

Canada's History



ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

When Europeans explored Canada they found all regions occupied by native peoples they called Indians, because the first explorers thought they had reached the East Indies. The native people lived off the land, some by hunting and gathering, others by raising crops. The Huron-Wendat of the Great Lakes region, like the Iroquois, were farmers and hunters. The Cree and Dene of the Northwest were hunter-gatherers. The Sioux were nomadic, following the bison (buffalo) herd. The Inuit lived off Arctic wildlife. West Coast natives

preserved fish by drying and smoking. Warfare was common among Aboriginal groups as they competed for land, resources and prestige.

The arrival of European traders, missionaries, soldiers and colonists changed the native way of life forever. Large numbers of Aboriginals died of European diseases to which they lacked immunity. However, Aboriginals and Europeans formed strong economic, religious and military bonds in the first 200 years of coexistence which laid the foundations of Canada.



(Top)

Indian encampment, fur trade era

(Right)

John Cabot, an Italian immigrant to England, was the first to map Canada's Atlantic shore, setting foot on Newfoundland or Cape Breton Island in 1497 and claiming the *New Founde Land* for England. English settlement did not begin until 1610



Jacques Cartier was the first European to explore the St. Lawrence River and to set eyes on present-day Québec City and Montreal

THE FIRST EUROPEANS

The Vikings from Iceland who colonized Greenland 1,000 years ago also reached Labrador and the island of Newfoundland. The remains of their settlement, l'Anse aux Meadows, are a World Heritage site.

European exploration began in earnest in 1497 with the expedition of John Cabot, who was the first to draw a map of Canada's East Coast.

EXPLORING A RIVER, NAMING CANADA

Between 1534 and 1542, Jacques Cartier made three voyages across the Atlantic, claiming the land for King Francis I of France. Cartier heard two captured guides speak the Iroquoian word *kanata*, meaning "village." By the 1550s, the name of *Canada* began appearing on maps.



ROYAL NEW FRANCE

In 1604, the first European settlement north of Florida was established by French explorers Pierre de Monts and Samuel de Champlain, first on St. Croix Island (in present-day Maine), then at Port-Royal, in Acadia (present-day Nova Scotia). In 1608 Champlain built a fortress at what is now Québec City. The colonists struggled against a harsh climate. Champlain allied the colony with the Algonquin, Montagnais and Huron, historic enemies of the Iroquois, a confederation of five (later six) First Nations who battled with the French settlements for a century. The French and the Iroquois made peace in 1701.

The French and Aboriginal people collaborated in the vast fur-trade economy, driven by the demand for beaver pelts in Europe. Outstanding leaders like Jean Talon, Bishop Laval, and Count Frontenac built a French Empire in North America that reached from Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico.

STRUGGLE FOR A CONTINENT

In 1670, King Charles II of England granted the Hudson's Bay Company exclusive trading rights over the watershed draining into Hudson Bay. For the next 100 years the Company competed with Montreal-based traders. The skilled and courageous men who travelled by canoe were called *voyageurs* and *coureurs des bois*, and formed strong alliances with First Nations.

English colonies along the Atlantic seaboard, dating from the early 1600s, eventually became richer and more populous than New France. In the 1700s France and Great Britain battled for control of North America. In 1759, the British defeated the French in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham at Québec City — marking the end of France's empire in America. The commanders of both armies, Brigadier James Wolfe and the Marquis de Montcalm, were killed leading their troops in battle.

THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC

Following the war, Great Britain renamed the colony the "Province of Quebec." The French-speaking Catholic people, known as *habitants* or *Canadiens*, strove to preserve their way of life in the English-speaking, Protestant-ruled British Empire.

A TRADITION OF ACCOMMODATION

To better govern the French Roman Catholic majority, the British Parliament passed the *Quebec Act* of 1774. One of the constitutional foundations of Canada, the *Quebec Act* accommodated the principles of British institutions to the reality of the province. It allowed religious freedom for Catholics and permitted them to hold public office, a practice not then allowed in Britain. The *Quebec Act* restored French civil law while maintaining British criminal law.

