

A New National Flag of Canada Proclaimed February 15th, 1965¹

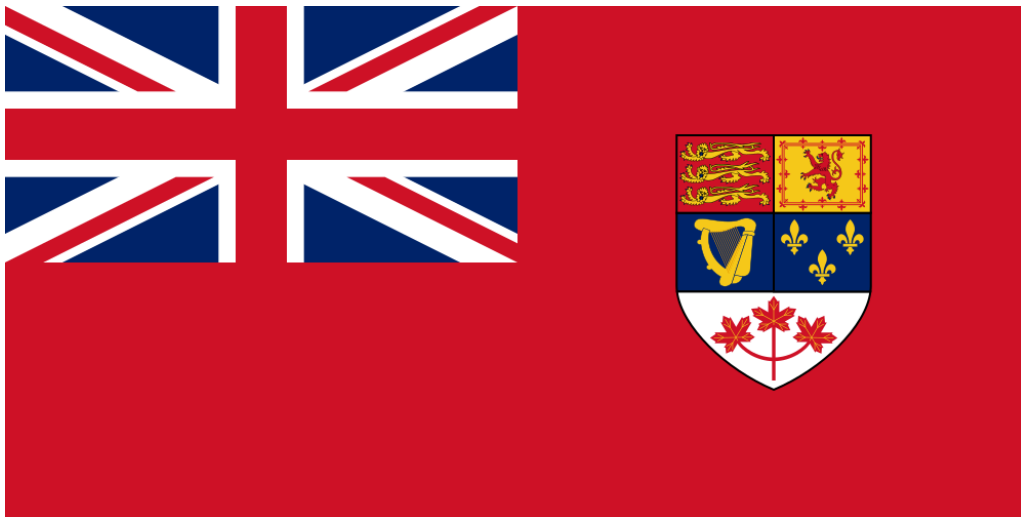
Flags used to identify Canada since 1801:



The Royal Union Flag, aka The Union Jack (1801-present day). The Union Jack still has official status in Canada (flown on special days like Statute of Westminster Day – December 11th), highlighting the country's historic links with the United Kingdom.



A defaced British Red Ensign with the different arms of the provinces depicted in the fly, ca. 1907. This flag was flown unofficially across Canada to represent the federation.

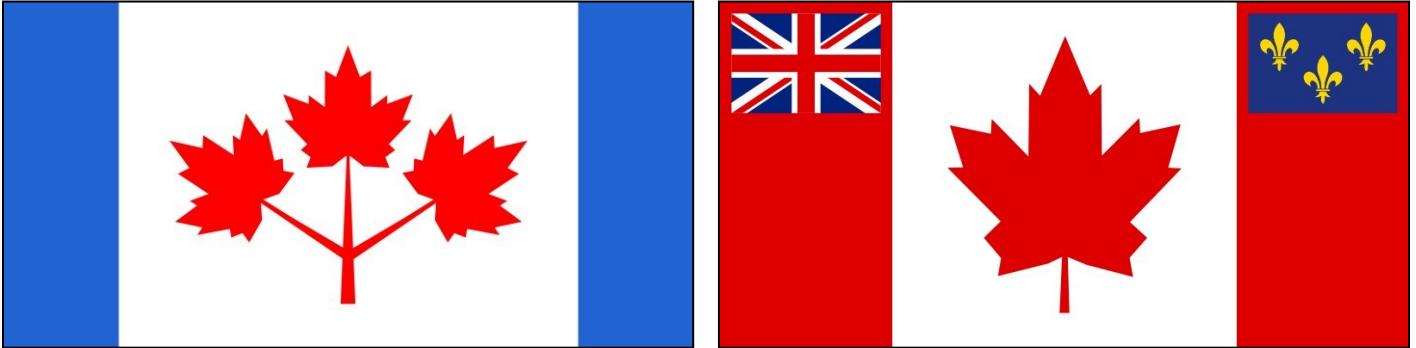


A defaced British Red Ensign with the Arms of Canada depicted in the fly. This flag was used from 1921-1965 as the flag of Canada. It was meant to be a temporary flag until a permanent design was selected.

Following the Second World War, in 1945, an Order in Council authorized the flying of the Canadian Red Ensign (depicted above) from federal government buildings, in Canada and abroad.

¹ Text from the Department of Canadian Heritage Website.

In 1964, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson made the creation of a new Canadian flag a priority. John Matheson, Member of Parliament, was Prime Minister Pearson's key advisor and supporter in this objective. On June 15, 1964, the Prime Minister presented his proposed flag to the House of Commons, launching a divisive Canadian flag debate. After three months without resolution, the question of a national flag was referred to an all-party committee.



The "Pearson Pennant" (left) and the rejected proposal for the Canadian flag put forward by the Special Committee on a Canadian Flag.

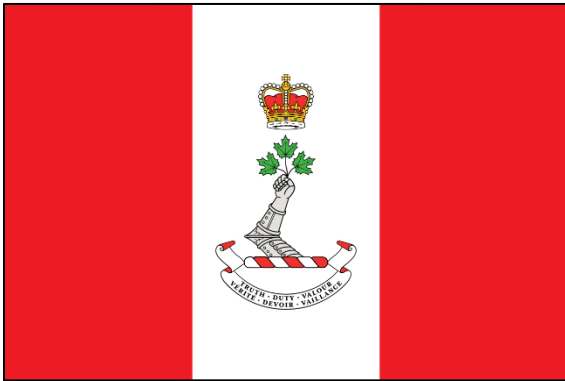
In October 1964, after eliminating thousands of proposals, the Special Committee on a Canadian Flag was left with three possible designs: one incorporating three red maple leaves with blue bars (nicknamed the "Pearson Pennant"), a flag with a single stylized red maple leaf on a white square with red bars, and another version that contained both the Union Jack and three fleurs-de-lis.

