

French-American Heritage Foundation of Minnesota

ARTICLE DU MOIS

ARTICLE OF THE MONTH

June 2021



Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day Celebrations

Photo: Fête Nationale du Québec

Le Petit d'Été
French-American Heritage Foundation of Minnesota

Mission Statement: To preserve and promote the French-American heritage in Minnesota through education and community events.

Website: fahfminn.org. YouTube: FAHF Minn.



A French-Canadian Celebration

SAINT-JEAN-BAPTISTE

We, Quebecois(es), love to celebrate and have a "fête." It's a well-known fact. We like to laugh, talk loudly, sing, dance, play music around a campfire, etc. Every opportunity is a good one to have a party. One difference I found, when I first moved to Minnesota from Quebec, is that you need to give advance notice if you want to invite people over. Back home, even if it's 5:25 p.m. and your dinner is currently cooking, if you receive a phone call from a friend who is inviting you for dinner, you say yes. Then you turn off your oven and put the meal in the refrigerator for another day. As easy as 1-2-3! And it does happen more often than you think.

The month of June has a big day that we like to especially celebrate which is the Saint-Jean-Baptiste, (also known by its official name: Fête Nationale du Quebec; and other names such as La Fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, the Saint-Jean and the St-Jean), on June 24, of each year. You might be familiar with the name if you have French-Canadian heritage in your roots. The Saint-Jean-Baptiste is the National Day of Quebec and to every French-Canadian living elsewhere. It represents our identity, our language, our culture, our joie de vivre and uniqueness. It is also a celebration of the light, but when did it begin?

Summer Solstice and Bonfires

Our ancestors celebrated this day since the early days of New France. The Saint-Jean was on the longest day of the year (usually between June 20 and 24), a time to rejoice before the intense labor days of harvesting. In the *Journal des Jésuites* (1646), Louis LeJeune wrote: "...on the 23rd of June a bonfire is lit on Saint-Jean's Day at eight-thirty in the evening [...] Five cannon shots were fired and the



Jules Breton, *La Fête de la Saint-Jean*, 1875
Philadelphia Museum of Art



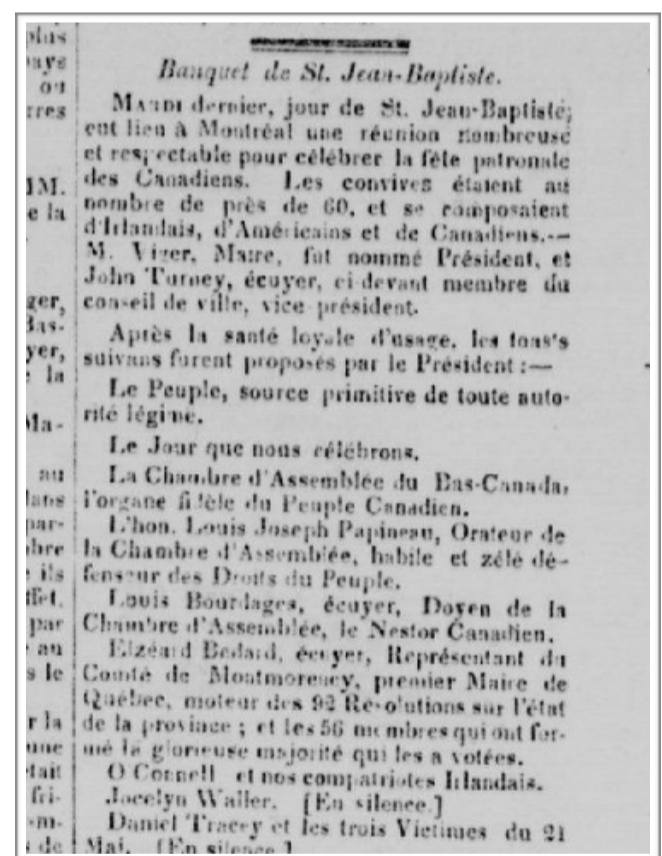
Inauguration of National Day - June 24, 1834 (Franchère)

