

The Birth Of The Canadian Flag

The search for a new Canadian Flag started in earnest in 1925 when a committee of the Privy Council began to research possible designs for a national flag. However, the work of the committee was never completed.

Later, in 1946, a select parliamentary committee was appointed with a similar mandate, called for submissions and received more than 2,600 designs. Still, the Parliament of Canada was never called upon to formally vote on a design.

Early in 1964, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson informed the House of Commons that the government wished to adopt a distinctive national flag. The 1967 centennial celebration of Confederation was, after all, approaching. As a result, a Senate and House of Commons Committee was formed and submissions were called for once again.

The exercise captured the imagination of the country. The committee held 46 sittings. It listened to hours of testimony from heraldic experts, historians and ordinary citizens. It was flooded by more than 2,000 proposed designs. Thousands of Canadians responded with flag designs of their own, using everything from beavers munching on birch trees to the northern lights shining over the Arctic Ocean to represent the country.

In October 1964, after eliminating various proposals, the committee was left with three possible



designs—a Red Ensign with the fleur-de-lis and the Union Jack, a design incorporating three red maple leaves, and a red flag with a single, stylized red maple leaf on a white square. Mr. Pearson himself preferred a design with three red maple leaves between two blue borders.

Two heraldry experts, who both favoured a three-leaf design, played a decisive role in the choice of our flag: Alan Beddoe, a retired naval captain and heraldic adviser to the Royal Canadian Navy, and Colonel Fortescue Duguid, a heraldist and historian.

The names of John Matheson and Dr. George Stanley are well known in the story of evolution of a new Canadian flag. Matheson, an Ontario Member of Parliament, was perhaps one of the strongest supporters of a new flag and played a key advisory role. Dr. Stanley was Dean of Arts at the Royal Military College in Kingston, and brought to the attention of the committee the fact that the Commandant's flag at the college—a maple leaf on a red and white

ground was quite attractive.

Yet no one single person can be credited with the design of Canada's National Flag. Indeed, the design arose based on a strong sense of Canadian history and a result of a collaborative effort involving several Canadians. The combination of red, white and red first appeared in the General Service Medal issued by Queen Victoria. Red and white were subsequently proclaimed Canada's national colours by King George V in 1921. Three years earlier, Major General (later the Honourable) Sir Eugene Fiset had recommended that Canada's emblem be the single red maple leaf on a white field—the device worn by all Canadian olympic athletes since 1904.

A key element of the National Flag—the stylized maple leaf—was designed by Jacques St. Cyr while the proportions of the flag were outlined by George Bist, a World War II veteran, and the precise colouration of the flag defined by Dr. Gunter Wyszecchi. The final determination of all aspects of the new flag was made by a 15-member parliamentary committee, which is officially credited with the design.

The committee eventually decided to recommend the single-leaf design, which was approved by resolution of the House of Commons Dec. 15, 1964, followed by the Senate Dec. 17, 1964, and proclaimed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, to take effect Feb. 15, 1965.

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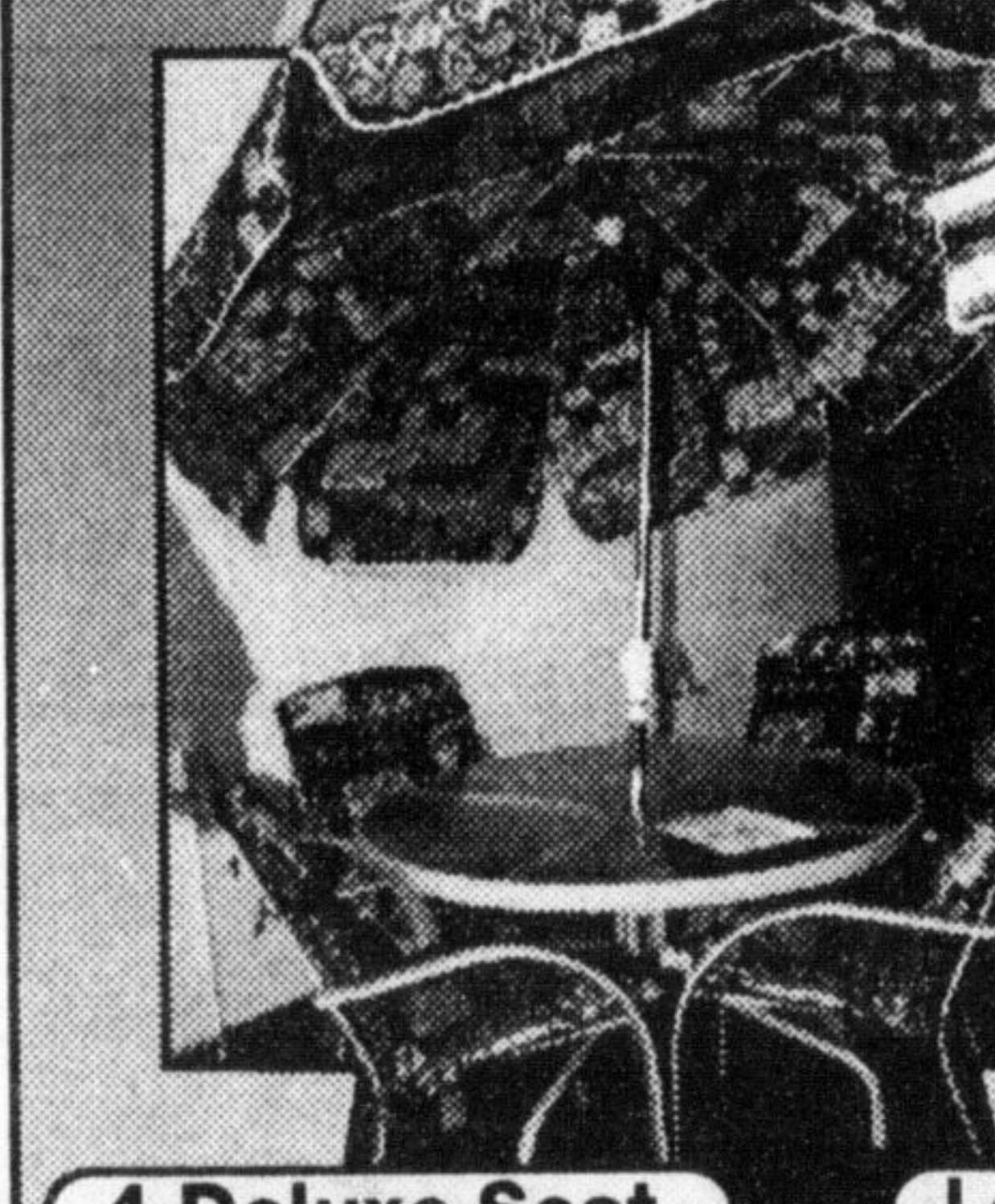
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