiery autumnal colours had been adopted as an emblem in the settlements along the river.

Its popularity with French Canadians continued, and was reinforced when, at the inaugural meeting of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste in 1834, the maple leaf was one of numerous emblems proposed to represent the society. Speaking in its favour, Jacques Viger, the first mayor of Montréal, described the maple as "the king of our forest; ... the symbol of the Canadien people."

Two years later, on November 14, 1836, maple leaves were chosen to embellish the heading of the newspaper, Le Canadien. Explained the editor, Étienne Parent:

La feuille d'érable a été, comme on sait, adoptée comme l'emblème du Bas-Canada, de même que la rose est celui de l'Angleterre, le chardon celui de l'Écosse et le trèfle celui de l'Irlande.

The following year, maple leaves made, what it probably, their first appearance upon Canadian flags, albeit those of rebellion. On June 1, 1837, Louis-Joseph Papineau was lead into an assembly of Patriotes at Ste-Scholastique by the green-white-red Patriote Flag adorned with a beaver, maple leaf, and muskellunge. Another flag, which had apparently also been prepared for that assembly, was subsequently carried by the Patriotes at the battle of Saint-Eustach on Dec 14, 1837. Its design was striking similarity to the masthead of Le Canadien: in addition to a bough of maple leaves on a plane field, it bore a pine wreath, a muskellunge, and the monogram, C J-Bte, said to mean, Canada for Canadiens.

Fortunately for Canada, this latter flag, or at least the lower two-thirds of it, has survived and is in the care of the Château Ramezay in Montréal.

It was not long before the maple leaf was also adopted by anglophones as the distinctive Canadian symbol. In 1848, the Toronto literary annual, Maple Leaf, referred to the leaf as the chosen emblem of Canada; in 1853, Susannah Moodie wrote in its praise; in 1854, it was borne on the banners of the Loyal Canadian Society at the dedication of the Brock monument at Queenston Heights; in 1858 a wreath of maple leaves appeared on the coins of the Province of Canada and four years later on those of New Brunswick.

The first flag with some official status to bear maple leaves appears to be that of the Royal Canadian Regiment (100th). In 1858, in reaction to the great rebellion in India, Canada offered to raise this regiment to serve in the regular British Army. Its regimental colours, presented by the Prince of Wales (later to become King Edward VII) in January 10, 1859, bore a maple leaf in each corner.

Widespread use of the symbol was evident in Canada during the 1860 visit of the Prince of Wales. The wearing of the maple leaf was urged at a public gathering in St. Lawrence Hall in Toronto on August 31. The meeting adopted the motion, put forward by James H. Richardson:

Resolved: that all Native Canadians joining in the procession, whether identified with the National Societies or not, should wear the maple leaf as the emblem of the land of their birth.

At the grand ball given in the Prince's honour, ladies wore the maple leaf badge, and the Prince's table bore a setting decorated with wreaths of maple leaves surmounted by a crown.

By the time Alexander Muir wrote "The Maple Leaf Forever," Confederation was only a few months old. Then, within a year, maple leaves appeared on the arms of Quebec and Ontario. In Quebec's case, they were in recognition that the spig of green maple leaves was "commonly used as a distinctive Provincial badge," while, in Ontario's case they resulted from a specific request by Canadian authorities.

In 1870, the first official distinctively Canadian flag was approved; it contained a garland of maple leaves in the centre. This was the flag of the Governor General of Canada, and so it will be treated in detail in the next chapter. The maple leaf was now firmly established as the premier distinctive Canadian symbol, a symbol shared by the people of each founding nation.

Yet the maple leaf was still an informal symbol of the nation. Its transformation into a formal national symbol was accomplished through a grant of arms for Canada.

The Story of the Arms of Canada

Whereas We have received a request
from the Governor General in Council of Our Dominion of Canada
To a large extent, Canada was granted the arms that Canada sought. During the subsequent flag debates, questions were to arise as to what Canada's national colours and symbol were. The answers, although made by recourse to a grant from King George V, sprung from choices made by Canada. As Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid paraphrased the grant for the flag committee during the 1945-46 flag controversy:

The King at the request of Canada, assigns to Canada the national colours white and red, and declares that the national emblem of Canada shall be three maple leaves on one stem on a white field.

