

Canada Day History

Canada Day (French: Fête du Canada) is the national day of Canada, a federal statutory holiday celebrating the anniversary of the July 1, 1867, enactment of the British North America Act, 1867 (today called the Constitution Act, 1867), which united three colonies into a single country called Canada within the British Empire. Originally called Dominion Day (French: Le Jour de la Confédération), the holiday was renamed in 1982, the year the Canada Act was passed.

The enactment of the British North America Act, 1867 (today called the Constitution Act, 1867), which confederated Canada, was celebrated on July 1, 1867, with the ringing of the bells at the Cathedral Church of St. James in Toronto, and "bonfires, fireworks and illuminations, excursions, military displays and musical and other entertainments," as

described in contemporary accounts. On June 20 of the following year, Governor General the Viscount Monck issued a royal proclamation asking for Canadians to celebrate the



anniversary of Confederation. However, the holiday was not established statutorily until May 15, 1879, when it was designated as Dominion Day, in reference to the designation of the country as a Dominion in the British North America Act. The holiday was initially not dominant in the national calendar; any celebrations were mounted by local communities, and the governor general hosted a party at Rideau Hall. No official celebrations were therefore held until 1917, and then none again for a further decade—the golden and diamond anniversaries of Confederation, respectively.

In 1946, Philéas Côté, a Quebec member of the House of Commons, introduced a private member's bill to rename Dominion Day as Canada Day. His bill was passed quickly by the House of Commons but was stalled by the Senate, which returned the bill to the Commons with the recommendation that the holiday be renamed The National Holiday of Canada, an amendment that effectively killed the bill.

Beginning in 1958, the Canadian government began to orchestrate Dominion Day celebrations. That year, then Prime Minister John Diefenbaker requested that Secretary of State Ellen Fairclough put together appropriate events, with a budget of \$14,000. Parliament was traditionally in session on July 1, but Fairclough persuaded Diefenbaker and the rest of the federal Cabinet to attend. Official celebrations



thereafter consisted usually of Trooping the Colour ceremonies on Parliament Hill in the afternoon and evening, followed by a mass band concert and fireworks display, though Fairclough, who became Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, later expanded the bills to include performing folk and ethnic groups, and the day became more casual and family oriented. Canada's centennial in 1967 is often seen as an important milestone in the history of Canadian patriotism and in Canada's maturing as a distinct, independent country, after which Dominion Day became more popular with average Canadians. Into the late 1960s, nationally televised, multi-cultural concerts held in Ottawa were added and the fête became known as Festival Canada. After 1980, the Canadian government began to promote celebrating Dominion Day beyond the national capital, giving grants and aid to cities across the country to help fund local activities.

Some Canadians were, by the early 1980s, informally referring to the holiday as Canada Day. However, this practice did cause some controversy: Numerous politicians, journalists, and authors decried the change at the time and some continue to maintain that it was illegitimate and an unnecessary break with tradition. Proponents argued that the name Dominion Day was a holdover from the colonial era and others asserted that an alternative was needed as the term does not translate well into French. Conversely, these arguments were disputed by those who claimed Dominion was widely misunderstood, and conservatively

inclined commenters saw the change as part of a much larger attempt by Liberals to "re-brand" or re-define Canadian history.

The holiday was officially renamed as a result of a private member's bill that passed on July 9, 1982, two years after receiving first reading in the House of Commons. The bill was passed by the House in five minutes, without debate, which inspired "grumblings about the underhandedness of the process." It met with stronger resistance in the Senate—some Senators objected to the change of name.

Most communities across the country will host organized celebrations for Canada Day, usually outdoor public events, such as parades, carnivals, festivals, barbecues, air and maritime shows, fireworks, and free musical concerts, as well as citizenship ceremonies for new citizens. The locus of the celebrations is the national capital, Ottawa, Ontario, where large concerts and cultural displays are held on Parliament Hill, with the governor general and prime minister typically officiating, though the monarch or another member of the Royal Family may also attend or take the governor general's place. Smaller events are mounted in other parks around the city and in Gatineau, Quebec.



Canada Day coincides with Quebec's Moving Day, when many fixed-lease apartment rental terms expire. The bill changing the province's moving day from May 1 to July 1 was introduced in order not to affect children still in school in the month of May.