

First Flags

A Report on Research Undertaken to Identify and Locate Canada's First Maple Leaf Flags

Introduction

This report summarizes research undertaken by Glenn Wright, at the request of Ian E. Wilson, National Archivist, on the history of the Canadian flag. It is based primarily on unpublished documentary sources available at the National Archives, as well as books, articles, newspapers and interviews with participants. The report addresses two separate and unrelated questions.

(1) In the autumn of 1964, silk-screened prototype flags were produced for viewing by Prime Minister Lester Pearson – but how many flags were made and where are they now?

(2) The first maple leaf flag was flown on Parliament Hill on February 15, 1965 – is this the same flag that was in the custody of the Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada until February 2000, when it was presented to the Minister of Canadian Heritage?

The report begins with a brief overview of flag history in 1964-1965, from the design of the government's preferred blue-bordered flag in the spring of 1964 through the raising of the national flag in February 1965. The overview is followed by two separate analyses. Part A describes events leading up to the production of prototypes in the autumn of 1964 and the sewing of prototype flags by Joan O Malley. The accepted version of this story is based on the memoirs and recollections of those who participated; no documents, public or private, have come to light to verify the facts as remembered. Part B of the report documents the history of the first maple leaf flag to fly on Parliament Hill. This flag was raised at noon on February 15, 1965, on a temporary flagpole on a dais erected in front of the Centre Block.

This report is based on a review of many government files and private papers not available to any previous researcher and on interviews with several of the key participants in these events. In both parts of the report, documented facts are presented in a chronological

format; comments, analysis and explanations by the author are clearly indicated.

Historical Overview: Lester B. Pearson and a Canadian Flag

*I believe that today a flag designed around the maple leaf will symbolize ... will be a true reflection of the new Canada.*¹

Lester B. Pearson, leader of the Liberal Party, became Prime Minister of Canada on April 22, 1963. He was determined that Canada have a distinctive national flag and had advocated the adoption of such a flag as Liberal party policy as early as 1960. Now, as Prime Minister, Pearson was in a position to deliver on his promise that Canada have a flag of its own.²

Enter John Matheson: war veteran, lawyer, heraldry enthusiast and Liberal Member of Parliament for Leeds, first elected to the House of Commons in a by-election held on May 29, 1961.³ Knowing of his interest in the flag, Pearson asked Matheson to research and to develop a design for a Canadian flag. Matheson immediately set to work and, drawing inspiration from Canada's Coat of Arms, he suggested a white flag with three red maple leaves conjoined on one stem in the centre. He presented his proposal to Pearson in the spring of 1963.⁴ In the course of

¹ Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, in a speech to the Dominion Convention of the Royal Canadian Legion, Winnipeg, Manitoba, May 17, 1964.

² Pearson was not alone in his desire to have a distinctive flag for Canada. His immediate predecessor as Prime Minister, John G. Diefenbaker, also recognized the need for a national flag and discussed the issue with his Cabinet in 1962. See *One Canada, Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker*, volume 3: *The Tumultuous Years, 1962 to 1967* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), p. 148; for Diefenbaker's recollections of the flag debate, see pp. 221-226.

³ John Ross Matheson (b. November 17, 1917) was Pearson's right hand man on the flag. It was his responsibility to ensure that an acceptable flag be designed and adopted. He was (and is) intensely loyal to Mike Pearson. In January 1966, he was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. Following his defeat in the 1968 federal election, Matheson was appointed to the Bench and served as a Judge at various jurisdictions until his retirement in 1992. Sources: *Canadian Who's Who*, 2000, p. 828; *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1970, p. 436.

⁴ King George V assigned the Arms of Canada by Royal Proclamation on November 21, 1921. For his flag design, Matheson simply adapted the third division of the Arms, three red maple leaves on a single stem on a white background. See Conrad Swan, *Canada: Symbols of Sovereignty* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 63-64 and especially colour plate 14.

his work, Matheson called upon Alan Beddoe, a designer and heraldry expert, to assist him with the details of the proposed flag.

The two men met with the Prime Minister in early May 1964 and, much to Matheson's surprise and dismay, Beddoe produced an amended design for the flag by adding a blue border on both sides. When Pearson asked for an explanation, Beddoe replied that the borders represented Canada from sea to sea. Pearson was, in John Matheson's words, "enchanted" with the design.⁵

The Prime Minister was anxious to have a flag with a minimum of delay. As a result, the pace of activity became frenetic. According to Beddoe, he was asked to produce four varying designs of the blue-bordered flag. He did so and met with Cabinet on May 25 to explain the flag; as a result, he was asked to prepare two additional variants of the same design. The following day, Beddoe again met with Cabinet. At this meeting, Cabinet decided on the general design of the flag and Beddoe was asked to oversee the production of a printed sample at the Department of Public Printing and Stationery.⁶ On May 27, Beddoe met with approximately fifty members of the news media to explain the flag.⁷ In the meantime, a full-size nylon example was made (according to John Matheson, Raymond Rock, MP for Lachine, arranged to have a sample made)⁸ and, on May 31, Matheson, Beddoe, and others were invited to the Prime Minister's summer residence at Harrington Lake to fly the flag. A final design, however, proved elusive; on June 1 and again on June 4, Beddoe prepared slightly revised versions and delivered them to the Prime Minister's Office.⁹

In the meantime, the government prepared a resolution for the House of Commons, initiated the documentation required for the proclamation of the flag, and planned for appropriate

⁵ John Matheson, *Canada's Flag: A Search for a Country* (Belleville, Ont.: Mika Publishing, 1986), p. 129.

⁶ National Archives of Canada (hereafter cited as NA), Alan Beddoe Papers (MG 30, D252), volume 9, Diary Notes, May 22, 25 and 26, 1964.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 27, 1964.

⁸ NA, Peter Stursberg Papers (MG 30, D78), vol. 30. Transcribed notes of an interview with John Matheson. This flag is on display with other Pearson memorabilia at Laurier House, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁹ NA, Beddoe Papers, vol. 9, Diary Notes, May 30-June 4, 1964.

ceremonies for its inauguration. The resolution was tabled in the House of Commons on May 28, and on June 11-12, two slightly different versions of the flag were flown on Parliament Hill.¹⁰

The decision of the Pearson government to proceed with a new flag precipitated a storm of protest in Parliament and in the country at large. The Right Honourable John Diefenbaker, former Prime Minister and Leader of the Official Opposition, dubbed the flag *Pearson's Pennant* and the debate was on between those who wanted a new flag and those who wished to retain the Canadian Red Ensign as Canada's national flag.

Debate on the flag was deliberately delayed by the Opposition with a filibuster on an interim supply bill in late July, but on August 12, 1964, the flag debate commenced in earnest. In the meantime, the Prime Minister's Office had been deluged with thousands of letters on both sides of the issue. By early September, it was clear to Pearson and his advisors that the situation had reached an impasse. On September 10, he called a meeting of party leaders, Diefenbaker (Progressive Conservative), Tommy Douglas (New Democratic Party) and Robert Thompson (Social Credit). Acting on a suggestion first made by Douglas in early August, Pearson decided to send the flag question to a fifteen member special committee.¹¹ All parties agreed in principle and, on the same day, Pearson announced to the House of Commons that the flag issue would be settled by committee.

The Special Committee on a Canadian Flag was formally appointed on September 15. The Committee consisted of seven Liberals (including the chair), five Conservatives and one representative each from the New Democratic Party, Social Credit and the Cr ditistes. The Committee was to meet *in camera* and was allotted a maximum of six weeks to complete its work.¹² John Matheson was offered the chairmanship by Pearson, but he refused on the grounds

¹⁰ Privy Council Office, file N-2-2(a) (1960-May 1964), Memo, Alan Winship to Gordon Robertson, May 28, 1964; Draft Press Release, n.d. (ca June 9, 1964).

¹¹ John Saywell (ed), *Canadian Annual Review for 1964* (Toronto: 1965), pp. 28-29.

¹² Members of the Flag Committee included seven Liberals (Herman Batten, chair; John Matheson; Grant Deachman; Jean-Eudes Dub ; Margaret Konantz; Joseph Macaluso; L o-Alphonse Cadieux), five Conservatives (Hugh John Flemming; Hon. J. Waldo Monteith; David Pugh; Reynold Rapp, Hon Th og ne Ricard, Vice-Chair); one New Democrat (Reid Scott), one Social Credit (Raymond Langlois), and one Cr ditiste (Marcel Lessard).

that he was too closely associated with the Prime Minister and the government's preferred design.