UNITED EMPIRE LOYALISTS

In 1776, the 13 British colonies to the south of Quebec declared independence and formed the United States. North America was again divided by war. More than 40,000 people loyal to the Crown, called "Loyalists," fled the oppression of the American Revolution to settle in Nova Scotia and Quebec. Joseph Brant led thousands of Loyalist Mohawk Indians into Canada. The Loyalists came from Dutch, German, British, Scandinavian, Aboriginal and other origins and from Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Jewish, Quaker and Catholic religious backgrounds. About 3,000 black Loyalists, freedmen and slaves came north seeking a better life. In turn, in 1792, some black Nova Scotians, who were given poor land, moved on to establish Freetown, Sierra Leone (West Africa), a new British colony for freed slaves.

(From Left to Right)

Count Frontenac refused to surrender Quebec to the English in 1690, saying: "My only reply will be from the mouths of my cannons!"

Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, was a great hero of New France, winning many victories over the English, from James Bay in the north to Nevis in the Caribbean, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries

Sir Guy Carleton (Lord Dorchester), as Governor of Quebec, defended the rights of the *Canadiens*, defeated an American military invasion of Quebec in 1775, and supervised the Loyalist migration to Nova Scotia and Quebec in 1782–83

The first elected Assembly of Lower Canada, in Québec City, debates whether to use both French and English, January 21, 1793



The Beginnings of Democracy

Democratic institutions developed gradually and peacefully. The first representative assembly was elected in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1758. Prince Edward Island followed in 1773, New Brunswick in 1785. The *Constitutional Act* of 1791 divided the Province of Quebec into Upper Canada (later Ontario), which was mainly Loyalist, Protestant and English-speaking, and Lower Canada (later Quebec), heavily Catholic and French-speaking.

The Act also granted to the Canadas, for the first time, legislative assemblies elected by the people. The name *Canada* also became official at this time and has been used ever since. The Atlantic colonies and the two Canadas were known collectively as British North America.

ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

Slavery has existed all over the world, from Asia, Africa and the Middle East to the Americas. The first movement to abolish the transatlantic slave trade emerged in the British Parliament in the late 1700s. In 1793, Upper Canada, led by Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, a Loyalist military officer, became the first province in the Empire to move toward abolition. In 1807, the British Parliament prohibited the buying and selling of slaves, and in 1833 abolished slavery throughout the Empire. Thousands of slaves escaped from the United States, followed “the North Star” and settled in Canada via the Underground Railroad, a Christian anti-slavery network.



(Bottom from Left to Right)

Lieutenant-Colonel John Graves Simcoe was Upper Canada’s first Lieutenant Governor and founder of the City of York (now Toronto). Simcoe also made Upper Canada the first province in the British Empire to abolish slavery

Mary Ann Shadd Cary was an outspoken activist in the movement to abolish slavery in the U.S.A. In 1853 she became the first woman publisher in Canada, helping to found and edit *The Provincial Freeman*, a weekly newspaper dedicated to anti-slavery, black immigration to Canada, temperance (urging people to drink less alcohol) and upholding British rule

A GROWING ECONOMY

The first companies in Canada were formed during the French and British regimes and competed for the fur trade. The Hudson’s Bay Company, with French, British and Aboriginal employees, came to dominate the trade in the northwest from Fort Garry (Winnipeg) and Fort Edmonton to Fort Langley (near Vancouver) and Fort Victoria—trading posts that later became cities.

The first financial institutions opened in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Montreal Stock Exchange opened in 1832. For centuries Canada’s economy was based mainly on farming and on exporting natural resources such as fur, fish and timber, transported by roads, lakes, rivers and canals.



(From Left to Right)
HMS *Shannon*, a Royal Navy frigate, leads the captured USS *Chesapeake* into Halifax harbour, 1813. There were also naval battles on the Great Lakes

Major-General Sir Isaac Brock and Chief Tecumseh. Together, British troops, First Nations and Canadian volunteers defeated an American invasion in 1812–14