The road to the adoption of national arms was not nearly as rocky as the one to the adoption of the new national flag, but it had its bumps and it was a road that had to be travelled first.

In 1868, when arms were granted to the four original provinces, the intent was to join these provincial arms to form a great seal for Canada. This was never carried out, but the composite (or quartered) arms were soon used to form a badge on the flag of the governor general and on both the blue and the red ensigns. The very real distinctions to be made among seals, badges, and arms, were rarely made, and soon the quartered arms of the provinces were treated as if they were the Arms of Canada.

In the chapter on ensigns, the story is told of how the Canadian badge, alias arms, evolved into a visual cacophony. Canada was being represented, not as an entity, but as an agglomeration of its parts. As those parts increased in number, the resulting clutter, although fun to study, hardly represented the nation very effectively. By 1907 the unofficial badge of Canada was a composite of the proper arms of all nine provinces with the frequent addition of a miscellany of maple leaves, oak boughs, a beaver, a log, and a crown.

Despite the clutter of the composite, the individual provincial arms were very effective. Equipping the latter five provinces with arms had been the project of Sir Joseph Pope, the Under-Secretary of State from 1896 to 1909. In 1915, he commented:

Having got the provinces regularly equipped [with arms], I began to consider the question of Arms for the Dominion and communicated with several people...

Pope had sought counsel in both Toronto and Montréal. A proposed shield for Canada was developed which contained not only maple leaves, but a lion and fleur-de-lis. Pope then corresponded with the York Herald at the College of Arms in London, with the result that an artist at the College produced a tentative drawing of the shield and crest for Canada. The drawing showed arms that were similar to those that Canada now enjoys, except that the red maple leaves on white were in the chief (at the top) of the shield, rather than in the base.

However, Pope left the office of the Secretary of State to become Under-Secretary in the newly formed Department of External Affairs in 1909 before the project had reached a stage where it could be presented to the Government. Without Sir Joseph Pope pushing the issue, it languished, but did not vanish. It resurfaced in 1915 during planning for the forthcoming fiftieth anniversary of Confederation, and in 1918 when the architect designing the new Parliament Building (the old ones burned in 1916) sought to use the arms in several places in the new Building. With the war over in November, 1918, the needs of the architect undoubtedly contributed to the establishment on March 26, 1919, of a committee to inquire into a grant of arms for Canada. Sir Joseph Pope, was appointed, along with Thomas Mulvey, Under-Secretary of State, Dr. Arthur G. Doughty, Dominion Archivist, and Maj. Gen. Willoughby G. Gwatkin, Honorary Lieutenant General of the Canadian militia.

The committee sought and received advice from a wide range of people including: Ambrose Lee, the York Herald at the College of Arms; Lieutenant Colonel C.F. Hamilton, Assistant Comptroller of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; E.M. Chadwick, a Toronto lawyer; Major General Eugène Fiset, later to become the Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec; members of the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society of Montréal at the Château Ramezay; and curiously, Rudyard Kipling. Of particular interest for the story of the flag is the recommendation of Major General Fiset that Canada's national emblem should be a single red maple leaf on a white field.

There appears to have been general agreement growing out of these discussions that while the arms must contain emblems of a "special Canadian nature," they should also recall the major historical tributaries whose confluence was Canada; one of the functions of heraldry is to place the present within the grand sweep of the past. The pattern which emerged late in 1919 represented Canada with the maple leaves, and, the national lineage with the Royal Arms of England, Scotland, Ireland and France. Unsettled questions concerned the number, placement, and colour of the maple leaves; the beaver, however, was nowhere to be seen.

By this time, the beaver had been substantially eclipsed by the maple leaf as a national symbol and so it does not seem that the committee members ever seriously considered inclusion of Canada's favourite fauna. The stated reasons for its rejection seem a little contrived, especially in the light of the fact that at the time Nova Scotia had a fish on its arms. The beaver: "his virtues, while real and laudable, are of a pedestrian and humble type not wholly suited to a nation which has no reason to pride itself upon its humility."

