

Civic Holiday History

Civic Holiday is a public holiday in Canada celebrated on the first Monday in August.

Though the first Monday of August is celebrated in most of Canada as a public holiday, it is only officially known as "Civic Holiday" in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, where it is a territorial statutory holiday.

In other provinces and municipalities, the holiday is known by a variety of names, including British Columbia Day in British Columbia, New Brunswick Day in New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan Day in Saskatchewan; all of these places celebrate the date as a provincial statutory holiday.

The holiday is celebrated as Heritage Day in Alberta; Natal Day in Nova Scotia, in commemoration of the founding of the Halifax–Dartmouth area; and as Terry Fox Day in Manitoba, in honor of the Manitoba-born athlete. The date is also celebrated as several municipal holidays in Ontario, such as Simcoe Day in Toronto, John Galt Day in Guelph, and Colonel By Day in Ottawa. Despite its special designations, the day is not a statutory holiday in Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Alberta, or Ontario; however, it is commonly observed by all levels of government, financial institutions, and some businesses.

The word "civic" is in reference to municipalities (such as cities, towns, etc.), as this day is not legislatively mandated a public holiday across the country by the Canadian federal government and is often given a different, more specific name by some municipalities or provinces.

Alberta

In 1974, the Government of Alberta, acting through Minister of Culture Horst A. Schmid, declared the first Monday in August an annual holiday to recognize and celebrate the varied cultural heritage of Albertans, known as "Heritage Day." This gave rise in 1976 to the Edmonton Heritage Festival, a three-day celebration of food, dance, and handicrafts of cultures from around the world. Heritage Day is not a statutory holiday.

British Columbia

In 1974, Surrey MLA Ernie Hall, part of the BC NDP government of Dave Barrett, introduced legislation in the provincial legislature to establish the day as a provincial statutory holiday. As the name suggests, "British Columbia Day" celebrates the history, heritage, and culture of British Columbia.

Manitoba

In Manitoba, the first Monday in August is celebrated as "Terry Fox Day" in honor of athlete and cancer research activist Terry Fox, who was born in Winnipeg in 1958.

The province marked the first Terry Fox Day on August 3, 2015, making Manitoba the first province to name a day in Fox's honor. British Columbia and Ontario have since begun to celebrate "Terry Fox Day" on the second Sunday of September, as that is usually the national date for the Terry Fox Run.

Ontario

In Ontario, the first Monday of August is technically a municipal holiday, as it is not designated as an official statutory holiday by provincial legislation. (Various private member's bills have been introduced in the Ontario Legislature attempting to make it official, but none has passed to date.)

As such, the holiday takes on different names and celebrates different subjects according to municipality. Many Ontario municipalities have chosen to honor a significant local person or organization to localize the celebration; when not given a local name, the day is often generically referred to as "Civic Holiday" or "August Civic Holiday."

In 2008, the Ontario Legislature passed a law identifying the first of August as "Emancipation Day," because the British Parliament abolished slavery in the British Empire as of August 1, 1834. However, it is still not an official holiday. The Caribbean Cultural Festival, formerly known as Caribana, is held this holiday weekend in Toronto, coinciding with Emancipation Day.

The Civic Holiday is now known by one of a number of local appellations, including the following:

- "Founders' Day" in Brantford: each year, the Brantford Heritage Committee submits a report to City Council with the name or organization that is to be recognized on that day.
- "Joseph Brant Day" in Burlington: celebrating Joseph Brant, the Mohawk Chief who became known for his treaty negotiations and loyalty to the British.
- "James Cockburn Day" in Cobourg: celebrating James Cockburn, one of the "fathers of Confederation."
- "John Galt Day" in Guelph: celebrating John Galt, the Scottish novelist and businessman who founded the city.
- "George Hamilton Day" in Hamilton: celebrating George Hamilton, the eponymous founder of the city.
- "McLaughlin Day" in Oshawa: celebrating Robert McLaughlin, who brought General Motors to Oshawa.
- "Colonel By Day" in Ottawa: celebrating Colonel John By, who led the construction of the Rideau Canal and founded Bytown, which became the city of Ottawa.
- "Peter Robinson Day" in Peterborough: celebrating Peter Robinson.
- "Alexander Mackenzie Day" in Sarnia: celebrating Alexander Mackenzie, the 2nd Prime Minister of Canada.
- "Simcoe Day" in Toronto: celebrating John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada and the leading proponent of the Act Against Slavery.
- "Benjamin Vaughan Day" in Vaughan: celebrating the eponymous Benjamin Vaughan.

Although a work holiday is given to employees of the federal, provincial, and many municipal governments, the Government of Ontario has not defined this day as a statutory holiday that all employers must treat as a holiday, and it is not mentioned in Ontario's Employment Standards Act nor the Retail Business Holidays Act.

Simcoe Day

In 1869, the city of Toronto became the first to introduce the civic holiday when the Toronto City Council called for a midsummer holiday for a "day of recreation." In 1875, the City Council fixed the first Monday in August as a Civic Holiday.

The holiday was renamed "Simcoe Day" in 1969 in honor of John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, who established York (now Toronto) as the capital of Ontario, and who was the leading proponent of the Act Against Slavery. However, a motion at the Ontario Municipal Association to extend the name change across Ontario failed.

Prince Edward Island

The holiday is not an official holiday, although some businesses may close for the day. Additionally, federal workers receive the day off and federal services are closed, but municipal and provincial services and workers have varying decisions made on their status, with some choosing to have a day off in celebration of Gold Cup Parade instead. This leads to a mix of openings and closings across the province. The capital city of Charlottetown has its own Natal Day, in early June, which should not be confused with Nova Scotia's Natal Day.

Saskatchewan

An official holiday on the first Monday in August was first proposed in Saskatchewan on March 17, 1975, by Gordon Snyder, Saskatchewan's Minister of Labour. The holiday was already celebrated by businesses across Saskatchewan, but Snyder wanted it to be a recognized statutory holiday known as "Saskatchewan Day." His proposal was approved in June of that year and the first Saskatchewan Day was celebrated that August.

The first Monday of August in Saskatchewan is therefore a statutory holiday as designated in the Labour Standards Act.

Non-observing jurisdictions

The first Monday in August is not generally observed as a holiday in Quebec, parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, or Yukon.

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