

Colonel George Francis Gillman Stanley CC CD FRSC FRHSC(hon) FRHistS



(July 6, 1907 – September 13, 2002) was a Canadian historian, author, soldier, teacher, public servant, and designer of the Canadian Flag.

George F.G. Stanley was born in Calgary, Alberta in 1907 and received a BA from the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He went to Keble College, University of Oxford, in 1929 as the Rhodes Scholar from Alberta, and held a Beit Fellowship in Imperial Studies and a Royal Society of Canada Scholarship. He earned a BA, MA, MLitt and DPhil. Always a keen athlete, he played for the Oxford University Ice Hockey Club, which won the Spengler Cup in 1931. At Oxford, he wrote his book, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of The Riel Rebellions*, and began his lifelong work on Louis Riel.

George Stanley retired from teaching in 1975, but remained active in public life. From 1981 to 1987, he was Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, a post in which he served with

great distinction. While Lieutenant-Governor, Stanley continued to act as General Editor of *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel* in five volumes, which appeared in 1985 after seven years of work by five Canadian scholars; this project was published ahead of schedule and under budget. Well into his nineties, Stanley continued to research, write, read manuscripts, review books, give interviews and talks, encourage young scholars, and maintain an active interest in the militia, cadets, St. John Ambulance, and SEVEC. He answered a steady flow of letters from school children asking about the Canadian flag. He never missed an opportunity to promote Canadian citizenship and love of country. In 1998, he donated his book collection to the Special Collections of the MacKimmie Library at the University of Calgary;^[6] his personal papers are now also deposited there. Stanley died in 2002 and was buried with full military honours in Sackville, New Brunswick.

In 1946, George Stanley married Ruth L. Hill (1922–2017), ONB, BA, BCL, LLD, DCLJ, MMLJ, FRSA, a Montreal lawyer (she was gold medalist in law at McGill University). They had three daughters: Della M.M. Stanley [Hon. Thomas Cromwell], Professor Marietta R.E. Stanley (1952–2008) [formerly married to Maurice McAtamney], and Laurie C.C. Stanley-Blackwell [John D. Blackwell]. The Stanleys also have two grandchildren: Thomas E.G.S. Cromwell [Megan Ormshaw] and Ruth L.H.Q. Stanley-Blackwell.

Designer of the Canadian Flag

On 23 March 1964, Stanley wrote a formal four-page memorandum to John Matheson, a member of the multi-party parliamentary flag committee, suggesting that the new flag of Canada should be instantly recognizable, use traditional colours, and be a simple design. He included a rough sketch of his design in the memorandum.



Stanley had become friends with Matheson in Kingston, Ontario, where their children learned Scottish dancing together. Two months before the Great Flag Debate erupted on 17 May 1964 with Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson's courageous—or strategic—speech at the Royal Canadian Legion's national convention in Winnipeg, Matheson had paid a visit to Stanley at Royal Military College of Canada. Over lunch at the RMC mess hall, the two discussed heraldry, the history and

the future of Canada, and the conundrum of the flag. And as the two men walked across the parade grounds, Stanley gestured toward the roof of the Mackenzie Building and the college flag flapping atop its tower. "There, John, is your flag," Stanley remarked, suggesting the RMC College Flag's red-white-red as a good basis for a distinctive Canadian flag. At the centre, Stanley proposed, should be placed a single red maple leaf instead of the college emblem: a mailed fist holding a sprig of three green maple leaves.

The suggestion was followed by Stanley's detailed memorandum of 23 March 1964 on the history of Canada's emblems, in which he warned that any new flag "must avoid the use of national or racial symbols that are of a divisive nature" and that it would be "clearly inadvisable" to create a flag that carried either a Union Jack or a fleur-de-lis. His vision provided a sound rationale and brought together all the key components of the new flag design. Stanley wrote the pivotal flag memorandum in his study at Cluny House, Pittsburgh Township, just east of Kingston; this fine stone residence was built in 1820 by Colonel Donald Macpherson (c.1755-1829),^[33] a maternal uncle of Sir John A. Macdonald. Stanley was forbidden by his superiors at RMC from appearing in person before the Parliamentary Flag Committee, which was made up of 15 MPs from various federal political parties.

The Stanley proposal was placed on a wall of the Flag Committee's meeting room in Ottawa with hundreds of other flag designs, and eventually was selected as one of the final three designs for consideration. In a classic Canadian compromise, the Stanley design, which was supported by the sole NDP member (Reid Scott) on the Flag Committee, beat out John Diefenbaker's flag (a combination of fleurs-de-lis, a maple leaf and the Union Flag) and the Pearson Pennant (three red leaves conjoined on a stem set against a white background with blue bars on either side—a flag proposal designed by Alan Beddoe).

Stanley's design was slightly modified by Jacques Saint-Cyr, a graphic artist with the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission (and ironically a Quebec sovereigntist),^[36] who reduced the number of points on the stylized maple leaf from 13 to 11. The Stanley design was officially adopted as the national flag of Canada (replacing the Canadian Red Ensign) by the House of Commons on 15 December 1964 and by the Senate on 17 December 1964, and proclaimed by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, taking effect on 15 February 1965. At 2:00 am on 15 December 1964, following the historic vote in the House of Commons to adopt Stanley's maple leaf design as Canada's new flag, Matheson wrote to Stanley: "Your proposed flag has just now been approved by the Commons 163 to 78. Congratulations. I believe it is an excellent flag that will serve Canada well."

Many Canadians did not yet share this sentiment. Shortly before the official flag raising on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on 15 February 1965 (February 15 was declared National Flag of Canada Day in 1996), Stanley received an anonymous death threat. Unperturbed, he attended the ceremony in a colourful and quintessentially Canadian Hudson's Bay coat,^[38] which stood out dramatically in a sea of dark formal attire worn by the other dignitaries.

Support for the new flag grew quickly, including in Quebec. As Matheson noted in his book *Canada's Flag* (1980), "when in June 1965, Dr. George F.G. Stanley of [the] Royal Military College ... was granted an honorary doctorate at Université Laval, he was loudly applauded by the student body when the Canadian flag was referred to in his citation. The applause interrupted the citation." French-Canadian nationalists had long demanded that the Union Jack (Union Flag) be removed from any future Canadian flag.

Some debate lingered over whether Stanley or Saint-Cyr should get credit for the flag, but it was settled in 1995 when Prime Minister Jean Chrétien officially recognized Stanley as the designer of

Canada's flag. Stanley also suggested the name for the Canadian pale, an original vexillological and heraldic device first used in the Maple Leaf flag.

In a feature article for The Canadian Encyclopedia, entitled "The Stanley Flag," Richard Foot observed: "The main players in the flag saga are now gone. Pearson died in 1972, Stanley in 2002 and Matheson in 2013. But what they created has lasted for nearly half a century and counting – flown from the top of the Peace Tower and from thousands of public and private buildings across the country, from embassies around the world, and recently, at Olympic medal ceremonies in Sochi, Russia. The Stanley flag is now a universally-recognized Canadian symbol." Former Governor-General David Johnston has written in a "letter" to George Stanley, "Our flag dares us to press on with the unfinished work of our country: to be ever more free and fair, just and inclusive; to be keener of mind and kinder of heart. ... Amazing what the right flag – your flag, our flag – can do.

Honours

- 1976 Officer of the Order of Canada
- 1983 Honorary Fellow of the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada
- 1983 Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada
- 1992 Knight Grand Cross of the Acadia Commandery, Order of Saint Lazarus Canada
- 1994 Companion of the Order of Canada