

A Celebration Of Empire: Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee

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On June 30, 1997, much of the world watched live satellite coverage as the old crown colony of Hong Kong, one of the last remnants of "the Empire on which the sun never set," reverted to Chinese rule after well over a century of British control. The head of the Better Hong Kong Foundation proclaimed, "Hong Kong's return to China is the most important event of this century." An extravaganza on July 1st, budgeted at over \$18 million, included a flotilla of barges with historic displays in Victoria Harbour, a massive fireworks display, a laser light show, and the world's largest karaoke singalong, in which an estimated 1.8 million people participated.

A hundred years previously, the attention of the world was focused on the greatest celebration of the 19th century - Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee - the commemoration of her 60 years on the throne. At that time over a quarter of the people in the world, and almost a quarter of its land mass, were under Victoria's rule. Most of the crowned heads of Europe were her children or grandchildren. On June 22, 1897, 320 million citizens of a global empire, including almost five million Canadians, took a holiday in honour of their beloved monarch.

The Woman Who Would be Queen

Georgiana Charlotte Augusta Alexandrina Victoria was born on May 24, 1819, the daughter of Edward, Duke of Kent, the fourth son of George III. Victoria's father died within a year of her

birth, and she was raised in relative seclusion in Kensington Palace, London. She acceded to the throne in 1837 at the age of 18, following the deaths of her three uncles, none of whom had legitimate heirs.

Much has been written of Victoria's life, and in particular, of her relationship with her cousin, Albert, whom she married on Feb. 10, 1840. Albert's untimely death in 1861 left Victoria, at the age of 42, a widow with nine children. She retreated into depression and went through a lengthy period of mourning. A process of re-emergence began around the time of her Golden Jubilee in 1887. The show of loyalty and devotion, by crowned heads of Europe and the lowliest of her subjects alike, succeeded in raising the curtains of despair which had kept Victoria from the public eye for so long.

The Diamond Jubilee of 1897

The Golden Jubilee of 1887 had been a great and noteworthy occasion, but the events of 10 years later transcended anything the world had known. In 1897, the 78-year-old Queen was revered as a symbol of imperial unity. While the guest list at the 1887 Jubilee had been dominated by the ubiquitous royal relatives, in 1897 the special guests of honour were the eleven colonial Premiers, accompanied by contingents of their nations's military forces.

As they had in 1887, the Jubilee celebrations in Britain began on Accession Day, Sunday, June 20, when the Queen took part in a simple ceremony of thanksgiving at

St. George's Chapel in Windsor. It featured the Jubilee Hymn *O King of Kings*, with text by the late Bishop of Wakefield and music by Sir Arthur Sullivan, which had been appointed for use in all churches and chapels throughout the Empire on that day. The service also included a rendition of the *Hymn of Praise*, by Mendelssohn, one of the Queen's favourite composers, which was sung by Canadian soprano Emma Albani.

The following day, June 21st, was a significant day for Canada. In the morning, it was officially announced that the honour of Knight Grand Cross in the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George would be bestowed upon the Canadian premier, as the representative figure among the colonial leaders. Wilfrid Laurier became Sir Wilfrid in a ceremony at Buckingham Palace that evening.

The main Jubilee celebrations took place on June 22nd. The Canadian cavalry opened the Colonial Procession, riding five abreast. The Right Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier came next, occupying the first of the carriages. Directly behind him was a detachment of the Toronto Grenadiers and Royal Canadian Highlanders. Following them were troops representing the breadth, and the colour, of the entire Empire. Next came the Royal Procession, which included an assortment of alternating military bands and squadrons, sheriffs on horseback, a hundred equerries, gentlemen-in-waiting and military attachés, and carriages carrying sundry English and foreign princes, and other royals. Finally, a carriage appeared drawn by eight cream-coloured horses and bearing the Queen herself.

The Jubilee service of thanksgiving took place outside St. Paul's Cathedral, where an estimated 15,000 people had crowded into the relatively confined space to watch. The brief ceremony included an intonation of the "Te Deum" composed by Victoria's late

husband Albert, a benediction pronounced by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the mass singing of the National Anthem and the Doxology ("Old Hundredth"), with new words honoring the Queen's long reign, specially composed for the occasion. The service concluded with a spontaneous and thunderous chorus of three cheers for the Queen.

Celebrating the Jubilee in Canada

Shortly before she left Buckingham Palace on June 22nd, the Queen pressed a button relaying her personal Jubilee message to all parts of the Empire: "From my heart I thank my beloved people. May God bless them." Five minutes later in Ottawa, Lord Aberdeen, Canada's Governor-General, responded: "The Queen's most gracious and touching message, this moment received, shall be immediately made known to all your Majesty's people throughout the Dominion and will stir afresh the hearts already full on this memorable day. We offer the glad tribute of loyal devotion and affectionate homage. God save and bless the Queen."

The excitement of the London celebrations had its local counterpart in hundreds of cities, towns and hamlets across Canada. On June 22, 1897, flags, bunting and banners covered buildings and adorned the streets by day, while electric lights, Chinese lanterns, fireworks, and great bonfires illuminated the night sky. Jubilee processions took place in almost every populated centre.

Two factors are of particular note in contemporary accounts. First, the Jubilee celebrations were civic events which brought together those from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Winnipeg newspapers proclaimed that the Jubilee "showed how patriotism can bind in joyous and fraternal bonds elements of every nation and creed." However, the description

"fraternal" is especially apt. While the universality exhibited in Jubilee parades crossed national and religious boundaries, the role of women in such public celebrations throughout the 19th century was generally limited to making costumes or helping to decorate floats for processions.