The War of 1812: The Fight for Canada

After the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte’s fleet in the Battle of Trafalgar (1805), the Royal Navy ruled the waves. The British Empire, which included Canada, fought to resist Bonaparte’s bid to dominate Europe. This led to American resentment at British interference with their shipping. Believing it would be easy to conquer Canada, the United States launched an invasion in June 1812. The Americans were mistaken. Canadian volunteers and First Nations, including Shawnee led by Chief Tecumseh, supported British soldiers in Canada’s defence. In July, Major-General Sir Isaac Brock captured Detroit but was killed while defending against an American attack at Queenston Heights, near Niagara Falls, a battle the Americans lost. In 1813, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles de Salaberry and 460 soldiers, mostly French *Canadiens*, turned back 4,000 American invaders at Châteauguay, south of Montreal. In 1813 the Americans burned Government House and the Parliament Buildings in York (now Toronto). In retaliation in 1814, Major-General Robert Ross led an expedition from Nova Scotia that burned down the White House and other public buildings in Washington, D.C. Ross died in battle soon afterwards and was buried in Halifax with full military honours.

By 1814, the American attempt to conquer Canada had failed. The British paid for a costly Canadian defence system, including the Citadels at Halifax and Québec City, the naval drydock at Halifax and Fort Henry at Kingston—today popular historic sites. The present-day Canada-U.S.A. border is partly an outcome of the War of 1812, which ensured that Canada would remain independent of the United States.



The Duke of Wellington sent some of his best soldiers to defend Canada in 1814. He then chose Bytown (Ottawa) as the endpoint of the Rideau Canal, part of a network of forts to prevent the U.S.A. from invading Canada again. Wellington, who defeated Napoleon in 1815, therefore played a direct role in founding the national capital



In 1813, Laura Secord, pioneer wife and mother of five children, made a dangerous 19-mile (30-km) journey on foot to warn Lieutenant James FitzGibbon of a planned American attack. Her bravery contributed to victory at the Battle of Beaver Dams. She is recognized as a heroine to this day

French-Canadian militiamen helped defend Canada in the War of 1812



REBELLIONS OF 1837–38

In the 1830s, reformers in Upper and Lower Canada believed that progress toward full democracy was too slow. Some believed Canada should adopt American republican values or even try to join the United States. When armed rebellions occurred in 1837–38 in the area outside Montreal and in Toronto, the rebels did

not have enough public support to succeed. They were defeated by British troops and Canadian volunteers. A number of rebels were hanged or exiled; some exiles later returned to Canada.

Lord Durham, an English reformer sent to report on the rebellions, recommended that Upper and Lower Canada be merged and given *responsible government*. This meant that the ministers of

Discover Canada

The Fathers of Confederation established the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867, the birth of the country that we know today

the Crown must have the support of a majority of the elected representatives in order to govern. Controversially, Lord Durham also said that the quickest way for the *Canadiens* to achieve progress was to assimilate into English-speaking Protestant culture. This recommendation demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of French Canadians, who sought to uphold the distinct identity of French Canada.

Some reformers, including Sir Étienne-Paschal Taché and Sir George-Étienne Cartier, later became Fathers of Confederation, as did a former member of the voluntary government militia in Upper Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald.

RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

In 1840, Upper and Lower Canada were united as the Province of Canada. Reformers such as Sir Louis-Hippolyte La Fontaine and Robert Baldwin, in parallel with Joseph Howe in Nova Scotia, worked with British governors toward responsible government.

The first British North American colony to attain full responsible government was Nova Scotia in 1847–48. In 1848–49 the governor of United Canada, Lord Elgin, with encouragement from London, introduced responsible government.

This is the system that we have today: if the government loses a confidence vote in the assembly it must resign. La Fontaine, a champion of democracy and French language rights, became the first leader of a responsible government in the Canadas.



CONFEDERATION

From 1864 to 1867, representatives of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Province of Canada, with British support, worked together to establish a new country. These men are known as the Fathers of Confederation. They created two levels of government: federal and provincial. The old Province of Canada was split into two new provinces: Ontario and Quebec, which, together with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, formed the new country called the Dominion of Canada. Each province would elect its own legislature and have control of such areas as education and health.

The British Parliament passed the *British North America Act* in 1867. The Dominion of Canada was officially born on July 1, 1867. Until 1982, July 1 was celebrated as “Dominion Day” to commemorate the day that Canada became a self-governing Dominion. Today it is officially known as Canada Day.