The Flag Committee held 45 meetings, heard 12 expert witnesses and received approximately 2000 submissions from across the country. But progress was painfully slow. As long as the Liberal members were wedded to the Pearson pennant (or appeared to be), there was no guarantee that the Committee would be successful in resolving the issue. It was increasingly obvious to certain members of the Committee that their work was doomed to failure as long as the three maple leaf design remained the choice of the Liberal members. At this point, the search for a compromise began. The middle ground seemed to be represented by a single-leaf flag which had been the expressed preference of the NDP, Social Credit and Cr ditiste parties. Matheson testifies that he anonymously submitted a single-leaf design among those displayed in the committee room, which was based on a suggestion that had been made to him by historian George Stanley, Dean of Arts and Professor of History at the Royal Military College (RMC). In March 1964, he proposed to Matheson that the RMC flag be used as a model for a national flag. It consisted of three equal panels, red-white-red, with the RMC symbol in the centre. Stanley recommended that a single red maple leaf in the centre would make for a simple, but striking national flag.¹³ Matheson revised Stanley's suggestion by increasing the size of the centre (white) panel to the proportions of a square, with the red borders on either side one-half the width of the centre panel based on another single-leaf flag independently submitted by Toronto designer George Bist.¹⁴

Matheson was caught in a delicate personal and political dilemma. He personally

¹³ On Reid Scott's intervention at this critical juncture, see Robert McKeown, 'How Canada's Flag Was Born', *Weekend Magazine*, January 23, 1965, pp. 14-15. For a slightly different version of events written ten years later, see John Matheson, *Canada's Flag: A Search for a Country* (Belleville, Ont.: Mika Publishing, 1986), pp. 126-128. This version of events was first produced by Matheson in a thesis of the same title written in 1975. Stanley's letter to John Matheson is dated March 23, 1964, and includes a small, hand-drawn in red ink, version of the single maple leaf flag. The letter is in the Beddoe papers (MG 30, D252, vol. 9).

The Hon. George Stanley (b. July 6, 1907), professor of history, 1936 to 1969, including twenty years at the Royal Military College, Kingston, Ontario, 1949-1969; he was also Dean of Arts at RMC from 1962 to 1969. Stanley also served as Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick from 1982 to 1987. Source: *Canadian Who's Who 2000*, pp. 1200-1201.

¹⁴ In April 1919, Major General Eug ne Fiset proposed that Canada adopt a white flag with a single maple leaf in the centre. See Matheson, *Canada's Flag*, p. 68.

favoured a three leaf design and, more importantly, it was the Prime Minister's stated preference. Worse still, Pearson was not keen about a single maple leaf. Could Matheson agree to a flag that the Prime Minister might not accept? It was absolutely essential that Pearson be on side, but the Committee's deliberations were supposed to be *in camera*. If the Conservative opposition discovered that Pearson was involved in any way, the work of the Committee and Pearson's desire for a national flag would have been scuttled.

While Matheson later stated in the House of Commons and in his history of the flag that he never consulted the Prime Minister during the Committee's hearings,¹⁵ another Liberal member of the Committee did. In his memoirs, Pearson acknowledges that he was informed of the crisis within the Committee prior to the final vote on a national flag which took place on October 22:

He [an unidentified Liberal member of the Flag Committee] reported that our design ... might get through with a majority of one or two ... but would certainly not get a very big majority. I decided then that I did not want a report with a majority of only one or two. I wanted a strong report backing the design. To get that, I was told, I would have to give in to some extent. I replied that I did not mind provided they brought in a good design with the red maple leaf. The committee then came up with the red and white flag which was later adopted .¹⁶

Once the Prime Minister indicated his acceptance, Liberal strategists on the Committee, with the collaboration of the representatives from the three opposition parties, were careful not to reveal their collective preference for the single-leaf design. The five Conservatives, unaware of these discussions, remained convinced that the Liberals would continue to support the so-called Pearson pennant with the three maple leaves or a variation of it.

Voting in Committee took place on October 22. Hundreds of submissions had been eliminated and those remaining were organized into three groups: (i) those with three maple leaves (for example, Pearson's blue-bordered flag); (ii) those with a single maple leaf; and (iii)

¹⁵ For Matheson's statement in the House of Commons, see Hansard, November 30, 1964, p. 10701; he repeats the claim in his book, *Canada's Flag*, p. 128.

¹⁶ *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, volume 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 276. Not only was Pearson aware of the potential deadlock in the Committee, he admitted in an 1970 interview that he had seen various flag designs courtesy of an unidentified member of the Committee (NA, Pearson Papers, MG 26, N5, vol. 47, file Flag and National Anthem).

those with the Union Jack, the Fleur-de-lis or a combination of the two. A further round of voting reduced the contenders to three in number, one in each of the categories. The next vote eliminated the Union Jack/Fleur-de-lis combination, leaving two: the one and three maple leaf designs. And now, the critical vote to choose the Committee's preference for a national flag. The result was unanimous, 14 to 0, in favour of the red and white design with a single maple leaf. This was to be Canada's flag. The Conservative members of the Committee were surprised, even startled, at the outcome, convinced as they were that the Liberals would only vote for a three leaf design.

On October 29, the Sixth and Seventh reports of the Committee were tabled in the House of Commons by Herman Batten, MP.¹⁷ As soon as the Flag Committee's recommendation became public knowledge, versions of the flag design appeared in the press, although the final design of the maple leaf had yet to be determined.¹⁸ Opposition to the Committee's choice was intense, especially from a small band of Conservatives who were, more than anything else, embarrassed at being outmanoeuvred in committee.¹⁹ Efforts by Pearson and the Liberals to have the report accepted as recommended failed; as a consequence, on November 30, the flag debate resumed in the House of Commons. But, as the *Canadian Annual Review* noted, party lines began to disintegrate when Quebec Conservative, Léon Balcer, called on the government to invoke closure. This was done about 1:00 a.m. on December 15; a recorded vote on the Sixth report of the Flag Committee followed and carried 163 to 78. Two days later, on December 17, the Senate gave its approval. Canada now had its own distinctive national flag, a red and white flag with a single red maple leaf in the centre.

Pearson had finally achieved one of his most cherished dreams. But if the politics of flag-

¹⁷ The recommendation that the single red maple leaf flag be adopted as Canada's national flag is contained in the Sixth report of the Committee.

¹⁸ See, for example, the *Ottawa Citizen*, October 29, 1964, p. 1. An unidentified MP is holding aloft a drawing of the flag design.

¹⁹ John Matheson recalled that the unanimous 14 to 0 vote produced consternation and dismay among the Conservative members of the Flag Committee (Matheson, *Canada's Flag*, p. 134), while John Diefenbaker acknowledged in his memoirs that his party had been badly out-manoeuvred on the vote (Diefenbaker, *One Canada*, vol. 3, p. 225).

making were now resolved, practical details were not. Officials in the Privy Council Office had control of the situation: orders in council were drafted; the approval of the Queen was required; a proclamation was designed and produced; and formal ceremonies to mark the occasion had to be planned. Amidst all of this activity, the final design of the flag was high on the list of priorities. The model of the single-leaf flag on which the Committee based its vote featured an angular 13-point leaf at the centre although the actual wording of the report made no specification as to the precise design of the leaf. Matheson had been put in touch with the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission for the production of prototype flags and accepted their advice that a simple, stylized leaf with 11 points and rounded interior angles developed by designer Jacques Saint-Cyr would be superior in all respects. It was only on December 23 that Cabinet itself approved the final version of the 11-point leaf.²⁰

In the meantime, there was some confusion. Following the House of Commons vote on December 15, several newspapers carried a photograph of jubilant MPs holding a 13-point maple leaf flag.²¹ In late December, *Weekend Magazine* asked the Prime Minister's Office for a flag to photograph for the January 23 edition of the magazine; the editor, to his later embarrassment (if not bewilderment), was loaned a flag with the 13-point leaf!²²

On December 23, Cabinet also established an interdepartmental committee to draft plans for an inaugural flag ceremony on February 15, 1965. With the design finalized, the Department of Defence Production (the purchasing agent for the government) was able to let tenders for the manufacture of an estimated 12,000 flags. Canada's national flag was raised for the first time on Parliament Hill at noon on February 15, 1965.

²⁰ National Archives, Records of the Privy Council Office, Record Group (RG) 2, volume 6265, Cabinet Conclusions, December 23, 1964; attached to the Conclusions is Cabinet Document 558/64 with additional information on the final design of the flag.

²¹ See, for example, the *Ottawa Citizen*, December 15, 1964, p. 1; *Ottawa Journal*, December 15, 1964, p. 3; and the Toronto *Daily Star*, December 15, 1964, p. 1.

²² *Weekend Magazine*, January 23, 1965. The 13-point flag, in full colour, graces the cover. An apology and explanation were published in the issue for February 20, 1965, p. 35.

PART A: Prototypes and First Flags, 1964

The unfolding of events in the autumn of 1964, while outlined in broad terms above, are best described in an annotated and documented chronology. The story of the prototypes and the first flag sewn by Joan O Malley is told in detail in a separate section following the chronology. Sources are indicated and any explanatory comments by the author are clearly marked as such.