Canadian celebrations were also noteworthy for their emphasis on children. Children's Jubilee parades were often held as events separate from the "main" Jubilee processions. In Winnipeg, 4,000 public school students, plus 2,000 from the private Catholic schools, marched like a "well-disciplined army." This scene was repeated in cities across the country. One of the largest celebrations took place in Ottawa, where almost 10,000 school children marched to Parliament Hill, all carrying flags.

In some centres, the children's concerts were quite elaborate. The program of the Festival Chorus of the Toronto School Children held at Exhibition Park, Toronto, was accompanied by the Band of the Royal Grenadiers. Along with the to-be-expected renditions of "God Save the Queen," "The Maple Leaf," and "Rule Britannia," it included a number of well-known patriotic and traditional songs, and several works specially composed for the occasion.

The primary objective of these children's parades and demonstrations was the inculcation of patriotic sentiment in the nation's youth. The chair of the local school board in Halifax wrote of the Jubilee events:

We have recognized and our law recognizes, the duty of transmitting to our children the feelings of loyalty which bind us so firmly to the motherland - the birth-place of so many of us. We would have our children look with reverence to those who represent the highest authority

in our empire, and in this Dominion of ours, for we would have them emulate their virtues in their devotion to country and in their willingness to do and to sacrifice for the good of the people.

The Events Remembered

The spirit of patriotic fervour was not restricted to the week of "official" remembrance. A rash of books appeared, detailing the Queen's ancestry and highlighting her glorious reign. The Queen's name and portrait were used to market everything from soap to cocoa to liver pills! Like any major public event, the Diamond Jubilee also inspired a plethora of souvenir items - flags, medals, stamps, ties, bookmarks, postcards, teacups - most featuring images of the Royal Family. Enterprising inventors produced items such as cork galoshes with five-inch heels, made for the benefit of shorter persons who wished to view the processions and had difficulty seeing over the crowds.

By the time of the Diamond Jubilee, changing tastes in women's fashions meant that there was no longer a vogue for such creations as a patented musical bustle which played the National Anthem whenever the wearer sat down, created for the Golden Jubilee in 1887. However, for the musically inclined, the events of 1897 inspired numerous songs and instrumental works. These were performed at a multitude of concerts in the weeks leading up to and immediately following Jubilee day. And although almost all have now been long forgotten, these patriotic pieces remained popular for years in an era when gatherings around the piano represented one of the most common forms of family and party entertainment.

Much of the popular music produced in honour of the Diamond Jubilee was

uncomplicated, and almost banal in nature. For example, the "Diamond Jubilee March," by Berkley Chadwick, with its simple block-like chords and repetitive form, and culminating in a fortissimo rendition of "God Save the Queen", provides little musical challenge to the pianist. Jules Norman's "The Diamond Jubilee Waltzes" incorporates a medley of melodies from his own works, then, once again, concludes with the National Anthem, this time in waltz tempo and devolving into a rousing finale *con brio e marcato*.

Patriotic vocal works of the Jubilee year fall into several categories. Many combined expressions of Canadian loyalty with effusive panegyrics to Victoria. Consider *Victoria the Rose of England (Canada's Greeting to the Queen on her Diamond Jubilee)*, words and music by Roberta Geddes-Harvey, one of Canada's first female composers:

Oh Queen by Millions lov'd and
feared!
O Empress thro' the world revered;
VICTORIA! the great, the good!
Thou crown of queenly womanhood!
Thy faithful subjects o'er the sea,
Greet thee with tender loyalty!

Another common approach among songwriters in the Jubilee year was to focus on the British flag as a symbol of Empire. For instance, J.C. Morgan's "For Queen, Flag and Country" emphasizes the links between Canada and Britain:

'It's only a small bit of bunting,
It's only an old tattered rag'
Yet victory, liberty, freedom
Triumphantly wait on that flag
The cross of Saint George and Saint
Patrick
With Saint Andrew's is lovingly bound
The red, white and blue of old
England

With our own royal Maple is crowned.

A particularly interesting example of a work focusing on the flag is "The Flag for Me," with words by J.A. Phillips:

Give me the grand old Union Jack
baptized in blood and tears;
The flag that o'er a nation free has
waved a thousand years.
More modern flags with stars and
bars as beautiful may be;
But the flag that's waved a thousand
years is good enough for me.

Two settings of this text were published in Diamond Jubilee Souvenir editions, one with original music by Wilhelm S. Koehler, the other an arrangement by Frederick W. Holland to the tune of the "Marseillaise." Two years later, a third version appeared, "respectfully dedicated to the Canadian contingent to the Transvaal" with music adapted by R. Gruenwald and this time based on the air to the "British Grenadiers".

Finally, many patriotic works of the Jubilee year emphasized loyalty to Canada, without specific reference to the Queen, e.g., "The Land of the Maple" by Henry Herbert Godfrey:

Oh Canada, my Canada, my thought is
all of thee,
Thy mountain chains and smiling
plains that stretch from sea to sea,
The sunlight gleams on murm'ring
streams and sweetest melody
Pour from the feathered songsters in
the spreading maple tree.

As we hear these texts today, most strike us as relatively uninspired doggerel. However, their popularity in their own time should not be underestimated. Godfrey's "The Land of the Maple," which also appeared in a French version, sold over 100,000 copies. In addition, these songs represented an

important way in which the values of loyalty to Queen and country which were being taught in the schools were reinforced in the home.

Conclusion

During the latter half of the 20th century, support for the British monarchy in Canada

has declined and many advocate its abolition altogether. It is difficult to comprehend the kind of nationalistic and imperialistic fervour which the Diamond Jubilee festivities of June 1897 celebrated. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that in recent years there has been a revival of interest in the Victorian period: the Queen who ruled for 60 years has not been forgotten.