Probably of greater moment were the jibes Canadians had suffered over the "Rat Line."

On the other hand the committee said the maple leaf is the favorite and is the most susceptible of artistic treatment. Not only has it been long in use, but during the war it was used as the symbol on the 'service flags' which scores of thousands of Canadians displayed; and a red leaf on a service flag denoted a Canadian who had laid down his life for his country. Thus the emblem has assumed a very poignant meaning to us.
So maple leaves it was, but how many? Nine leaves, one for each province, would have made each "so small as to render distinctive treatment impossible.... A single leaf, on the other hand would be too large, and would tempt artists to make a picture of it, instead of conventionalizing it, as is proper in heraldry." Thus design considerations prompted the choice of three, which were then joined as a sprig as had been the leaves on the 1868 arms of both Quebec and Ontario.

Initially the committee wished to place the maple leaves on a white band across the top of the shield with the various royal arms below. Their aim had been to show Canada's origins as "a daughter country inheriting the arms of the four mother countries." That this positioning was not the correct heraldic way to accomplish their ends only became apparent later. (The positioning was based on a flawed analogy with a label, which when used on the top of a shield, transformed the arms of a parent into that of a child).

At first the colour choice for the leaves seemed obvious: red. The rich red of the leaves would be striking against a white background "reminiscent of the snows for which Canada is famous and of which she is proud.? This combination to represent Canada on the shield then would make red and white Canada's official colours.

Indeed there is good historical reasons to believe that red and white had for some time been informally considered the colours of Canada. The first evidence is indirect and comes from the arms of Ontario and Quebec. Heraldically, there are only three proper colours for maple leaves: green, yellow and red. In 1868, Ontario, the former Upper Canada, had been given yellow leaves; Quebec, the former Lower Canada, had been given green leaves. Whether purposely or inadvertently, the Heralds had left Canada, itself, to be distinguished by red leaves. To enhance visibility, heraldry has a rule that restricts the allowable combinations of shades: a colour such as red must be placed on a metal, either gold (yellow) or silver (white). Yellow had been used for the leaves of Ontario and the background for Quebec, so white was clearly the background colour for Canada.

There is a difference between something being available for use and something being used. But from the early years, red and white also seemed to have been used as the quasi-official colours of Canada. They were adopted as the ribbon colours on the first post-Confederation military medal, the Canadian General Service Medal issued in 1899 for service against the Fenian raids (1866, 1870) and for service in the Red River campaign (1870). The red-white-red pattern of this ribbon seems to have inspired the flag of the Royal Military College early in the twentieth century. (This in turn, was an inspiration for the red-white-red pattern of the new national flag in 1965.)

It is clear that red and white were deemed the obvious choice for Canada both by the officials at the College of Arms, who would have been familiar with the 1868 arms, and by committee member, Maj. Gen. Gwatkin, who would have been familiar with the General Service Medal and the colours of Royal Military College. This choice was reflected not only in the colours of the leaves they chose for the shield, but also the colours of the mantling, the wreath, and the leaf held by the lion in the crest.

So, by early 1920, the arms committee had decided that the nation of Canada would be represented by maple leaves and its colours red and white; the antecedents of Canada would be represented by the Royal Arms of England, Scotland, Ireland, and France. Now, the grand plan began to unravel.

The committee sought the comments of the College of Arms in London, England, and in April 1920 received a stern rebuke. No such use of the Royal Arms was permissible, said the Garter King of Arms, and he would refuse to recommend Canada's design to the King. The Canadians had an exquisite design and they knew it, so, after some consideration, they decided to recommend that the government "defy Garter and turn his flank by approaching the King through the Duke of Connaught [Canada’s Governor General]."

Now, with a stratagem to counter the external problem, the committee developed internal dissent; by April 17, 1920, Sir Joseph Pope developed a taste for green leaves, which, he said, spoke of growth and life as opposed to the red, which symbolized decay and death. It appears that Pope's conversion followed immediately upon a meeting with Prime Minister Borden, who held a firm preference for green leaves. Although there is nothing in heraldry that associates red with decay and death, the Prime Minister had to be catered to if they were going to outflank the College of Arms by going to the King through the Governor General.

