

Recently we enjoyed St. Valentine's Day; an occasion for couples to express their affection of each other. And earlier in the same week we celebrated the British Columbia holiday of Family Day when the range of our affections widens to encompass our family as well as our friends and fellow provincial citizens.

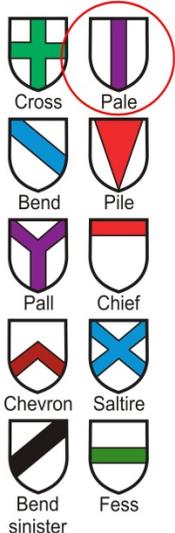
Closely following these events was an occasion where all Canadians can express their association for each other as citizens of a proud nation. The occasion of February 15 was National Flag of Canada Day. It was 49 years ago in 1965 that our distinctive flag was raised across our nation and at overseas locations around the world.

The National Flag of Canada Day was an integral part of the BC/Yukon Branch involvement at the recent Cumberland Heritage Fair held on February 15, 2014. Branch members Don Mayers and Steve Cowan manned the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada booth at this well attended all day civic event. At the beginning of the day we were the only participants who seemed to be aware of the birthday of our national flag. By the end of the day we had handed out a good supply of our national flag (courtesy of Heritage Canada). Booth visitors were questioned about our flag and all were pleased to know about the significance of February 15.



Don Mayers (left) and Steve Cowan (right), both RHSC members from the Comox Valley, distributing flags at The BC/Yukon Branch table-top display on National Flag of Canada Day at the Cumberland Heritage Fair on February 15, 2014, Cumberland BC.

The design of our flag did not match the formal heraldic designs, called the



"Ordinaries"

The closest design is the Pale. The Pale was a shield divided into thirds. This didn't fit our flag so a new heraldic term was approved in a Proclamation by Her Majesty on 28 January 1965.

The Canadian Pale

The central portion is one-half of the width. The outer portions are one-quarter of the width.



Part of our message was to explain how our national flag was the harbinger of Canadian heraldry. And from the development of our national flag the Canadian Honours System and the Canadian Heraldic Authority arose.

A more detailed description of the development of our national flag was given at the heraldry presentation to the Victoria Genealogical Society on February 13. With National Flag of Canada Day soon after this presentation I had included heraldic aspects of our flag as the Canadian Pale was developed in 1964 and then proclaimed by Her Majesty on January 28, 1965.

The salient item was the development of the Canadian Pale as an official heraldic design. In a flag with the ratio of 2:1 length to width the Canadian Pale results in a square in the centre and a quarter of the width as a border on both sides. This was a first in official heraldry of the Commonwealth. The concept of a wider centre pale has been seen earlier in vexillology, that part of heraldry sealing with flags. For instance, the state flag of the State of Iowa, in use since 1921, has a broad pale of one-half of the width; with a flag ratio of 3:4 the centre area is not a square as in our flag. Our flag has a symmetrical and simple charge compared with the Iowan flag with a charge, a motto and a title in its pale.

Interest in our national flag was evident at our Heritage Day booth. Both adults and children were surprised and pleased when handed a free flag. And most of the parents of the young children in attendance hadn't been born when the new flag was raised.

One member of the public dropped by our RHSC booth and recalled the occasion of the first raising of our new national flag. One February 15, 1965, Chief Warrant Officer Rick Grinham, O.M.M., C.D. (retired), of Cumberland BC, was a young soldier attached to One Surface-to-Surface Missile Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery and the flag raising ceremony has a very special meaning. On that date Rick and his fellow soldiers were on a field training exercise along the border separating West Germany from East Germany. Being February the weather was sub-zero and the countryside and forest were covered in snow. At 11:00am on the big day, and in full view of the East German border guards, the old flag was lowered and the new National Flag of Canada was raised. A trumpeter played O Canada as the soldiers saluted. Afterwards the soldiers gathered and celebrated the occasion with a tot of army rum. Over the next few weeks the various military vehicle decals were replaced with the new national flag maple leaf.

Next year, 2015, is the sexagenary (60th) anniversary of the National Flag of Canada. We have an opportunity to spread the word about heraldry as our flag has special heraldic meaning. Your participation in any civic events you either develop or learn about will help with the mission of the Society to make Canadians aware of Canadian heraldry.

References:

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