1964

Thursday, September 10

Prime Minister Pearson announced in the House of Commons that the flag question would be referred to an all-party special committee (*Hansard*, September 10, 1964, p. 7817).

Thursday, September 17

Flag Committee met for the first time.

Thursday, October 8

Jack Davis, MP, met with Pearson about the Flag Committee (Pearson papers, MG 26 N8, appointment book, October 21, 1964; hereafter cited as Pearson appointment book).

Thursday, October 22

Flag Committee commenced voting on flag designs in the morning and by noon had reduced the possibilities to three, one in each of the following three categories: a flag with three maple leaves; a flag with one maple leaf; a flag incorporating the Red Ensign and/or the Fleur-de-lis. Voting continued and the third design was eliminated first. A final vote was then held on the two remaining designs, i.e., the design with three maple leaves and the design with a single maple leaf. The Conservative members of the Committee, assuming that the Liberals would sustain the Prime Minister's preferred design with three leaves conjoined on a single stem with the blue borders, voted for the single maple leaf. But the Liberal members, along with those

representing the minor opposition parties, had already agreed amongst themselves to choose the single maple leaf design. As a result, the vote was 14 to 0 in favour of the single maple leaf flag. As agreed upon beforehand, a second confirming vote was allowed and the result was 10 to 4 in favour of the flag this allowed the Conservative members to express their displeasure with the choice; one Conservative voted for the single maple leaf design in the second vote (National Archives, Records of Parliament, Record Group 14, accession 87-88/146, box 102, Minutes of the Special Committee on a Canadian Flag, October 22, 1964; Grant Deachman, a Liberal member of the Committee, also recounted the voting procedure in an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen*, October 29, 1964, pp. 1-2).

Saturday, October 24/Sunday, October 25

PM Pearson's agenda book has one entry for both days: privately (Pearson appointment book).

Tuesday, October 27

PM Pearson met with James Walker, MP, and Grant Deachman, MP, from 2:10 to 2:30 p.m. (Pearson appointment book).

Wednesday, October 28

PM Pearson at 24 Sussex Drive all day, agenda book indicated no official engagements (Pearson appointment book).

Thursday, October 29

The final reports of the Flag Committee (i.e., Sixth and Seventh) are tabled in the House of Commons. In its Sixth report, the Committee recommended that the flag to be designated as the National Flag of Canada be a red flag of the proportions two by length and one by width, containing in its centre a white square, the width of the flag, bearing a single red maple leaf, or, in heraldic terms, described as gules on a Canadian pale argent a maple leaf of the first (Special Committee on a Canadian Flag, Sixth Report, October 29, 1964; *Hansard*, October 29, 1964,

p. 9546).

On the same day, illustrations of the new flag, bearing a 13-point maple leaf, appeared in the daily press (*Ottawa Citizen*, October 29, 1964, p. 1).

Thursday, October 29/Friday, October 30, 1964

John Matheson, MP, met and discussed the flag design with Patrick Reid,²³ Director of the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission (Patrick Reid, *Wild Colonial Boy: A Memoir* (Vancouver, 1995), pp. 168, 170).

Note: Reid states that Matheson first contacted him in late October. Assuming that Mr. Matheson would not have contacted him about the flag prior to its selection, he must have done so on either October 29 or 30.

Wednesday, November 3

PM Pearson met with John Matheson at 12:30 p.m. (Pearson appointment book).

Friday, November 6

PM Pearson and John Matheson met briefly from 2:55 to 3:00 p.m. (Pearson appointment book).

Note: Although there is no public or private document for corroboration, two published sources cite this date as the date when the first Canadian flag was made, sewn, and delivered to 24 Sussex Drive. See *Sewing the First Flag* (p. 16) below for an analysis of these sources.

It is clear that the Prime Minister received a flag that day. On November 9, 1964, Patrick Reid wrote to John Matheson about the final design of the maple leaf:

²³ Patrick Reid (b. November 14, 1924) is a corporate executive and retired diplomat. Following a career in the British Army, Reid emigrated to Canada in 1954, and in 1962 was appointed Director of the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, a position he held until 1968. He subsequently held government appointments in London and Paris before returning to Canada as Ambassador and Commissioner General of Expo 86. Reid is currently Chairman of the Rick Hansen Institute, Vancouver, B.C. His memoirs, *Wild Colonial Boy*, were published in 1995. Source: *Canadian Who's Who 2000*, p. 1052.

It is our opinion that one of the Saint-Cyr²⁴ creations passed the distance test admirably. This is the leaf presented in flag form to the Prime Minister last Friday (PCO records, file N-2-2(a), 1964 (December), Reid to Matheson, November 9, 1964. A copy of this letter is attached to Cabinet Document 558/1964 with the Cabinet Conclusions for December 23, 1964; see RG 2, volume 6265).

Saturday, November 7

PM Pearson at 24 Sussex all day. At 11:00 a.m., he met with Andrew Boyd and Tom Kent; at 4:30 p.m., with the Hon. Walter Gordon (Pearson appointment book).

Sunday, November 8

At 10:00 a.m., PM Pearson spoke on the telephone with President Lyndon Johnson; and at 1:00 p.m., he hosted a lunch at Harrington Lake for Dr. Lange, the Norwegian Foreign Minister (Pearson appointment book).

Monday, November 9

Cabinet met.

Patrick Reid (Canadian Government Exhibition Commission) wrote to John Matheson, MP, re: the design of the maple leaf on the flag (see entry for November 6, 1964, above).

Tuesday, November 10

Alan Winship (PCO) sent a cardboard flag model to A.M. Guerin (Director, Clothing and Textile Branch, Department of Industry) and asked him to have Bruck Mills produce a flag measuring 9 feet by 4.5 feet. Winship adds: I know you will understand that the same degree of secrecy should be maintained in the handling of this request (PCO records, box 173, file N-2-2(a)-7, 1967, Winship to Guerin, November 10, 1964).

Note: Bruck Mills Ltd was located in Montreal, Quebec. Earlier in the year, the company had

²⁴ This is a reference to Jacques Saint-Cyr (1921-1996), a designer with the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, who was responsible for the final refined design of the maple leaf.

produced several flags bearing the blue-bordered design.

Friday, November 13

Cabinet met.

Monday, November 16

A manufactured single maple leaf flag is delivered to Alan Winship at the Privy Council Office. The flag was made by Bruck Mills, Montreal (NA, Records of the Department of Public Works, Record Group 11, volume 5007, file 778-20, part 6, Memo, W.H. Huck, Assistant Deputy Minister/Finance and Administration, Defence Production to George Johnson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Works, November 23, 1964).

Tuesday, November 17

Even though the final phase of the flag debate has yet to begin, officials in the Privy Council Office were discussing plans to purchase a sufficient number of flags to meet federal requirements. Because of this, a final and definitive design was needed. Alan Winship raised this question with Gordon Robertson on November 17: It may be useful to settle the point at an early date about how we will deal with any design modifications which, for one reason or another, should be made. The longer this takes once both the Commons and the Senate have given some form of approval, of course the more time will be required to meet the flag requirements for federal departments, etc. A panel of artists was suggested earlier, but this no longer would seem practical or necessary. Possibly some quick work by the artists of the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, with advice from the National Design Council, would be enough (PCO records, file N-2-2(a)-7, Memo, Alan Winship to Gordon Robertson, November 17, 1964).

Note 1: On Gordon Robertson's copy (i.e., the original, also on the file), the final three words, ... would be enough , are underlined. Robertson comments, I think it would, at this stage .

Note 2: It is obvious from Winship's concern that the final design mentioned by Patrick Reid to John Matheson on November 9 (see above) had not yet reached officials in the Privy Council Office.

Thursday, December 3

Alan Winship (PCO) prepared a draft schedule of Steps to be taken concerning the New National Flag . The second item on his list of ten read: Preparation of final design of the new national flag ; and the fourth item: Cabinet approval of the national flag design and orders in council (PCO records, box 172, file N-2-2(a)-3, 1964(Nov-Dec)-1965, Winship to Robertson, December 3, 1964).

Thursday, December 10

In a hand-written note to Gordon Robertson, Alan Winship stated that he has prepared drafts to Parkin & Warren re: design changes, but am holding these in view of your comments . Winship added: I will have the Saint-Cyr photographs for you tomorrow after 10 a.m. (PCO records, box 172, file N-2-2(a)-3, 1964(Nov-Dec)-1965, Winship to Robertson, December 10, 1964).

Note: The Saint-Cyr photos have not been located.

On the same day, an interdepartmental meeting was held at PCO to discuss proposed methods of distribution of new Canadian flag . The meeting included representatives from Defence Production (including Edward G. Jamieson); PCO (Alan Winship); Public Works and National Defence.

