

# MINNIE H. BOWEN'S

Canada

Documentary Record  
For elementary school



## MINNIE H. BOWEN ET LE DRAPEAU CANADIEN

# Historical Context

## Document 1: Creation of a Federal Canadian Regime Within the Eastern Townships

After 1867, Canada undergoes a period of reflection on its identity and its international image. How do Canadians perceive themselves? What role do they wish to play on the international stage? What type of relationship do they wish to maintain with Great-Britain and with the United-States? Two ideological and political concepts confront each other throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century: **imperialism** and **nationalism**. At the turn of the century, a strong sentiment of Canadian national affirmation develops among the English-speaking population, whose members wished to be clearly distinct from the United-States, all while maintain close ties to the British Empire. This train of thought is both **nationalist** and **imperialist**. At the same time, French-Canadians are also experiencing a strong national sentiment of their own.

It is difficult to paint a homogenous portrait of the Eastern Townships as they were in this period. Certain rural environments were traditionally English-speaking, while others were exclusively French-speaking. In urban sectors, both groups lived side by side, but the American influence was strongly felt, be it within institutions or in the business sector. Within the English-speaking community, several groups gathered within various organizations. Individuals of British origins became members of the St.George Society; individuals of Irish origins became members of the St.Patrick Society; and individuals of Scottish origins became members of the St.Andrew's Society.

In townships where the population was predominantly of British origin, such as the Sherbrooke, Compton or Richmond Townships, people were overtly loyal to the British metropolis throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. These were the golden years of Great-Britain's imperial glory, at the time the world's greatest empire. During events such as Victoria Day, the British flag, the Union Jack, flew over residents' houses. On the other hand, in villages where the population was predominantly of American origin, such as Stanstead or Barnston, one could see the Stars and Stripes, the American flag, flying proudly on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the American national holiday. In sum, one could infer the origins of the inhabitants of various areas within the Eastern Townships by observing the flags that were flown on days of historical significance.



### Imperialism:

In Canada, imperialism was a partisan movement that promoted, maintained or renewed imperial ties. A nation is qualified as imperialist when it controls one or several others, as was the case with the British Empire. This can be a political or institutional domination, and is generally associated with colonialism.

### Nationalism:

In Canada and in Quebec, nationalism was a partisan movement that sought to gain greater power for the nation, often at the expense of other groups. This school of thought promotes or defends a nation, that is, a group of individuals who share various common characteristics (ethnic background, language, culture, etc.)

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Montréal: les éditions Hurtubise
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## Document 2: Hallmarks of the History of Anglophone Women

In the nineteenth century, girls of British origin were often educated according to Victorian (Queen Victoria) ideology. In order to stay busy and to readily find a husband, girls were introduced to the arts, to music, to foreign languages. The purpose of this education was, firstly, to allow them to become better wives and mothers; secondly, women were expected to contribute to an enjoyable family environment through their culture and knowledge.

In contrast, Catholic girls were raised to become women dedicated to a life of motherhood or of religion. French-Canadian girls were thus not as educated. Moreover, the 1880-1940 era represents, for the Anglo-Protestant community, a time when feminine political, social and educational movements developed at a rapid rate.



*Hélène Margaret Johnson (1835-1863)  
is one of the first women to publish  
her poetry in a journal. Her first  
poems were published in 1859 in  
the Stanstead Journal.*



Nina May (Pickel) Owens is one of the first Canadian female artists. She was born in Bolton Centre in 1869. She played a particularly important role in Canadian art history as she contradicted popular beliefs and knowledge regarding women and artists at the turn of the twentieth century. Nina proudly displayed her domestic and artistic roles, and in doing so called into question conventional notions of femininity and of the exclusively male nature of the artistic sphere.



