

Victoria Day and Empire Day

A Canadian Tradition

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Instructional Resources Unit
Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth

Empire Day & Victoria Day

A Canadian Tradition

✿ **Victoria Day was established to celebrate the birthday of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Victoria Day became an official holiday in Canada by a declaration of the Canadian legislature in 1845.**



☞ Victoria was born on May 24, 1819. She was the only daughter of Edward, Duke of Kent, Fourth Son of King George III. Her father died shortly after her birth and because Victoria's uncles had no legitimate heirs, she became the next in line for the throne of Britain.

❧ **Victoria became the sovereign ruler of Britain and all her domains on June 20, 1837 upon the death of her uncle King William IV. She was only 18 years of age. Her reign lasted until her death in 1901, making Victoria the longest ruling monarch in British history.**



**The 24th of May is the Queen's Birthday
If we don't get a holiday, we'll all run away!**

- Newfoundland Verse -



Source: Manitoba Pictorial Collection
Archives-Instructional Resources Unit

☛ **Victoria Day was always celebrated on the 24th of May unless that day fell on a Sunday. In which case, it was celebrated on the Monday. In 1952, an amendment to the Statutes of Canada was passed by Parliament that established Victoria Day as always being the first Monday after the 24th of May.**



King George V and Queen Mary with children

Source: Empire Day Annuals

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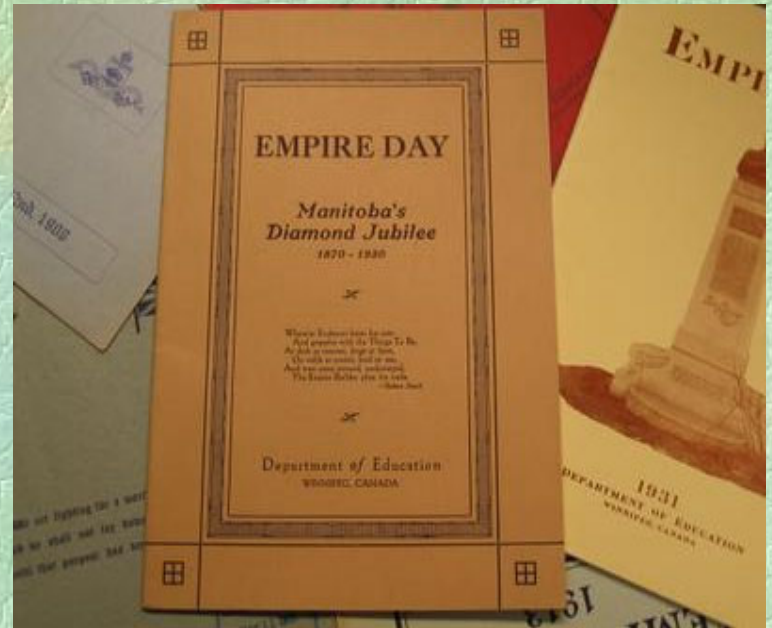
☛ In 1897, Clementina Fessenden created Empire Day as a way for the children of Canada to celebrate the glory of the British Empire. Manitoba, and every other province in the Dominion as well as Newfoundland, held community events to mark the occasion. Empire Day was also celebrated in other Commonwealth countries such as New Zealand and Australia. The holiday was established on the last school day before May 25th.



School children celebrating Empire Day, New South Wales, Australia

Source: Empire Day Annuals, Archives-Instructional Resources Unit

☞ **Manitoba Department of Education produced “Empire Day” annuals (ca. 1908-1931) during the height of Empire Day recognition. These publications included a discussion on Empire Day itself as well as history lessons, songs, poems, pictures, and stories.**



Empire Day Annuals

Source: Archives-Instructional Resources Unit

The Empire Day Movement

Motto

“One King, One Flag, One Fleet, One Empire”

Watchwords

“Responsibility, Duty, Sympathy, Self-Sacrifice”

Rallying Cry

“For God, Duty and Empire”

Flowers

“Daisies, Ox-eyed Daisies and Bachelor’s Buttons”

Empire Day, May 23, 1917

**The Honorable Robert S. Thornton,
Minister of Education of Manitoba, stated:**

"The Motherland with the overseas Dominions, India, and other British territories constitute the British Empire, and May 23rd, the day before Victoria Day, is celebrated as Empire Day to mark and impress on our minds the character, extent, and significance of the Empire to which we belong. All over the world wherever the British flag flies boys and girls will be celebrating the day."

🐉 **“Empire Day” was designed to encourage children in feeling part of the greater Empire. Messages to the children of Manitoba were included from various provincial premiers as well as from citizens of other British dominions.**



East Kildonan students and teacher

Source: Manitoba Pictorial Collection, Archives-Instructional Resources Unit

☛ **During World War I, “Empire Day” was used to communicate nationalistic fervor in support of the Dominion and Great Britain. Lessons in the booklet expressed the right and might of the allies and their goals.**

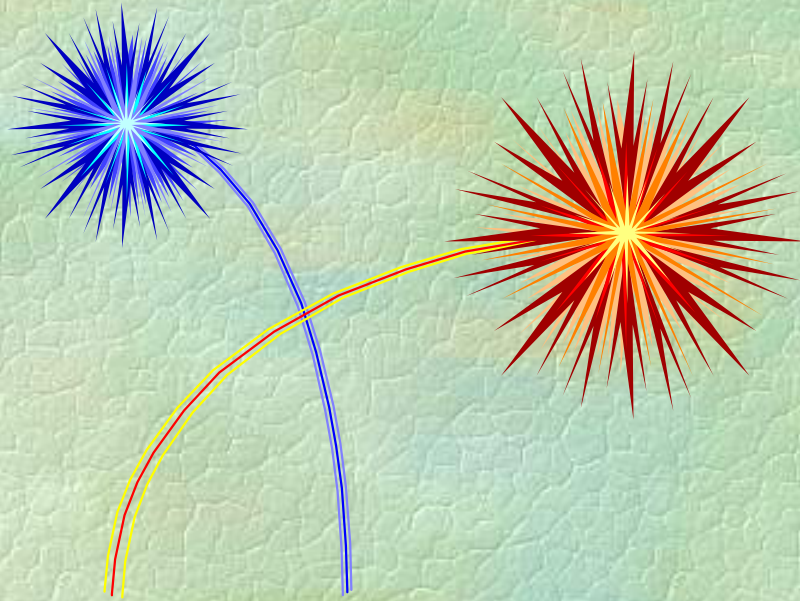


Canadian troops in Winnipeg, World War I

Source: Empire Day Annuals, Archives-Instructional Resources Unit

☞ **It is interesting to note the changing tone of “Empire Day.” The annual grew progressively more Canadian (more Canadian authors and subject matter) into the 20th century.**

☞ **Empire Day continued to be celebrated in Canada the day before Victoria Day but slowly died out by the 1940s.**



The End!

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