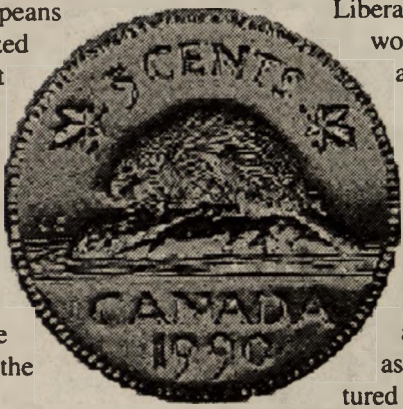


CANADA DAY

How the beaver developed its presence in our country

After the early Europeans explorers had realized that Canada was not the spice-rich Orient, the main mercantile attraction was the beaver population numbering in the millions. In the late 1600s and early 1700s, the fashion of the day demanded fur hats, which needed beaver pelts. As these hats became more popular, the demand for the pelts grew.



King Henry IV of France saw the fur trade as an opportunity to acquire much-needed revenue and to establish a North American empire. Both English and French fur traders were soon selling beaver pelts in Europe at 20 times their original purchase price.

The trade of beaver pelts proved so lucrative that the Hudson's Bay Company honoured the buck-toothed little animal by putting it on the shield of its coat of arms in 1678. Sir William Alexander, who was granted title to Nova Scotia in 1621, had been the first to include the beaver in a coat of arms.

The Hudson's Bay Company shield consists of four beavers separated by a red St. George's Cross and reflects the importance of this industrious rodent to the company. A coin was created to equal the value of one beaver pelt.

Also, in 1678 Louis de Buade de Frontenac, then Governor of New France, suggested the beaver as a suitable emblem for the colony, and proposed it be included in the armorial bearings of Quebec City.

In 1690, in commemoration of France's successful defence of Quebec, the "Kebeca

Liberata Medal" was struck. A seated woman, representing France, with a beaver at her feet, representing Canada, appeared on the back.

The beaver was included in the armorial bearings of the City of Montréal when it was incorporated as a city in 1833. Sir Sandford Fleming assured the beaver a position as a national symbol when he featured it on the first Canadian postage stamp - the "Three Penny Beaver" of 1851.

The beaver also appeared with the maple leaf on the masthead of *Le Canadien*, a newspaper published in Lower Canada.

For a time, it was one of the emblems of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste. It is still found on the crest of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.

Despite all this recognition, the beaver was close to extinction by the mid-19th century. There were an estimated six million beavers in Canada before the start of the fur trade. During its peak, 100,000 pelts were being shipped to Europe each year; the Canadian beaver was in danger of being wiped out. Luckily, about that time, Europeans took a liking to silk hats and the demand for beaver pelts all but disappeared.

The beaver attained official status as an emblem of Canada when an "act to provide for the recognition of the beaver (*castor canadensis*) as a symbol of the sovereignty of Canada" received royal assent on March 24, 1975.

Today, thanks to conservation and silk hats, the beaver - the largest rodent in Canada - is alive and well all over the country.

The Great Canadian Adventure

Test your knowledge

- 1) How many of our provinces do not touch salt water?
- 2) In what year did Canada celebrate its centennial (100th) birthday?
- 3) What precious metal was discovered in the northwest of Canada during the 1800's?
- 4) Who are the 'Snowbirds'?

- 5) What document, reflecting Canada's fundamental, democratic, equality and linguistic rights, became part of the Constitution in 1982?

ANSWERS
 1) Two (Alberta and Saskatchewan)
 2) 1967 (3) Gold (4) The Canadian Armed Forces Aerobatic Team (5) The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom

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