

IT IS the single most important, most historic and most magnificent of all the symbols of Canada. It clearly distinguishes Canada among all the nations of the world and since 1954 it is the only symbol that appears in the new designs of every Canadian dollar bill of every denomination and it is the only symbol that always appears there in full color.

But few have ever looked closely enough into the design of these Royal Arms of Canada to discover one of the most extraordinary stories ever told about the real beginnings of this country. It was created by a group of Canadians when Canadians, for the first time, began to believe that their country had become one of the

major nations of the world; and in its design there is a truer story about Canada than you will find in most history books.

For in the shield at the centre of the Royal Arms of Canada, in the most significant and important part of any nation's coat of arms, there is a collection of emblems that disproves one of the most famous stories still believed by most Canadians. It was not two nations that founded this land called Canada.

In Canada's shield, you will see the symbols of the four ancient kingdoms of the Western world whose peoples were the true founders of Canada: The English, the Scottish, the French and the Irish. Multiculturalism is not a new event in our history; it is heralded in the arms of Canada. The glory of this country has always been founded upon the diversity of its peoples and nowhere has that story been told more dramatically or more colorfully than in the story of the Royal Arms of Canada.

It is a story crowded with many of the greatest legends and figures in the history of the Western world; and many of its symbols reflect the deep religious faith of Canada's founding peoples in the centuries that they knew as the Golden Age of Christianity. In this royal month that marks the arrival of the Queen in Canada, it is a time to recall the story of this country's arms. For this symbol is both the Royal Arms of the Queen of Canada and the Royal Arms of Canada as a sovereign nation; and, in the true tradition of heraldry, it is this symbol that has made kinsmen of us all.

On July 1, 1867, when a new country called Canada was born, few people gave any thought about a coat of arms for Canada. When a design had to be used to symbolize Canada, the coats of arms for each of the first four provinces of Canada were joined together. As new provinces joined Confederation, their coats were added until the design became so complicated it was almost impossible to understand.

In 1919, a group of men met together to try to resolve the problem of creating a distinctive coat of arms for Canada. To ensure it would hold its proper place among the coats of arms of all the nations of the world, it would be based on the heraldic traditions that began almost 1,000 years ago in the midst of some of the bloodiest wars in history. There was nothing superfluous about the birth of this new art and science called Heraldry. It was created for very practical, even vital reasons. In the middle ages, almost no one could read or write. Even kings were unable to write their own names. In

Canada's Coat of Arms tells a fascinating tale of the nation's real founders, the proud heritage they brought with them

the middle of a battle, words raised on a banner would be incomprehensible to everyone on the field. Kings and knights enclosed in suits of armor, with their helmets closed, were unrecognizable to their followers. A mark or sign had to be found and painted or engraved onto their armor to identify them.

At first the marks were simply bands of color or a single emblem such as a cross. This sign or emblem was also sewn onto the fabric coat that the knights wore to protect their armor from snow and the heat of the sun and, from this emblem emblazoned on a simple linen coat, came the term, coat of arms.

The practice of adopting coats of arms quickly spread across Europe. Shields bearing coats of arms were carried by the knights in the Crusades. In the peaceful years that followed, the tradition of coats of arms became even more popular and was used to identify knights who fought in the great medieval tournaments.

As hundreds of new coats of arms were created, the designs became increasingly complex; heralds were appointed who could recognize the various markings and who could call out the names of the knights as they rode into the ring. From these heralds came the term, heraldry.

The leading heralds formed "colleges of heralds" and, over the centuries, these colleges helped create the coats of arms that were requested by a growing number of universities, hospitals, societies, bishops, popes and kings, as well as by cities and new countries. On the Canadian postage stamp issued to commemorate the papal visit, the central illustration is John Paul II's coat of arms. In 1921, almost half a century after the Fathers of Confederation had created Canada, the time appeared right for Canada to adopt its own coat of arms.

It has been said that Canada was most truly born as a nation on the field at Vimy Ridge. On that battlefield in northern France in April 1917, for the first time in history, all Canadian regiments fought together as a single unit and achieved one of the great victories of that war.

In the years that followed, there was growing pride in the role played by Canada in that war and Canadians began to think of themselves as a people loyal with the British Empire, but with a destiny of their own. In 1919, a select committee of very senior government officials was created to explore the idea of creating a coat of arms for Canada.

The principal figure in that committee was Sir Joseph Pope, the under secretary of state for External Affairs. In England, one of the principal figures involved in the project was Winston Churchill who was then secretary of state for the colonies. In 1921, working in conjunction with the Heralds College in London, the committee believed they had found the proper design.

On Nov. 21, 1921, King George V as signed by royal proclamation the new armorial bearings for Canada and there is a legend that the design was carried personally to Canada by Churchill.

On page M3, for all who care about the traditions and the heritage of Canada, is chosen for the Royal Arms of Canada.