Dominion of Canada \$1 bill, 1923, showing King George V, who assigned Canada’s national colours (white and red) in 1921, the colours of our national flag today



Dominion from Sea to Sea

Sir Leonard Tilley, an elected official and Father of Confederation from New Brunswick, suggested the term *Dominion of Canada* in 1864. He was inspired by Psalm 72 in the Bible which refers to “dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.” This phrase embodied the vision of building a powerful, united, wealthy and free country that spanned a continent. The title was written into the Constitution, was used officially for about 100 years, and remains part of our heritage today.

Sir Louis-Hippolyte La Fontaine, a champion of French language rights, became the first head of a responsible government (similar to a prime minister) in Canada in 1849



Expansion of the Dominion

- 1867 – Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick
- 1870 – Manitoba, Northwest Territories
- 1871 – British Columbia
- 1873 – Prince Edward Island
- 1880 – Transfer of the Arctic Islands (to N.W.T.)
- 1898 – Yukon Territory
- 1905 – Alberta, Saskatchewan
- 1949 – Newfoundland and Labrador
- 1999 – Nunavut

Did you know? In the 1920s, some believed that the British West Indies (British territories in the Caribbean Sea) should become part of Canada. This did not occur, though Canada and Commonwealth Caribbean countries and territories enjoy close ties today.

Canada's First Prime Minister

In 1867, **Sir John Alexander Macdonald**, a Father of Confederation, became Canada's first Prime Minister. Born in Scotland on January 11, 1815, he came to Upper Canada as a child. He was a lawyer in Kingston, Ontario, a gifted politician and a colourful personality. Parliament has recognized January 11 as Sir John A. Macdonald Day. His portrait is on the \$10 bill.

Sir George-Étienne Cartier was the key architect of Confederation from Quebec. A railway lawyer, Montrealer, close ally of Macdonald and patriotic *Canadien*, Cartier led Quebec into Confederation and helped negotiate the entry of the Northwest Territories, Manitoba and British Columbia into Canada.

Sir John A. Macdonald,
the first Prime Minister of
the Dominion of Canada



CHALLENGE IN THE WEST

When Canada took over the vast northwest region from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869, the 12,000 Métis of the Red River were not consulted. In response, Louis Riel led an armed uprising and seized Fort Garry, the territorial capital. Canada's future was in jeopardy. How could the Dominion reach from sea to sea if it could not control the interior?

Ottawa sent soldiers to retake Fort Garry in 1870. Riel fled to the United States and Canada established a new province: Manitoba. Riel was elected to Parliament but never took his seat. Later, as Métis and Indian rights were again threatened by westward settlement, a second rebellion in 1885 in present-day Saskatchewan

led to Riel's trial and execution for high treason, a decision that was strongly opposed in Quebec. Riel is seen by many as a hero, a defender of Métis rights and the father of Manitoba.

After the first Métis uprising, Prime Minister Macdonald established the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) in 1873 to pacify the West and assist in negotiations with the Indians. The NWMP founded Fort Calgary, Fort MacLeod and other centres that today are cities and towns. Regina became its headquarters. Today, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP or "the Mounties") are the national police force and one of Canada's best-known symbols. Some of Canada's most colourful heroes, such as Major-General Sir Sam Steele, came from the ranks of the Mounties.

(From Left to Right)