Tuesday, December 15

At approximately 2:15 a.m., the House of Commons voted to accept the recommendation of the Flag Committee, thus adopting the single red maple leaf flag as Canada s national flag (*Hansard*, December 14, 1965, pp. 11138-11139).

Thursday, December 17

The Senate approved the new flag.

Friday, December 18

In a draft memo to Cabinet, prepared this day, officials of the Privy Council Office reviewed steps to be taken before the new flag could be raised, e.g., Proclamation, order in council, Canada Gazette entry, plans for the inaugural ceremony, etc. The memo then addressed the question of flag design and noted that approval of Cabinet was now sought on the flag design. The memo acknowledged that Alan Beddoe designed the flag that was recommended by the Flag Committee, and added: Subsequently, a *refinement* of the design was prepared at the request of certain members of the Flag Committee, by Mr. Saint-Cyr, an artist employed by the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission. This design is attached as Appendix 2. The distinction lies in the shape of the leaf and there are a number of reasons for preferring the Saint-Cyr design over that illustrated in Appendix 1. These reasons are set out in a letter from the Director of the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission to Matheson dated November 9, 1964, and attached as Appendix 3 . The final version of this document is Cabinet Document 558/64, dated December 21, 1964; see NA, RG 2, vol. 6265, Cabinet Conclusions, December 23, 1964.

Wednesday, December 23

Cabinet approved the final design of the flag. PM Pearson wrote to Governor General Georges Vanier to inform him of this fact and added: So far as the leaf is concerned, a good deal of work has been done by experts in this field who have tested a number of different illustrations under different conditions. They finally recommended one that the Cabinet approved this morning You will be interested to know that this particular design of the leaf retained its identity as a maple leaf much better than any other at a distance (Lester B. Pearson papers, MG 26, N3, vol. 292, file 912.1, L.B. Pearson to Governor General Vanier, December 23, 1964).

Thursday, December 24

Alan Winship reported to Gordon Robertson that: The experts at the Exhibition Commission agree the bottom of the leaf stem should be straight & are drawing their specifications accordingly. (These can be easily changed if that is the PM s wish) (PCO records, box 172, file N-2-2(a)-6, 1964-1965, hand-written note, Winship to Robertson, December 24, 1964).

Wednesday, December 30

The Department of Defence Production called for tenders for the manufacture of the new Canadian flag; approximately 12,000 flags are required by the end of January 1965.

Sewing the First Flag

Of all the events surrounding the adoption of a national flag in the autumn of 1964, the production of prototypes and the sewing of the first flag are perhaps the most confused. In the course of research for this report, I found no document, public or private, that made direct reference to the events that are stated to have taken place on the night of November 6, 1964. There are, however, at least six published accounts of what happened, all based on the recollections of participants. On closer analysis of these versions of the story, one finds confusion, inconsistency, and an inability to reconcile certain facts with what is known from the documentary record. What follows is a brief analysis of the six published accounts, listed below in the order in which they were published.

1. Allan Dickie, Matheson Recalls Birth of Flag , *Kingston Whig-Standard*, February 15, 1966, pp. 1-2 (referred to below as the Dickie/Matheson article);
2. David Cobb, Our Great Flag Mystery , *The Canadian*, January 26, 1974, p. 11;
3. John Matheson, Canada s Flag MA Thesis, Mount Allison University, April 1975. Published as *Canada s Flag: A Search for a Country* by G.K. Hall, Boston, Mass. in 1980 and reprinted by Mika, Belleville, Ontario in 1986; see especially p. 178 in the 1986 edition of the book (referred to below as the Matheson book);²⁵

²⁵ John Matheson s book was first prepared as a thesis for Mount Allison University in the spring of 1975, although there is evidence that he was researching and writing the manuscript as early as 1966. In an interview with the *Kingston Whig-Standard* in March 1966, Matheson states that he is writing a book on the history of the flag and that he has already completed five chapters (*Kingston Whig-Standard*, March 3, 1966, p. 26). I am grateful to Bill Kretzel for bringing this clipping to my attention.

4. Ken MacQueen, Lester Pearson, Joan's flag and visions of white bread and jam , *Ottawa Citizen*, January 22, 1995, p. A9;
5. Patrick Reid, *Wild Colonial Boy: A Memoir* (Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995), especially pp. 167-174; and
6. Patrick MacAdam, How Our Flag Was Born , *Ottawa Citizen*, July 1, 1999, p. C2.

_____ These sources tell the story of Joan O Malley and her role in the making of Canada's first flag in the autumn of 1964. There is a general consensus in the published record on the basic outline of the story, a story that is well-known and widely distributed.²⁶ On closer analysis and reflection, however, one finds discrepancies and inconsistencies within the versions of the story cited above and with what we know of the work of the Flag Committee.

Unfortunately, no contemporary document has yet been found to corroborate the fact that Joan O Malley was present on November 6, 1964, at the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission (CGEC) facility in Ottawa. Joan herself explained to the author that both her and her husband, Brian O Malley, were sworn to secrecy.²⁷ This is not meant to suggest that she did not sew a flag or flags; indeed, she did, as the analysis at the conclusion of this section demonstrates.

A series of questions follow, with answers as found in the Dickie/Matheson, Cobb, MacQueen and MacAdam articles, and in the books by John Matheson and Patrick Reid.

1. When were the prototypes and first flag made?

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Matheson (article) | November 1964 |
| Cobb | late fall, 1964 |
| Matheson (book) | November 6, 1964 |
| MacQueen | late autumn 1964 |
| Reid | November 6, 1964 |
| MacAdam | November 6, 1964 |

²⁶ On the Internet, for example, there are numerous sites, including many federal government sites, that feature a brief history of the Canadian flag and Joan's role in sewing the first flag.

²⁷ In conversation with Glenn Wright and Bill Peters, January 29, 2001.

In conversation with the O Malleys on January 29, 2001, the author raised the question of the date. Joan stated that the flag-making took place on November 6, 1964. Both she and her husband agree that the night was cold and wet and perhaps slushy. Some time after the event, Joan checked weather records maintained by a colleague and decided that her father called her into the CGEC on November 6th. Both the O Malleys agreed that the event may have taken place earlier, but not as early as Thanksgiving weekend (October 9). The author checked official weather records for the dates in question: on the night of November 6/7, 1964, there was only a trace of precipitation in Ottawa and the low temperature ranged between 37 and 40 degrees F. By contrast, the night of October 9/10, there was rain and the low temperatures hovered in the 34 to 38 degree F range.²⁸ The author feels it is possible that the O Malley event took place in early October rather than early November. As a further piece of evidence, it should be noted that on the evening of November 6, John Matheson attended graduation ceremonies at Rideau District High School in Elgin, Ontario, in order to present the Matheson Leadership Award to one of the students.²⁹

2. How many prototypes were made?

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Matheson (article) | 1 |
| Cobb | 4 (including the first one, which was defective) |
| Matheson (book) | suggests at least 2 |
| MacQueen | 3 |
| Reid | 3 |
| MacAdam | 3 |

It is interesting to note that Reid is very definite about the number of prototypes and what happened to them. He states that John Matheson took one (the first, defective one, now in the custody of Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Ontario); one was purloined by an Exhibition Commission employee; and the third one was given to Joan O Malley to sew (She

²⁸ Meteorological Branch, Department of Transport, *Monthly Record, Meteorological Observations in Canada*, October and November 1964.

²⁹ Queen's University Archives, John Matheson Papers, box 25, folder 14, Agenda 1964, entry for November 6, 1964. His presence at the high school is confirmed in the *Kingston Whig-Standard*, November 13, 1964, p. 20.

sewed superbly, added a halyard toggle and grommets strong enough to withstand the winter weather outside Reid, p. 172). But the Matheson prototype is a one-sided flag with unfinished ends and was not meant to fly. Joan O Malley viewed the Matheson flag on January 29, 2001, and had no recollection of sewing a flag of this nature. When queried on the matter, Joan herself has consistently stated that she sewed six flags, two each of three designs: a blue-bordered flag with three red maples leaves in the centre; the same flag with red borders; and a design with a single red maple leaf. These bear no relationship to the Matheson prototype.³⁰

3. Was the O Malley flag made to be flown?

| | | |
|--------------------|---|----|
| Matheson (article) | no specific comment, but implication is | no |
| Cobb | yes | |
| Matheson (book) | yes | |
| MacQueen | yes | |
| Reid | yes | |
| MacAdam | yes | |

In conversation with the author, however, John Matheson was emphatic that the flag was not meant to be flown. He stated that Pearson wanted to see what the design would look like as a full size (6 feet x 3 feet) flag. Joan O Malley stated recently that three of the six flags were equipped with a sleeve that would allow them to be flown. Recollections by both Joan and Brian O Malley and accounts of the flag-making event by Cobb, MacQueen, Reid, MacAdam and Matheson (in his book) all indicate that the flags she sewed were flyable.³¹

4. How many flags did Joan O Malley sew?

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Matheson (article) | 1 |
| Cobb | 3 |
| Matheson (book) | 1 |
| MacQueen | 3 (two of each, six in total) |
| Reid | 1 |

³⁰ Confirmed in conversation with the author and Bill Peters, January 29, 2001. The same account is given in Ken MacQueen's 1995 article and in the article by Patrick MacAdam.

