

The nation's Supreme Court sits in Ottawa

By JAMES MONTAGNES

In 1875, eight years after Canada became a united nation, the Supreme Court of Canada was founded at Ottawa. Today it is housed in a chateau-type building on Wellington St., close by the Canadian Parliament Buildings.

The Supreme Court is the highest court of appeal for both criminal and civil cases. Its nine judges interpret federal and provincial legislation, the powers of the various governments and other matters.

The statesmen who founded Canada believed that the country would require an independent authority to rule on disputes between the federal and provincial governments. At first there was difficulty in writing legislation which would suit both the English and French political groups in the country.

Finally legislation was passed under the Liberal government of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, and among its provisions it ensured sound interpretation of the French civil law which is used in Quebec. There are three judges from Quebec province, usually three from Ontario, one from the Atlantic provinces and two from Western Canada. Since 1949 it has been the final court of appeal in Canada.



In 1975 Canada issued a multicolored 8-cent stamp featuring the statue of Justice which stands in front of the Supreme Court Building at Ottawa, to mark 100 years of the Supreme Court. Used copies of the stamp are worth about five cents at stamp stores.

A united legislature formed in the 1800s

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Before Canada became a nation in 1867, there were a number of British colonies across Canada. Two of these, Upper Canada, now Ontario, and Lower Canada, now Quebec, had their first united legislature in 1841. This was brought about largely through the efforts of Robert Baldwin in Toronto and Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine in Montreal.

Both were born in Canada, Baldwin at Toronto in 1804, and Lafontaine near Montreal in 1807. Both were lawyers, and both worked for responsible government, rather than the governments dominated by family groups in both Upper and Lower Canada. After the 1841 Act of Union they formed the first Baldwin-Lafontaine coalition government. While both worked for more responsible government, nei-

Stamp Story

ther had taken part in the 1837 rebellions which took place at Montreal and near Toronto.

They headed a second coalition government from 1848 to 1851. Both were responsible for passage of important legislation in their respective areas. Among Baldwin's legislation was that for reform of the judicial system and the establishment of the University of Toronto as a non-sectarian university. Lafontaine was responsible for legislation compensating people who had suffered property losses during the 1837 rebellion.

Lafontaine left politics in 1851, became chief justice of Lower Canada in 1853, holding that post till his death in 1864. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1854. Baldwin died in 1858.



In 1927 a 20-cent brown carmine portrait stamp was issued for Baldwin and Lafontaine for the 60th anniversary of confederation. Used copies of the stamp are worth about \$3 at stamp stores.