On October 29, 1964, the committee recommended to the House of Commons that the single-leaf, red and white design be adopted. Debate in Parliament continued, however, and it was only at the early hour of 2:15 a.m. on December 15, 1964, that the motion to adopt the *National Flag of Canada* was carried by a vote of 163 to 78. Approval by the Senate came on December 17, 1964, and **on January 28, 1965, the National Flag of Canada was proclaimed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, to take effect on February 15, 1965.**



Members of the Committee celebrate around the winning design, 1965.

Since 1996, February 15th has been observed as *The National Flag of Canada Day*.



Commandant's flag at the Royal Military College



Dr. George Stanley's original sketch from a letter to John Matheson.

Red and White were proclaimed Canada's official colours by King George V in 1921.

The inspiration for the flag is said to have come from Dr. George Stanley, Dean of Arts at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario. Impressed by the Commandant's flag at the College (a mailed fist holding three maple leaves on a red and white ground), Dr. Stanley suggested to Mr. John Matheson a similar design with a single red maple leaf at the centre.

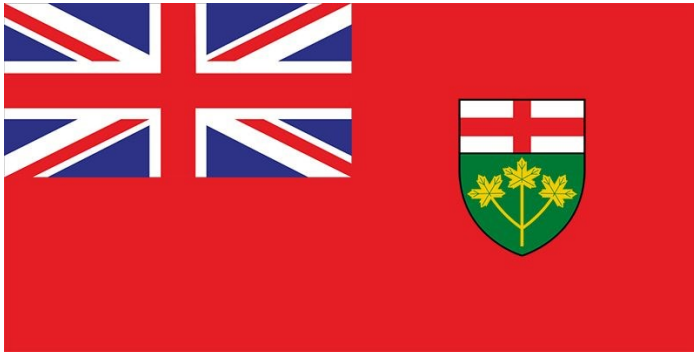
In February 1965 the following letter appeared in the Waterdown District High School newspaper:

The Flag

Noon on the fifteenth day of February, nineteen hundred sixty-five, was a very important date day in Canadian history—— Canada raised her first Canadian flag. The official flag—raising ceremony was given national television and radio coverage. Everywhere in Canada the event was marked by some sort of ceremony, everywhere in Canada except of course for Mr. J. Diefenbaker's private residence, Maple Leaf Gardens and of course Waterdown District High School. Why? Schools in Burlington and Hamilton raised the Maple Leaf, why not us? Because dear readers through no fault of the office we had no flag! The school board had neglected to see to it that all schools had a flag in time for the raising! It seems to me someone should raise some of the dust and cloud a few of the bifocals at the next board meeting.

—member of the School Bored [sic]

Not everyone was in favour of the newly designed Canadian flag – in fact, changing the flag was very controversial at the time. In protest, Ontario and Manitoba proclaimed their own provincial Red Ensigns soon after the Maple Leaf was raised over Ottawa.

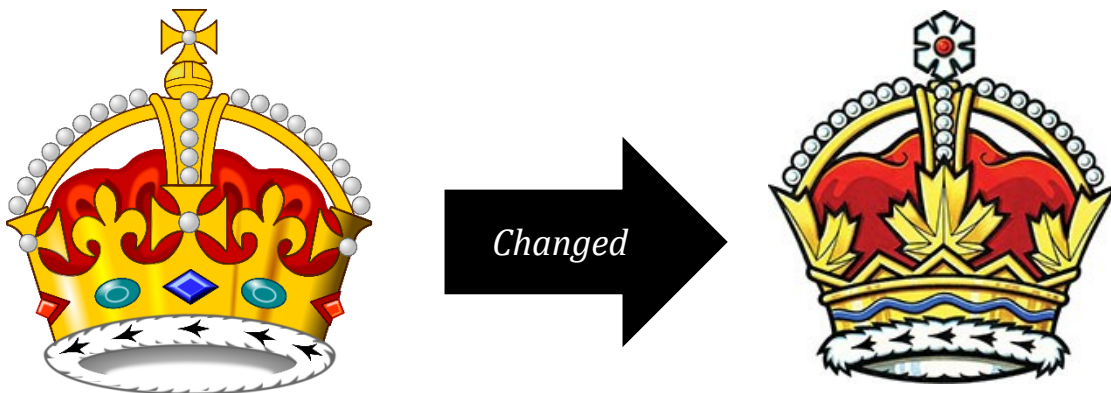


Flag of Ontario (1965 – present day)



Flag of Manitoba (1966 – present day)

Altering symbols can be very controversial – in 2023 Canada changed its Royal Crown used to represent The King. What changes do you notice?



What is the *Canadian Royal Crown*?

The Canadian Royal Crown is a heraldic emblem and not a material object. Its design was approved in April 2023 by His Majesty The King on the advice of the Prime Minister of Canada. The Canadian Royal Crown is an important symbol of the sovereign's authority, the Canadian monarchy, and the power of the state acting in the sovereign's name. This new version shares many features with other heraldic versions of the Royal Crown, but also incorporates elements emphasizing the Canadian identity of the monarchy. Following a request by the Government of Canada, it was designed by Cathy Bursey-Sabourin, Fraser Herald and Principal Artist at the Canadian Heraldic Authority.²

² Office of the Secretary to the Governor General. "Royal Crown." The Governor General of Canada, May 17, 2023. <https://www.gg.ca/en/heraldry/royal-and-viceregal-emblems/royal-crown>.