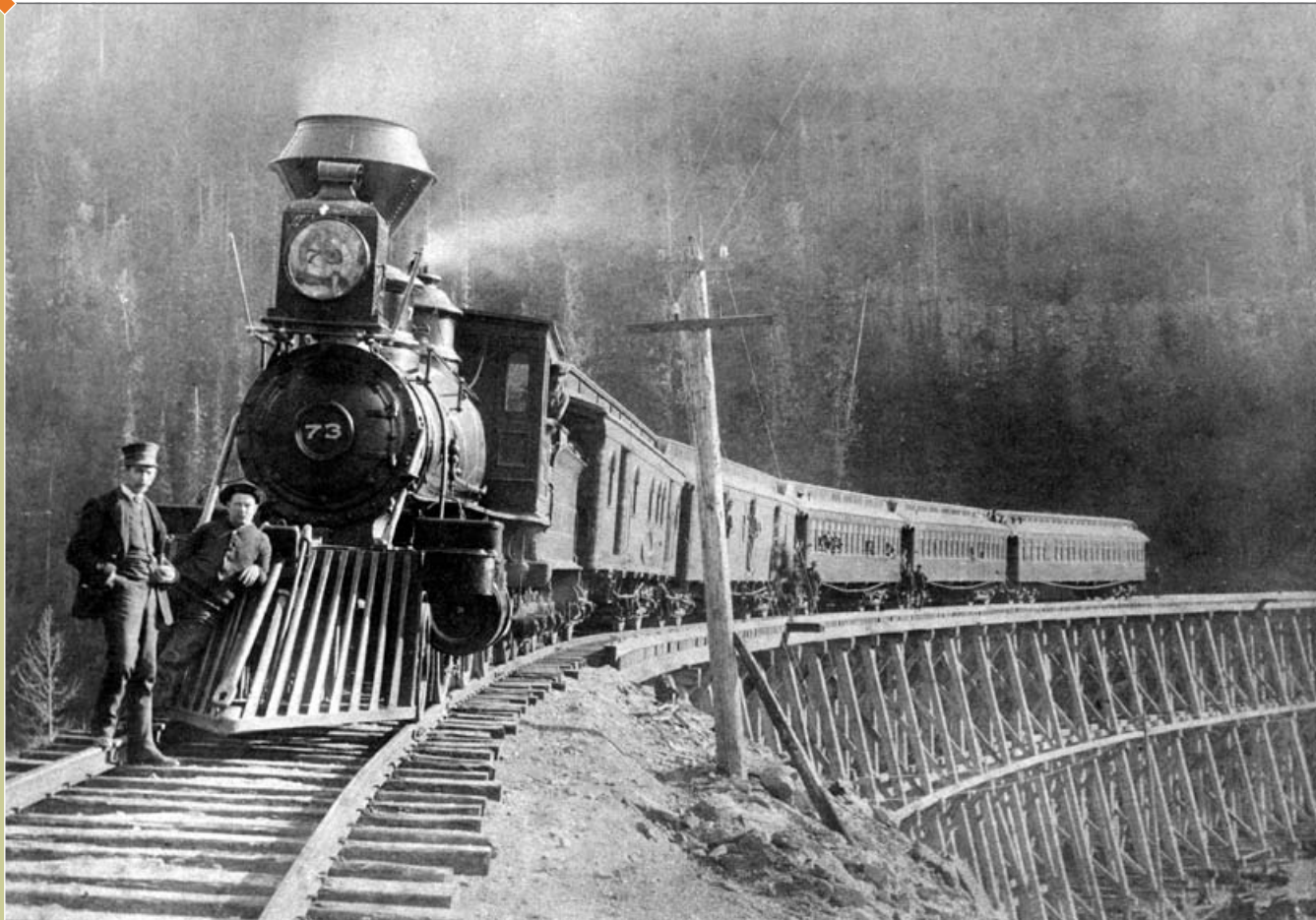
Fort Garry, 1863: the flag of the Hudson's Bay Company flew over Western Canada for 200 years before Confederation

Sir Sam Steele: A great frontier hero, Mounted Policeman and soldier of the Queen

Métis Resistance: Gabriel Dumont was the Métis' greatest military leader



Members of the train crew pose with a westbound Pacific Express, at the first crossing of the Illecillewaet River near Glacier, B.C., 1886



A Railway from Sea to Sea

British Columbia joined Canada in 1871 after Ottawa promised to build a railway to the West Coast. On November 7, 1885, a powerful symbol of unity was completed when Donald Smith (Lord Strathcona), the Scottish-born director of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), drove the last spike. The project was financed by British and American investors and built by both European and Chinese labour. Afterwards the Chinese were subject to discrimination, including the Head Tax, a race-based entry fee. The Government of Canada apologized in 2006 for this discriminatory policy. After many years of heroic work, the CPR's "ribbons of steel" fulfilled a national dream.