³¹ The author spoke with John Matheson about the O Malley flag on November 8, 2000, while his conversation with Joan and Brian O Malley took place on January 29, 2001.

MacAdam 3 (two of each, six in total)

In two separate conversations with the author, Joan O Malley stated that she sewed six flags, two each of the three final designs before the Flag Committee. When interviewed by Ken MacQueen in 1995, she recalled sewing two versions of a flag with three maple leaves and one version with the single maple leaf. If Joan's memory is correct, only two of the designs she sewed were before the Committee. It is clear that she sewed a version of the Pearson pennant, the blue-bordered flag with three red maple leaves in the centre (designed by Alan Beddoe). She has also stated that she sewed a similar flag with red borders in place of the blue. This is an interesting assertion and suggests that there was a compromise design prepared for Prime Minister Pearson that retained the three maple leaves in the centre with the border motif. Joan also sewed a single red maple leaf flag similar to the design that was finally accepted by the government. Undoubtedly, the maple leaf in the centre was rendered by Alan Beddoe, and was similar to what appears on his blue-bordered flag. The stylized maple leaf on Canada's flag was chosen after the Flag Committee completed its deliberations on October 29, 1964; indeed, the final refined design was not approved by Cabinet until December 23, 1964.³²

5. Did Joan O Malley use a sewing machine?

| | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Matheson (article) | yes |
| Cobb | yes |
| Matheson (book) | suggests yes |
| MacQueen | yes |
| Reid | no |
| MacAdam | yes |

_____ While this may not appear to be a very critical question, it is, nonetheless, important because Joan O Malley clearly recalls that her machine had trouble with the thick material that was used to make the flags. She told Ken MacQueen in January 1995 that sometimes the needle would hardly go through. Patrick Reid recalled in his memoirs that they used bedsheets

³² The author spoke with Joan O Malley about this on two occasions, October 30, 2000, and January 29, 2001. Ken MacQueen, writing in the *Ottawa Citizen*, cites Joan's recollections in his article, "Lester Pearson, Joan's flag and visions of white bread and jam" (*Ottawa Citizen*, January 22, 1995, p. A9).

and spare bunting for the silk-screening. And the Canadian Heritage Web site quotes Joan saying: My sewing machine wasn't made for such heavy material. This being the case, Joan O Malley did not sew a version of the Matheson prototype – it is made from a see-through cheesecloth type material, very light to the touch.³³

Comment and Analysis

When interviewed by journalist Ken MacQueen in January 1995, Joan O Malley recalled that she sewed two versions of the flag with three leaves in the centre, and the version later approved by Parliament. She reiterated this in conversation with the author on January 29, 2001. Assuming that her recollections are correct (and there is no reason not to accept them), this suggests that the sewing did not take place on November 6, 1964.

On October 29, Herman Batten, MP and chair of the Flag Committee, presented the Sixth and Seventh reports of the Committee to the House of Commons. The Sixth Report of the Committee recommended that the single red maple leaf flag be adopted as Canada's national flag. All other flags had been eliminated during the Committee's voting procedure which took place on October 22. While the resolution to adopt this flag would not reach the floor of the House until November 30, the recommended design was public knowledge and representations of it had appeared in the daily press. In other words, there was no reason to make a three-leaf flag (and two versions of it) on November 6 or, in fact, on any date after October 22.

Both Joan and Brian O Malley recall that the flag sewing event took place on a Friday and that the weather was wet and cold, some snow was in the air as well. Weather records for November 6, 1964, do not support this particular recollection. The author suggested to them that the sewing event must have taken place earlier in October, on October 9 or 16. While they both stated that it was not the 9th (reasons for saying so were not articulated), this is the only Friday in

³³ Joan O Malley in conversation with the author, January 29, 2001; Ken MacQueen's *Ottawa Citizen* column, January 22, 1995; Patrick Reid, *Wild Colonial Boy: A Memoir* (1995), p. 171; Department of Canadian Heritage Web site (<http://www.pch.gc.ca>). The Matheson prototype was examined by the author, Joan and Brian O Malley and Bill Peters at the CCI on January 29, 2001.

October that fits the weather profile and it is well before the Flag Committee made its final decision on a flag design.³⁴

In addition, two of the published accounts of the flag-making event cloak the activities in secrecy. Patrick Reid describes a call from the Prime Minister's Office, 'The P.M. needs professional help, he wants it very quietly ...' (p. 168). Also writing in 1995, Ken MacQueen (after interviewing Joan O Malley) states that 'She was sworn to secrecy In a more recent interview, the O Malleys were more explicit: Brian O Malley stated without prompting that the flag-making was secret because the government had not yet decided on a final design.'³⁵ These recollections clearly indicate that the flag-making took place prior to October 22.

As of October 29, the flag design was public knowledge. And, since the flag was public knowledge, why would a version of the flag be produced at a government agency at night when it could have been done by a commercial flag manufacturer? When the Privy Council Office wanted samples of the blue-bordered flag in the spring of 1964, they were ordered through regular government purchasing channels from a flag-maker in Montreal.

And why the urgency? In both Cobb and MacQueen, Ken Donovan (Joan O Malley's father) stresses the urgency of the request from the PMO. But why did the flags have to be made late on a Friday night? Could the work not have waited until Saturday morning, or even Monday morning? Ken Donovan has stated that the Prime Minister wanted to fly the flags at Harrington Lake, yet records indicate that Mr. Pearson did not go to Harrington Lake on Saturday, November 7. He did, in fact, have lunch at the Lake on Sunday, November 8, but he was hosting the Norwegian Foreign Minister. He might have flown the flags in the afternoon, but, with a foreign politician present, it is unlikely. Mr. Pearson may have been at the Lake the following weekend (his agenda book states that both days were private). This being the case, why the urgency on November 6? In other words, by November 6, there was no urgency; the flags sewn

³⁴ In conversation with the author, January 29, 2001. Weather information has been compiled from the Department of Transport, *Meteorological Observations in Canada*, for October and November 1964, and from the *Monthly Meteorological Summary* for October and November 1964 for observations taken at the Ottawa International Airport.

³⁵ In conversation with the author, January 29, 2001.

by Joan O Malley were likely made earlier under a different set of circumstances.

The Patrick Reid Version of the Story

The Dickie/Matheson article, the stories by Cobb and MacQueen, and the brief account by John Matheson in his book (Matheson's account appears to be based in part on Cobb) suggest that everything happened on a single night. Patrick Reid has a different version of events, events that obviously stretch out over the course of several days.³⁶ Cobb and MacQueen, writing years apart, but both relying, to some extent, on Ken Donovan's memory, state that an urgent request came from the PMO late on a Friday afternoon, about 4:30 p.m. Bunting was acquired, cut and silk-screened and, when someone was needed to sew the final product, Donovan called on his daughter, Joan O Malley.

Patrick Reid recalls that late in October, he received a call from the PMO requesting his assistance (p. 167) and that John Matheson met with him the same day at about 6 p.m. (p.168). After discussing various design issues, Reid asked Matheson to return the following evening for a working session (p. 170).

Reid then went home, discussed the matter with his wife and called the PMO. He asked if a very simple, stylized design would meet with approval (p. 170) and was told to get on with it! (p. 170). It is not clear whether he called the PMO the same evening that he met with Matheson; if he did, it would have been very late.

Reid subsequently spoke with the Exhibition Commission's chief designer, Tom Wood, although, again, it is not clear whether he spoke with him that same night. Wood suggested that Jacques Saint-Cyr (another designer with the Commission) would be the man for the job,

³⁶ The earliest version of the story, the article by Allan Dickie in the *Kingston Whig-Standard*, is most curious on this point. The first part of the article suggests that the flag was made in a rush and late at night; however, the second part of the article suggests otherwise. Dickie recounts Matheson's story that the actual design process took several days, if not weeks, and that only after due consideration by Matheson and officials at the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission was a flag design chosen. It is also clear from this 1966 article that one flag was made and that Joan sewed only one flag. See Allan Dickie, "Matheson Recalls Birth of Flag", *Whig-Standard*, February 15, 1966, pp. 1-2.

especially since he had already designed a red maple leaf for trade show purposes.