## A Few Important Dates in Women's History:

- 1849** Canadian Parliament strips women of their right to vote on the pretext that they are too vulnerable.
- 1874** The Compton Ladies' College is founded. As of 1893, a preparatory class for McGill's entrance exams is offered by this institution. The course was based on the scholarly training given to girls in British colleges.
- 1889** Isabella Jacques is the first woman admitted to Bishop's University's Faculty of Medicine, located, at the time, in Montreal.
- 1890** The Christian Women's Union for Temperance is founded. This Eastern Townships women's organization fought for women's right to vote, among other things.
- 1893** The Women's Council of Montreal is founded. This is the first feminist organization founded in the Province of Quebec. Its purpose is to gain greater civil and political rights for women. It is largely made up of Protestant women.
- 1894** The House of Commons rejects a petition in favour of women's right to vote presented by the Christian Women's Union for Temperance.
- 1906** After having been called to service during the Boer War (1898-1902), nurses are officially admitted to the Canadian Armed Forces.
- 1910** The Quebec Women's Institutes are founded.
- 1917** During wartime, Canadian women who have a family member (spouse, son, brother, father) who served in the army are given the right to vote in the federal elections. In this same year, Ontario and British-Columbia grant women the right to vote in provincial elections.
- 1918** Canadian women who are not excluded on the grounds of their race or of their First Nations heritage and who are aged 21 and over officially obtain the right to vote at the federal elections, but cannot yet vote in provincial elections.
- 1940** The Province of Quebec grants women of non-Native descentance the right to vote.

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# Minnie H. Bowen and the Canadian Flag

Document 10: Minnie H. Bowen: A Woman in Search of a Canadian Symbol

From the time of Confederation until the establishment of an official, distinct Canadian flag, there was always some debate over what emblem would best represent the Canadian people. The "flag issue," as it was known, first came to a head in the 1920s when Prime Minister Mackenzie King established a committee to find an appropriate design to represent Canada. Prior to this, Britain's Royal Union Flag (Union Jack) had flown over the parliament buildings (since 1904), but many people favoured the Red Ensign. Various versions of the Canadian Red Ensign functioned as the country's unofficial emblem, despite the fact that it had only been authorized for marine use and had no legal status on land.

The flag issue inspired a flood of letters to newspapers and magazines. Many individuals submitted proposals (designs on paper as well as cloth prototypes) in the hopes of creating an emblem for Canada, but it is difficult to imagine anyone more passionate and perseverant in this matter than Minnie H. Bowen.

Indeed, Minnie's interest in the flag appears to have begun early as the 1890s, when correspondence indicates her concern regarding Canadians' lack of a proper emblem, unique to the Canadian people. Her letters also testify to the fact that she had done extensive research on the history of flags – the British flag, in particular – and she understood the symbolism of design elements. When Prime Minister King formed a committee to find a suitable flag for Canada, Minnie was prepared. She had already put together her own proposal and established a clear argument for her design.

The symbolism of Minnie's design and her fervent belief that her flag should become Canada's national symbol are best expressed in her own words, as articulated in *The Ottawa Evening Journal*, September 25, 1930:

"It is a simple, clear design, easily distinguished, not to be mistaken for any other. It does not exalt any section or race, but represents the whole. It is rich in color, striking in effect and in beauty would rank near the white



ensign and the Union Jack. It does not go to the animal or vegetable kingdom for appeal, nor to the stars nor to race, with its precious inheritance of ideals, language and blood. These are lesser things. It appeals by the sign, which is the highest revelation of the spiritual world, devoted sacrifice. It would represent the heroic sacrifices by which Canada's history was made. First, those of the French explorers, settlers and missionaries, who, under their white banner, raised the cross in this land, followed by the sacrifices of all our pioneers, English, Scottish and Irish, and other races. By steadfastness, courage and devotion, these men and women gave Canada her soul."

Minnie Bowen died in 1942, years before the flag issue would finally be settled in 1965. Although Minnie's flag was not destined to become Canada's chosen emblem, it did hang for a time, during the 1930s, in the editorial office of the *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, where the public was invited to view it and express their opinion.

Minnie's flag is a symbol, not only of one woman's perseverant, literate and passionate campaign, it also speaks to deeply held convictions, sentiments of identification and unity with other provinces, devotion to country, and racial inclusiveness – attributes which certainly were shared by many of her peers, English-speaking Townshippers who helped shape their province and their country.

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<http://100objects.qahn.org/content/minnie-h-bowen-canadian-flag-c-1920s>



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