Chinese workers' camp on the CPR, Kamloops, B.C., 1886

MOVING WESTWARD

Canada's economy grew and became more industrialized during the economic boom of the 1890s and early 1900s. One million British and one million Americans immigrated to Canada at this time.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier became the first French-Canadian prime minister since Confederation and encouraged immigration to the West. His portrait is on the \$5 bill. The railway made it possible for immigrants, including 170,000 Ukrainians, 115,000 Poles and tens of thousands from Germany, France, Norway and Sweden to settle in the West before 1914 and develop a thriving agricultural sector.



(From Left to Right)

Sergeant, Fort Garry Horse, Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1916

Sir Arthur Currie, a reserve officer, became Canada's greatest soldier

Maple leaf cap badge from the First World War. Canada's soldiers began using the maple leaf in the 1850s



THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Most Canadians were proud to be part of the British Empire. Over 7,000 volunteered to fight in the South African War (1899–1902), popularly known as the Boer War, and over 260 died. In 1900, Canadians took part in the battles of Paardeberg (“Horse Mountain”) and Lillfontein, victories that strengthened national pride in Canada.

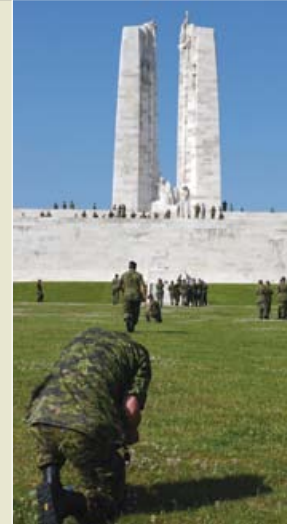
When Germany attacked Belgium and France in 1914 and Britain declared war, Ottawa formed the Canadian Expeditionary Force (later the Canadian Corps). More than 600,000 Canadians served in the war, most of them volunteers, out of a total population of eight million.

On the battlefield, the Canadians proved to be tough, innovative soldiers. Canada shared in the tragedy and triumph of the Western Front. The Canadian Corps captured Vimy Ridge in April 1917, with 10,000 killed or wounded, securing the Canadians’ reputation for valour as the “shock troops of the British Empire.” One Canadian officer said: “It was Canada from the

Atlantic to the Pacific on parade ... In those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation.” April 9 is celebrated as Vimy Day.

Regrettably, from 1914 to 1920, Ottawa interned over 8,000 former Austro-Hungarian subjects, mainly Ukrainian men, as “enemy aliens” in 24 labour camps across Canada, even though Britain advised against the policy.

In 1918, under the command of General Sir Arthur Currie, Canada’s greatest soldier, the Canadian Corps advanced alongside the French and British Empire troops in the last hundred days. These included the victorious Battle of Amiens on August 8, 1918—which the Germans called “the black day of the German Army”—followed by Arras, Canal du Nord, Cambrai and Mons. With Germany and Austria’s surrender, the war ended in the Armistice on November 11, 1918. In total 60,000 Canadians were killed and 170,000 wounded. The war strengthened both national and imperial pride, particularly in English Canada.



(From Top to Bottom)

The Vimy Memorial in France honours those who served and died in the Battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917, the first British victory of the First World War

Agnes Macphail, a farmer and teacher, became the first woman MP in 1921

WOMEN GET THE VOTE

At the time of Confederation, the vote was limited to property-owning adult white males. This was common in most democratic countries at the time. The effort by women to achieve the right to vote is known as the women’s suffrage movement. Its founder in Canada was Dr. Emily Stowe, the first Canadian woman to practise medicine in Canada. In 1916, Manitoba became the first province to grant voting rights to women.

In 1917, thanks to the leadership of women such as Dr. Stowe and other suffragettes, the federal government of Sir Robert Borden gave women the right to vote in federal elections — first to nurses at the battle front, then to women who were related to men in active wartime service. In 1918, most Canadian female citizens aged 21

and over were granted the right to vote in federal elections. In 1921 Agnes Macphail, a farmer and teacher, became the first woman MP. Due to the work of Thérèse Casgrain and others, Quebec granted women the vote in 1940.