Saint-Cyr agreed to do a sketch and have it available that evening, when we would meet John Matheson (p. 171). This clearly suggests a passage of time from the initial meeting with John Matheson and Saint-Cyr doing his sketches. After a long and what Reid calls a productive session, We agreed to meet again on 6 November, after Jacques had had a chance to work up some variants. Then, according to Reid, Matheson phoned to say we had to have a flag at the Prime Minister's residence on the morning of 7 November. It would be flown for the Prime Minister's inspection when he got up (p. 171).

It is clear from Reid's account that there were several days leading up to the night when the flag was sewn. The initial phone call had to have been on Thursday or Friday, October 29 or 30. This would have given Reid an opportunity to take the problem home (as he recalls), and later speak with Tom Wood, meet with Jacques Saint-Cyr, give Saint-Cyr time to work up several designs and have a second meeting with John Matheson. Only then, at the second meeting with Matheson, did they agree to a working session on Friday, November 6. Reid says that when he first met Matheson, Matheson told him that The problem is a simple one. We need a design for the single maple leaf. The red bars are set. We need the proportions and specifications finalized, once the design is settled (p. 170).

Recall that the Flag Committee had already recommended a flag with a single maple leaf in the centre, and a drawing of the flag had been prepared (see *Ottawa Citizen*, October 30, 1964, p. 1). The proportions had also already been settled, the centre white section was twice the width of one red bar (i.e., 2 to 1). Matheson had been concerned about this and accepted the proportions suggested by Toronto designer George Bist.³⁷

The maple leaf itself was another matter should it have 13 points or 11? The flag designed for the Flag Committee by Alan Beddoe had 13, but the Committee's recommendation was not specific. According to John Matheson, the Committee chose the single maple leaf as a

³⁷ George Bist, a Canadian war veteran and designer, proposed a single maple leaf flag on a white background with blue side panels. The design was never a real contender for national flag, but Matheson found that Bist's proportions, i.e., the white centre was square and equal to the sum of the two side panels, added a note of distinction to the red-white-red design. Matheson acknowledges that George Bist contributed substantially to the ultimate flag result (Matheson, *Canada's Flag*, p. 125).

design principle and that a final, definitive version of the maple leaf would be determined after October 29.³⁸ If Reid is correct, the flag was stylized with 11 points on the same evening that Joan O Malley allegedly sewed the flag (Reid, p. 171).

Given available evidence, what is the most likely sequence of events? An analysis of statements made by Ken Donovan, Joan O Malley, John Matheson, Patrick Reid and the two journalists, David Cobb and Ken MacQueen, suggest that we have two events, the details of which have become intermeshed with one another. Joan O Malley sewed three flags, including one with a single maple leaf. As suggested above, she must have completed this work prior to October 22, 1964, when the Flag Committee chose the design that would become Canada's national flag. John Matheson was undoubtedly present when this was done, but why were the flags made? In spite of what he says about not contacting the Prime Minister during the deliberations of the Flag Committee, is it possible that the flags were made for the Prime Minister, to show him what the possibilities were for a national flag? The flag issue had preoccupied him for most of 1964, and he had now been informed that his preferred design (the blue-bordered flag) was unacceptable and that it would never be selected as the country's national flag.

If so, when did Joan sew the three flags? If the O Malleys are correct about the inclement weather, the only possible date for the flag-making event is October 9. The Flag Committee had been meeting for three weeks, but there was no resolution in sight. On October 8, Jack Davis, a Liberal MP, met with Pearson on the subject of the Flag Committee and while Pearson has readily admitted to seeing the various designs before the Committee, might he have asked for sample flags before changing his mind in favour of the single maple leaf design?

If one regards the Matheson/Reid story as the correct version of events, i.e., three silk-screened versions of the single maple leaf were made, and one was given to Joan O Malley to sew the edges, then the Donovan/O Malley version appears to relate to a different event. Mrs. O Malley has recalled how difficult it was to work with the material: in 1995 she told Ken MacQueen that sometimes the needle would hardly go through. Patrick Reid describes the

³⁸ John Matheson in conversation with the author, January 17, 2001.

material as bedsheets (Reid, p. 171). This could not have been a nylon or silk flag. The one known prototype at Queen's University is bunting, a fairly light material, loosely woven like cheesecloth and almost transparent.

The Jamieson Flag

On August 21, 2000, Edward G. Jamieson of Ottawa, Ontario, wrote to the Prime Minister and informed him that he had a flag prototype sewn by Joan O Malley. In the fall of 1964, Mr. Jamieson was a senior administrative officer in the Clothing and Textiles Branch of the Department of Industry. In his letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. Jamieson writes:

At the culmination of Cabinet's decision-making process, I was asked by the then Director of the Clothing and Textile Branch to undertake an urgent and confidential mission, that being to go to the Montreal plant preparing prototypes of the new flag and bring them back for cabinet review and approval. I enjoyed the James Bond flavour of this task, and was and am grateful to have participated in some small way in that part of history. A few days, I believe, after my delivery of the flags, I was given one as a souvenir of the event.

The flag I was given, sewn by Joan O Malley to the best of my knowledge, has unfinished edges which would make it difficult to be formally flown which makes me wonder about press reports of a prototype flown at the cottage of the late Lester Pearson.

Mr. Jamieson subsequently gave the flag to his son, Edward Jamieson Jr.³⁹

The author viewed the flag at Edward Jamieson's office in Mississauga, Ontario, on November 9, 2000. Prior to leaving Ottawa, I spoke with John Matheson about this flag. He suggested, without prompting, that the flag would be a flag not meant to be flown and that it would have an orange hue, i.e., it would not be as red as the flag is today. He was absolutely correct. The Jamieson flag, made of a nylon or silk material, has no sleeve or grommets, has been turned down on all sides and sewn. On the short sides, the stitch line is relatively straight, on the

³⁹ In conversation with the author, Mr. Jamieson was unable to recall when he made his trip to and from Montreal, nor was he able to remember the name of the company that produced the flags. He also assured me that the flag was not referred to as an O Malley flag at the time. He told me that he assumed as much from subsequent reading of the story of the flag.

long sides, it is often very crooked. The corners appear to be hand-stitched, i.e., an extra stitch or two has been added to hold the double thickness of the fabric. It is, however, an 11-point flag and, in all respects, is similar to our national flag.

Has this flag any connection with the O Malley flag or flags? Only if Joan O Malley sewed a nylon or silk flag can the connection be made. But her own recollections, as shown above, suggest that she sewed more than one flag of various designs with a heavier, linen-type material. Could her flag have been used as a model to make other flags? Possibly, but if the scenario described above is correct (i.e., that she sewed the flags prior to October 22, 1964), the flag she sewed was a 13-point maple leaf and not the final 11-point design. When shown the Jamieson flag in January 2001, Mrs. O Malley examined it very carefully and concluded that the sewing was not hers.

Unless some documentary evidence comes to light, the story of Joan O Malley and flag-making remains a mystery. Just as David Cobb discovered in 1974 (and his article might very well have sown the seeds of confusion in this story), the first flag remains a mystery, and the one donated to Queen's University Archives by John Matheson appears to be the very first effort to produce an example of the new Canadian flag with the 11-point maple leaf.

PART B: The First Canadian Flag Flown on Parliament Hill, February 15, 1965

On February 16, 2000, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien presented to the Hon. Sheila Copps, Minister of Canadian Heritage, a Canadian flag that had traditionally been identified as the first one to fly on Parliament Hill on February 15, 1965. Evidently, the flag had been donated by retired Prime Minister, Lester Pearson, to the National Liberal Caucus on April 24, 1968, and had, in the intervening years, resided in the office of the Leader of the Liberal Party. Upon examination by the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), however, it was discovered that the flag was stamped "APR 1965". If this represents the date of manufacture, then this is not the first flag to fly on Parliament Hill.

This part of the report summarizes the search for any record, public or private, that might document the provenance of this flag. Research indicates that it was the intention of the government to preserve this flag as well as the first one to be hoisted on the Peace Tower on February 15, 1965. As in Part A, findings are presented in the form of an annotated chronology with sources indicated as required. Comments and observations by the author are noted.

1964-1965

At the beginning of January 1965, much had been accomplished. The final design of the flag had been determined, the Queen had approved the choice and the Flag Proclamation was being drafted. Officials from several departments, including the Privy Council Office, the Secretary of State, and Public Works, were drafting the program for the ceremonies and speeches for flag inauguration day on February 15.

In these hectic days leading up to the raising of the first maple leaf flag on Parliament Hill, the ultimate disposition of the last Red Ensign and the first Maple Leaf flags flown on February 15 was discussed amongst officials of the Privy Council Office and in Cabinet.

Tuesday, December 15, 1964

About 2:15 a.m., the House of Commons voted to accept the recommendation of the Special Committee on a Canadian Flag, thus approving its choice of the single red maple leaf flag as Canada's national flag (*Hansard*, December 14, 1964, pp. 11138-11139).

