

Royalty and the Maple Leaf

By Ruth McKenzie



At Ottawa in 1957 Queen Elizabeth wore gown with maple-leaf motif.

WHEN Queen Elizabeth visited Canada in 1957, she paid a charming compliment to the Canadian people by wearing a "maple leaf" dress at the state reception at Rideau Hall. Around the bodice and skirt of the pale green satin gown, were garlands of dark green maple leaves appliquéed with crystals and emeralds.

This occasion was by no means the first time that royalty had honored Canada's maple leaf. During the 1860 visit of the Queen's great-grandfather, King Edward VII, while Prince of Wales, the maple leaf was first used officially as the Canadian emblem. Even seven years before, both English- and French-speaking Canadians regarded the maple leaf as their emblem.

The visit of the Prince of Wales caused tremendous excitement. He arrived in St. John's, Newfoundland, on July 23 and proceeded in regal style from east to west as far as Upper Canada. He was due in Toronto early in September. By August, Toronto's preparations were well in hand. The Prince was to arrive by train and be escorted to a large open space in the front of the Parliament Buildings for the official reception. Afterwards, a procession was to form to conduct the Prince to Government House.

The St. Andrew's, St. George's and St. Patrick's Societies planned to march in the procession behind their respective banners proclaiming their origins as Scottish, English or Irish. These plans sparked a "backlash" on the part of native-born Canadians.

Support for the Emblem

James H. Morris arranged to have native-born Canadians assigned a place in the procession. He called a public meeting at St. Lawrence Hall on August 21, and explained that the purpose of the meeting was not to have native Canadians form a society, but simply "by wearing the Maple Leaf on the day of the arrival of the Prince, to show that they were Native Canadians . . . to be known to the world as such and as loyal subjects of Her Majesty."

The key resolution, moved by Dr. James H. Richardson, declared "That all Native Canadians joining the procession, whether identified with the National Societies or not, should wear the Maple Leaf as an emblem of the land of their birth."

In seconding the resolution, Mr. F. H. Heward added prophetically that he hoped "hereafter the Native Canadian, wherever he went abroad from his native soil, in whatever part of the wide world he might be, would wear in his bosom the maple leaf as the emblem of the land of his birth."

The upshot of the meeting was that the native-born Canadians, with maple leaves on their breasts and branches in their hands, marched in the procession for the Prince.

During the Prince's visit, the emblematic

maple leaf adorned many other objects besides the persons of native Canadians. While in Montreal to inaugurate the Victoria Bridge, Prince Edward spread the final bit of mortar with a silver trowel extravagantly decorated with national emblems. The handle was in the shape of a beaver. A garland of maple leaves, topped by the English rose in a circle of shamrocks and Scotch thistles, formed the border of the blade. At the base of the blade were the Prince's feathers. In the centre was an inscription. On the reverse side was an engraving of the bridge.

With another lavishly decorated silver trowel, the Prince laid the cornerstone of the Queen Victoria statue in Queen's Park, Toronto. Inaugurating the Toronto Horticultural Gardens (Allen Gardens), the Prince used a silver spade, the blade of which was decorated with maple and oak leaves.

However, the ladies of Dickinson's Landing made the most unusual emblematic gesture. This village had been singled out for the special honor of welcoming the Prince because it was a suitable point on the St. Lawrence from which to embark for the thrilling experience of shooting the rapids. In a flurry of preparations, the villagers erected arches of evergreens on the road leading from the station to the river and decorated their houses with flags, and the ladies made a unique carpet of maple leaves, 80 feet long, for the wharf. When the Prince arrived, accompanied by Captain Dickinson's troop of cavalry from Cornwall, he was attracted by the "beauty and novelty" of the carpet, according to the contemporary historian James Croil.

The use of the maple as Canada's emblem had been growing among Canadians for some time before the Prince's visit. Sir John Macdonald laid the first stone of the main Parliament Building in Ottawa in April, 1860, with a silver trowel shaped like maple leaf.

The museum at Belleville, Ontario, has a banner believed to date from 1850, which

was designed for a patriotic group, the Native Canadian Society. On it a wreath of maple leaves in autumn colors is topped by a crown.

In literature, too, the maple leaf had made its appearance as the emblem of Canada. In December, 1846, "The Maple Leaf or Canadian Annual, a Literary Souvenir for 1847," was published by Henry Rowsell of Toronto. Only Canadians were eligible to contribute to this potpourri of literary sketches and poems.

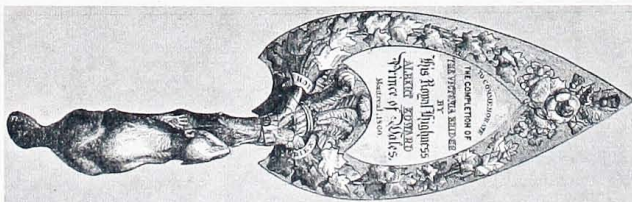
Some 15 years later, Sir James Le Moine of Quebec brought out a series of miscellanies called "Maple Leaves". Six volumes in all were published sporadically from 1863 to 1906.

When Alexander Muir wrote the patriotic song "The Maple Leaf Forever" in 1867, he gave lyric expression to the sentiment already deeply rooted among Canadians that the maple leaf was "our emblem dear."

Probably no national emblem was ever more spontaneously chosen than the maple leaf. The early settlers of Upper Canada were drawn to the maple tree by its glorious beauty in the fall and its great bounty: the sugar, syrup, firewood and building material that it provided. French-speaking Canadians began to regard the maple leaf as their emblem at least as early as 1805 when it was described as such in the Quebec Gazette.

After Confederation, the maple leaf was incorporated in the provincial coats of arms of Ontario and Quebec. In 1921, when King George V granted Canada the present coat of arms (some minor changes were made in 1957), three maple leaves on a single stem formed the motif of the lower section of the shield. At the top, the shield was surmounted by a helmet on which stood a golden lion holding a red maple leaf in its paw.

The final endorsement came on January 28, 1965, when Queen Elizabeth signed the official proclamation making the red and white maple leaf flag the National Flag of Canada.



Trowel used by the Prince of Wales to complete Victoria Bridge.