So it was that on July 13, 1920, an order-in-council was passed requesting the King for a grant of arms with the sprig of green leaves above the four Royal Arms. Although about to be bypassed, Garter countered with a shield bearing an imperial crown and red maple leaves on a white field. The Canadians would not be deterred and went to the King through the Colonial Office. After all their manoeuvring, it must have been embarrassing to now be informed, as they were, that the presented arms had a design flaw. The committee had wished to show Canada as the heir of the older kingdoms, but the heraldic way to show that was to place Canada's symbol at the base of the shield rather than at the top. As presented, they were assured, it was the Royal Arms that had been debased into the junior position.

Another order-in-council, on April 30, 1921, solved this problem by placing the leaves at the base, where the committee's design criteria should have put them in the first place. An added benefit was that the base of the shield, with its triangular shape, also more effectively displayed the sprig of maple leaves. However, the proposal continued incongruously to show green leaves on the shield, but a red and white mantling and wreath, plus a red leaf in the lion's paw on the crest.

This time King George V approved Canada's arms proposal: the College of Arms, which had been outflanked, was called upon to prepare the warrant. Now, the Herald preparing the arms did Canada a considerable favour. Instead of specifying leaves that were "green," as the Order-in-Council had requested, he specified leaves that were "proper." Proper means in its natural colours, and this
allowed the green preferred at that time, but left the door ajar for others to correct the inconsistencies.

On November 21, 1921, King George V signed the Royal Proclamation that gave Canada the arms it sought. However, the story did not end there. In the ensuing years, the arms were widely used not only to represent Canada formally on governmental flags, money, buildings, documents, medals and stationary, but also to represent Canadians informally on popular plaques, china, broaches, and postcards. While there were stylistic changes in the representation, the leaves were almost exclusively depicted as green.

Yet there was early recognition that a mistake had been made. In 1939, a Battle Flag was approved; based on the Proclamation of Canadian Arms, it displayed a sprig of three red leaves. Similarly, the Canadian Army Badge, adopted in 1947, showed a sprig of three red leaves. Indeed, red leaves began to appear elsewhere, largely as a result of the work of the Canadian heraldic artist, Alan B. Beddoe. For quite a number of years after the war, he had been required to depict the arms in work for the government, and he had always shown the leaves as red for he felt that the proclamation of 1921, properly interpreted, called for red leaves.

At Alan Beddoe's urging, the official depiction of the Arms of Canada was revised. Among the changes announced on October 8, 1957, was a change in the colour of the leaves from green to red. Further, the female harp was replaced by the simpler and more ancient celtic harp, and, at the Queen's request, the crown with the raised arches, often called the Tudor crown, was replaced with Saint Edward's crown with its depressed arches. These and other small changes resulted in an even more effective and beautiful design than the 1921 version.

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Endnotes

2. The Arms of Canada: 1921 (Ottawa: Secretary of State, 1921, 1923), p. 6. This pamphlet was published without attribution of any kind. However, the Secretary of State File No. 1156 reveals that its author was Lt.-Col. C.F. Hamilton, who was at the time the Assistant Comptroller and Accountant for the RCMP.
8. Matheson, Canada's Flag, p. 23.
17. Much of the material in this section is based upon two sources: the Secretary of State Department File No. 1156, and Chapter 2, "Canada Obtains Arms," of John Ross Matheson's book Canada's Flag (Boston: Hall, 1980) or (Belleville Ontario: Mika, 1986). Matheson's book should be consulted for further detail.
18. Matheson, Canada's Flag, p. 52.
One of the people in Toronto with whom Pope corresponded on the subject was E.M. Chadwick, K.C. the senior partner of Messrs. Fasken, Robertson, Chadwick and Sedgewick. The interesting role Chadwick played in establishing provincial arms and ensign badges is told in the chapter on ensigns.

Matheson, *Canada's Flag*, p. 248.

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