Later the same day, Cabinet met to discuss what needed to be done to proclaim the flag and to mark its inauguration. An Interdepartmental Flag Committee was established to make recommendations on a ceremony. The Committee was chaired by Jean Miquelon (Deputy Registrar General, Secretary of State), and included representatives from the Governor General's Office, Privy Council Office, Public Works, External Affairs, and Transport.

Wednesday, December 23, 1964

Once again, Cabinet met and discussed the various steps required for the formal adoption of the flag (i.e., approval by the Queen, a Proclamation, various orders in council, etc.). At this meeting, the design of the flag was exhaustively discussed, and finally one prepared by Jacques Saint-Cyr (Canadian Government Exhibition Commission) was chosen (RG 2, vol. 6265, Cabinet Conclusions, December 23, 1964).

Wednesday, December 30, 1964

With the design of the flag now finalized, the Department of Defence Production called for tenders on the manufacture of an estimated 16,000 flags, 12,000 for delivery as soon as possible.

Wednesday, January 6, 1965

The Interdepartmental Flag Committee met and appointed a Sub-committee on Outdoor Activities (PCO records, file N-2-2(a)-6, 1964-January 1965).

Friday, January 8, 1965

The Sub-committee on Outdoor Activities met and noted that the Governor General's Standard would be flying from the Peace Tower on February 15; the Standard would be lowered when he departed from Parliament Hill and the new flag raised in its place. The Sub-committee also noted that the new flag would be raised simultaneously on the East and West Blocks and on other government buildings throughout Ottawa at noon on February 15 (PCO records, file N-2-2(a)-6, 1964-January 1965, Minutes of the Sub-committee on Outdoor Activities, dated January 11, 1965).

Tuesday, January 19, 1965

The Interdepartmental Flag Committee completed its work on plans for the February 15 ceremony.

Wednesday, January 20, 1965

Cabinet met and agreed with the recommendation of the Interdepartmental Committee that there be a single ceremony, i.e., the Red Ensign would be lowered and the Maple Leaf flag raised in its place. For practical reasons, Cabinet decided that a stage would be erected in front of the Centre Block, the flags to be lowered and raised on a temporary flagpole.

Thursday, January 28, 1965

Queen Elizabeth II signed the flag proclamation at Buckingham Palace. Prime Minister Pearson was present on this historic occasion to witness royal approval of a distinctive Canadian flag.⁴⁰

Friday, February 12, 1965

Arrangements for the flag-raising ceremony were discussed at a Cabinet meeting. Cabinet

⁴⁰ The Proclamation, now in the custody of the National Archives of Canada, was prepared by Yvonne Diceman, a highly skilled calligrapher and designer, who was also responsible for the Canadian Bill of Rights (source: Matheson, *Canada's Flag*, p. 179).

concluded that: It was important that the Red Ensign lowered at the ceremony, the new flag there raised and other historic items relevant to the creation of a new flag be sent to the Archives or to the Canadian Historical Museum for safekeeping and display . This was the first Cabinet decision to preserve the special flags used on February 15 (RG 2, vol. 6271, Cabinet Conclusions, February 12, 1965).

Monday, February 15, 1965

Ceremonies to mark the raising of the new flag began at 11:00 a.m. in the Hall of Honour. Following speeches by Georges Vanier (Governor General of Canada), Lester Pearson (Prime Minister) and the Speakers of the Senate and House of Commons, dignitaries and guests moved outdoors. Canada's national flag was raised at noon. At the same time, Maple Leaf flags were raised on the East and West Blocks and following the lowering of the Governor General's standard, the new flag was hoisted on the Peace Tower for the first time.

Note: CBC television carried a live, one hour broadcast of the raising of the flag. A video copy is available at the National Archives of Canada.

Friday, March 5, 1965

Alan Winship (PCO), in a memo to Gordon Robertson (Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet), requested direction on the disposition of the flags used on February 15:

It will be useful to know whether the government wishes to have the first new flag flown from the Peace Tower and the one used on the platform on Flag Day placed in some special location (PCO records, file N-2-2(e), 1964-1965, Alan Winship to Gordon Robertson, March 5, 1965).

Tuesday, March 9, 1965

Cabinet directed that an interdepartmental committee consider and report upon a policy to be followed in the disposition of Red Ensigns.

Richard O Hagan (Press Secretary, Prime Minister's Office), in a note to Alan Winship (PCO), stated that he was in New York with the Prime Minister who spoke at a dinner of the Canadian Society. O Hagan further states that the Canadian flag behind the podium was the

trimmed formal type that we have been talking about for the Prime Minister's Office (PCO records, file N-2-2(a)-7, Richard O Hagan to Alan Winship, March 9, 1965).

Friday, March 12, 1965

A confidential PCO document dated March 12, and marked Agenda flag disposal, noted that Cabinet had directed that an interdepartmental group develop recommendations on various flag related matters, including the disposition of special flags: Peace Tower, Flag Ceremony, etc. (PCO records, file N-2-2(e), 1964-1965).

Note: This refers to what was referred to as the Flag Disposal Committee. Alan Winship was the PCO representative on the Committee and this document, a draft agenda, was probably prepared by him.

The Flag Disposal Committee met the same day, March 12, and the discussion was subsequently summarized by Alan Winship: During the meeting, we agreed also that the Committee should make recommendations concerning the disposition of special flags: the last Red Ensigns and the first Maple Leaf flags used on the Peace Tower, in the Flag ceremony, etc. Mr. Winship also suggested to his fellow Committee members that ... we should have a meeting on Thursday afternoon, March 25th, to consider the attached paper and the problem of special flags ... (PCO records, file N-2-2(e), 1964-1965, Memorandum for Members of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Disposal of Old Flags, dated March 22, 1965).

Note: This certainly suggests that the special flags used on February 15 were still under the control of the Privy Council Office or some other official in government or on Parliament Hill.

Tuesday, March 23, 1965

In a letter to John Matheson, MP, Alan Winship reiterates that the disposition of the special flags was under consideration: At this moment, there is an interdepartmental committee working quietly towards proposals for a policy for the disposition of the old Ensigns. It is looking, as well, at the question of a suitable means of disposing of the first Maple Leaf flags flown on the more important public buildings ... (PCO records, file N-2-2-(e), Alan Winship to John Matheson, March 23, 1965).

Thursday, April 1, 1965

The Interdepartmental Committee on the Disposal of Flags reported on its deliberations, but no mention was made of the special flags (PCO records, file N-2-2(e), 1964-1965, Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Disposal of Flags , dated April 1, 1965).

Note: The omission of any mention of the special flags is most curious; see below, April 8.

Thursday, April 8, 1965

In a draft Memorandum for Cabinet on Flag Disposal , Gordon Robertson wrote: The red ensign and the maple leaf flag used on the outside platform during ceremonies on February 15, as well as the last red ensign and the first new flag which flew from the Peace Tower, have been reserved for a final decision on disposal. *If they are to be preserved and displayed, the most suitable location would appear to be ... the Museum of Human History* (PCO records, file N-2-2(e), 1964-1965, Memorandum for Cabinet: Flag Disposal , dated April 8, 1965).

Note: The original memo contains a much longer note on the special flags , but most of the section has been crossed out. The document is annotated in Gordon Robertson s handwriting and these handwritten changes are indicated above in italics.

This recommendation, such as it is, formed part of Cabinet Document 205/65 dated April 21, 1965, and forms the basis of the Cabinet Decision taken at the meeting of Cabinet on May 4, 1965; see below for details.

Tuesday, May 4, 1965

Alan Winship (PCO), in a memo to Richard O Hagan (Press Secretary, Prime Minister s Office), informed him that it was not the usual practice in London, Canberra or Wellington for the national flag to be on display in the office of the Prime Minister (PCO records, file N-2-2(b), Alan Winship to Richard O Hagan, May 4, 1965).

Note: The request from Richard O Hagan is not on file, but it is clear that he requested from the PCO information on the practice of having the national flag in the office of the leader of the government.

Cabinet met the same day to discuss the broad question of the disposal of unused Red Ensigns in stock and used Maple Leaf flags. In addition, Cabinet concluded: The Red Ensign and the Maple Leaf flag used during the ceremonies on Parliament Hill on February 15, 1965, and the last Red Ensign as well as the first Maple Leaf flag to be flown from the Peace Tower to be transferred to the Museum of Human History for preservation . This was the second Cabinet decision to preserve the special flags used on February 15 (PCO records, file N-2-2(e), 1965-Dec. 1966, Record of Cabinet Decision, Meeting of May 4, 1965, paragraph 3).

Note: Again, this implies that the flags in question were under the control and or custody of an official, in the PCO or on Parliament Hill, who could give effect to this Cabinet decision.