More than 3,000 nurses, nicknamed “Bluebirds,” served in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, 2,500 of them overseas



Discover Canada

(From Left to Right)
 Canadian soldiers
 observe Remembrance
 Day
 Remembrance Day poppy
 Canadian war veteran



Scouts with
 Remembrance Day
 wreath

Canadians remember the sacrifices of our veterans and brave fallen in all wars up to the present day in which Canadians took part, each year on November 11: Remembrance Day. Canadians wear the red poppy and observe a moment of silence at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month to honour the sacrifices of over a million brave men and women who have served, and the 110,000 who have given their lives. Canadian medical officer Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae composed the poem “In Flanders Fields” in 1915; it is often recited on Remembrance Day:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
 Between the crosses, row on row,
 That mark our place; and in the sky
 The larks, still bravely singing, fly
 Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the dead. Short days ago
 We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
 Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
 In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
 To you from failing hands we throw
 The torch; be yours to hold it high.
 If ye break faith with us who die
 We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
 In Flanders fields.*

BETWEEN THE WARS

After the First World War, the British Empire evolved into a free association of states known as the British Commonwealth of Nations. Canada remains a leading member of the Commonwealth to this day, together with other successor states of the Empire such as India, Australia, New Zealand, and several African and Caribbean countries.

The “Roaring Twenties” were boom times, with prosperity for businesses and low unemployment. The stock market crash of 1929, however, led to the Great Depression or the “Dirty Thirties.” Unemployment reached 27% in 1933 and many businesses were wiped out. Farmers in Western Canada were hit hardest by low grain prices and a terrible drought.

There was growing demand for the government to create a social safety net with minimum wages, a standard work week and programs such as unemployment insurance. The Bank of Canada, a central bank to manage the money supply and bring stability to the financial system, was created in 1934. Immigration dropped and many refugees were turned away, including Jews trying to flee Nazi Germany in 1939.



Phil Edwards was a Canadian track and field champion. Born in British Guiana, he won bronze medals for Canada in the 1928, 1932 and 1936 Olympics, then graduated from McGill University Medical School. He served as a captain in the Canadian Army during the Second World War and, as a Montreal doctor, became an expert in tropical diseases



In the Second World War, the Canadians captured Juno Beach as part of the Allied invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944

The D-Day Invasion, June 6, 1944

In order to defeat Nazism and Fascism, the Allies invaded Nazi-occupied Europe. Canadians took part in the liberation of Italy in 1943–44. In the epic invasion of Normandy in northern France on June 6, 1944, known as D-Day, 15,000 Canadian troops stormed and captured Juno Beach from the German Army, a great national achievement shown in this painting by Orville Fisher. Approximately one in ten Allied soldiers on D-Day was Canadian. The Canadian Army liberated the Netherlands in 1944–45 and helped force the German surrender of May 8, 1945, bringing to an end six years of war in Europe.



THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World War began in 1939 when Adolf Hitler, the National Socialist (Nazi) dictator of Germany, invaded Poland and conquered much of Europe. Canada joined with its democratic allies in the fight to defeat tyranny by force of arms.

More than one million Canadians and Newfoundlanders (Newfoundland was a separate British entity) served in the Second World War, out of a population of 11.5 million. This was a high proportion and of these, 44,000 were killed.

The Canadians fought bravely and suffered losses in the unsuccessful defence of Hong Kong (1941) from attack by Imperial Japan, and in a failed raid on Nazi-controlled Dieppe on the coast of France (1942).

The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) took part in the Battle of Britain and provided a high proportion of Commonwealth aircrew in bombers and fighter planes over Europe. Moreover, Canada contributed more to the Allied air effort than any other Commonwealth country, with over 130,000 Allied air crew trained in Canada under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) saw its finest hour in the Battle of the Atlantic, protecting convoys of merchant ships against German submarines. Canada's Merchant Navy helped to feed, clothe and resupply Britain. At the end of the Second World War, Canada had the third-largest navy in the world.

In the Pacific war, Japan invaded the Aleutian Islands, attacked a lighthouse on Vancouver Island, launched fire balloons over B.C. and the Prairies, and grossly maltreated Canadian prisoners of war captured at Hong Kong. Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945—the end of four years of war in the Pacific.

Regrettably, the state of war and public opinion in B.C. led to the forcible relocation of Canadians of Japanese origin by the federal government and the sale of their property without compensation. This occurred even though the military and the RCMP told Ottawa that they posed little danger to Canada. The Government of Canada apologized in 1988 for wartime wrongs and compensated the victims.