Comment and Analysis

It is clear from the foregoing that steps had been taken in the Privy Council Office and at Cabinet to ensure that the first flags flown on Parliament Hill would be preserved. There is no record to indicate that this decision was ever implemented. The Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) has concluded, following an extensive search, that this first flag is not in their possession. In July 1966, Alan Winship of the PCO transferred a number of flag models, designs and other artifacts relating to the Pearson Pennant and the single red maple leaf flag to the Human History Branch, National Museum of Canada. These items have not been identified or located by the Museum.⁴¹

The flag now in the custody of the Minister of Canadian Heritage was for many years in the possession of the Leader of the Liberal Party. The accompanying flagstaff has a small plaque indicating that the flag was the first flown on Parliament Hill, and that it was donated to the National Liberal Caucus by Lester Pearson on April 24, 1968. The occasion was a farewell dinner in honour of the Pearsons, who were presented with matching writing desks. While the

⁴¹ PCO records, box 172, file N-2-2(a)-2(a), 1965-1966, Winship to Dr. Richard Glover, July 19, 1966 (with a list of items transferred); Dr. Glover's acknowledgement, dated August 8, 1966, is in PCO records, box 171, file N-2-2(a).

press reported on the dinner, there is no reference to the flag or to the fact that Pearson presented the flag to Caucus on this occasion.

Several former Pearson staff members (including Mary Macdonald, Jim Coutts and Richard O Hagan) and the chair of the caucus in the spring of 1968 (Judge Russell Honey) have been contacted about the flag. Those closest to the Prime Minister could not recall the first flag being given to him, although Miss Macdonald had a vague recollection of the Prime Minister receiving a flag. Gordon Robertson and Alan Winship had no recollection when asked about the fate of the flag.

The suggestion has also been made that one or both maple leaf flags used on February 15, 1965, eventually found their way into the hands of Lucien Lamoureux (then Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons). In July 2000, the Canadian Conservation Institute was contacted by retired Chief Warrant Officer J.W. Stevenson, who recounted the following story: the flag was lowered from the temporary flagpole by a military officer who handed it to Mr. Lamoureux. He is reported to have kept the flag in his possession during his term as Speaker of the House and later as a Canadian Ambassador in Europe. This same flag was supposedly the flag which draped the coffin at his funeral service in July 1998 and was subsequently retained by his widow who resides in Belgium. Unfortunately, there is no documentary information in the National Archives concerning the flag which draped Mr. Lamoureux's coffin.

General Conclusions

The story of the first flag prototypes and the first sewn flag is a mystery. There are no contemporary documents to substantiate stories that have appeared in print over the course of the last thirty-six years. It is clear, however, that the prototype now in the custody of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, is of special significance because it represents the very first effort to reproduce the design in flag format. Any further search for or identification of prototypes or first flags cannot proceed unless the Donovan/O Malley version of events (how many flags were made and what were the designs?) can be clarified beyond a reasonable doubt. Only when this is

sorted out can some definite opinion be offered on the provenance of the Jamieson flag.

With respect to the first flag flown on Parliament Hill, the paper trail ends in mystery too. Cabinet clearly decided that the first maple leaf flags used on February 15, 1965, the one raised on the temporary flagpole, as well as the flag to fly from the Peace Tower, were to be preserved. It appears, however, that no one was responsible for ensuring that the decision was acted upon and, as a consequence, both flags have seemingly disappeared or cannot now be located or identified with any certainty.

Indeed, one might question the significance that has been assigned to the first flag to be raised on Parliament Hill. Flags were raised simultaneously on the East and West Blocks and on government buildings in Ottawa and all across Canada, and at Canadian offices throughout the world. Records suggest that there was nothing significant about the first flag; it was manufactured as one of about twelve thousand flags that were ordered by the government in advance of February 15, 1965.

If the flag was not one-of-a-kind, there are two unique documents that put the story of the Canadian flag into perspective. Of first significance is [Dr. George Stanley's letter to John Matheson dated March 23, 1964](#), in which he suggested that a single maple leaf on a red-white-red background would be an appropriate national flag for Canada. Not only did Dr. Stanley describe the flag and its potential significance, he put pen to paper and rendered a likeness of the flag we have today. In the context of the flag controversy in 1964, his contribution, simple as it was, would eventually become the solution in an acrimonious and seemingly endless debate. Although the final, refined design was developed by skilled professionals at the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, especially by Jacques Saint-Cyr, George Stanley's letter is one of the most significant documents in the history of Canada's flag.

Of greatest importance is the [Flag Proclamation dated January 28, 1965](#). The Proclamation established the new Canadian flag and incorporated both the legal heraldic description as well as a vivid image of the official design. It not only proclaimed the adoption of a distinctive national flag, it also provided Canada and Canadians with an identity that is instantly recognizable throughout the world. Now in [the custody of the National Archives](#), the proclamation is part of our heritage, one of our country's key documents, signed by Queen

Elizabeth II and Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson.

George Stanley's inspired suggestion in March 1964, and the official flag proclamation of January 1965, stand at either end of a lengthy and often bitter controversy. These two documents tell the story of the conception and evolution of an idea, they document a flag design that has become for Canadians a powerful symbol of our national identity and an essential element of our Canadian heritage.

Glenn Wright
National Archives of Canada
January 2001
(revised, February 2001)

Sources Consulted

Archival Records:

The archival records listed in this section are in the custody of the National Archives of Canada.

Private Fonds

Alan Beddoe (MG 30, D252)

Hal Dornan (MG 32, G1)

W. Kaye Lamb (MG 31, D8)

Maurice Lamontagne (MG 32, B32)

John R. Matheson (MG 32, C29)

Lester B. Pearson (MG 26 N)

Especially significant are series N3, N4 and N5. Correspondence and documentation relative to the flag are found in file 912.1.

R. Gordon Robertson (MG 31, E87)

Peter Stursberg (MG 31, D78)

Government Records

Privy Council Office (RG 2)

Cabinet Conclusions, 1964-1965
central registry files, 1964-1966 (in the custody of the PCO)

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central registry files, 1964-1966, especially file 32-3, Protocol Branch (RG 6, acc. 86-87/320)
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Public Works (RG 11)

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Parliament (RG 14)

Special Committee on a Canadian Flag, 1964 (RG 14, acc. 87-88/146, boxes 101-102)

Trade and Commerce (RG 20)

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Videos:

CBC Television, Flag Ceremonies, February 15, 1965 (available at the National Archives of Canada)

Canadian Museum of Civilization, amateur video of the opening of the Maple Leaf Forever exhibit, December 1, 1989 (includes footage of John Matheson speaking at the opening, a tour of the exhibits and comments by John Matheson, George Bist, George Stanley and others on the origins of the flag)

Newspapers:

Various newspapers have been consulted in the course of this research, especially press

reports from 1964 and 1965, and from 1995 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the flag, including the following:

Ottawa Citizen
Ottawa Journal
Globe and Mail
Toronto Star
Winnipeg Tribune
Vancouver Sun
Hamilton Spectator
Kingston Whig-Standard
Brockville Recorder-Times
London Free Press

Contacts:

In the list that follows I have tried to identify the position held by the individual in 1964-1965 or, in the case of persons not involved in the adoption of the national flag, I have noted their current position and place of employment. Over a dozen of my colleagues at the National Archives offered advice and assistance at various stages of the research; their names are not included in this list.

David Cobb (retired journalist)
 James Coutts (Appointments Secretary, Prime Minister's Office)
 Allan Dickie (former journalist, *Kingston Whig-Standard*)
 Ken Donovan (Purchasing Agent, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission; father of Joan O Malley)
 Audrey Dubé (House of Commons Curatorial Staff)
 Jennifer Drew (Curator, Laurier House, Ottawa, Ontario)
 George Henderson (Archivist, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario)
 Judge Russell Honey (Chair, National Liberal Caucus, 1968)
 Edward G. Jamieson (Clothing and Textile Branch, Defence Production, 1964-1965)
 Edward Jamieson (son of Edward G. Jamieson)
 Bill Kretzel (designer/design historian, Ottawa, Ontario)
 Mary Macdonald (Executive Assistant to Prime Minister Pearson, 1964-1965)
 Judge John R. Matheson (Member of Parliament, member of the Flag Committee)
 Richard O Hagan (Press Secretary, Prime Minister's Office, 1964-1965)
 Brian O Malley
 Joan O Malley
 Margot Reid (Artifact Curator, Canadian Museum of Civilization)
 Patrick Reid (Director, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, 1964-1965)
 R. Gordon Robertson (Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, 1964-1965)

Bernie Roche (Curator, Laurier House, Ottawa, Ontario)
Fred Ross (former photographer, *Kingston Whig-Standard*)
Judy Tomlin (Head, Artifact Documentation, Canadian Museum of Civilization)
Alan Winship (official, Privy Council Office, 1964-1965)

Internet Resources:

Canadian Heritage (<http://www.pch.gc.ca>)

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