Photo: BANQ

muskets were fired two or three times."¹

The Conquête, (the conquest of New France by the British), took a toll on the celebrations, but then they were brought back to life around a banquet (see postcard above) organized by Mr. Ludger Duvernay on Tuesday, June 24, 1834, in Montreal. He gathered more than 60 important gentlemen from the Lower Canada society. Mr. Duvernay was a journalist and editor of the newspaper *La Minerve*. He co-founded the organization "Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera" that later became the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste. About 25 speeches were made during this inaugural banquet. The ultimate goal was that this day, June 24, would become the National Day for all French-Canadian people. Mr. Duvernay wanted to unify the people of Lower Canada.²

From early on, many people organized banquets, Masses and parades. Houses were decorated with the maple leaf and beaver (symbols of the SJB Society). Songs were sung like "Vive la



Extract from the *La Minerve* Newspaper
June 26, 1834, *Banquet de St. Jean-Baptiste* – Photo: BANQ

¹ *Le Journal des Jésuites*, Chez Léger Brousseau, Québec, 1871 (<http://bibnum2.banq.qc.ca/bna/numtxt/123977.pdf>).

² La Fête Nationale du Québec website: <https://www.fetenationale.quebec/fr/a-propos/histoire>.



Canadienne" and "Ô Canada, mon pays, mes amours" (by Georges-Étienne Cartier). Did you know that Canada's National Anthem (Ô Canada) was first sung on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day in 1880?³

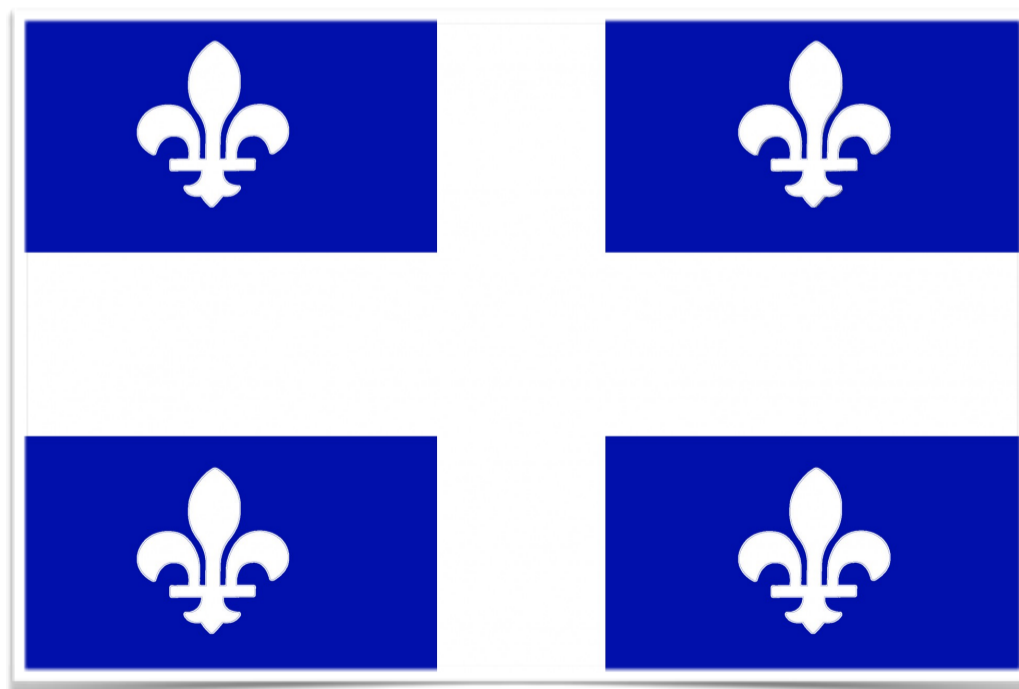
In 1925, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste became an official day and the National Assembly of Québec voted that June 24 would become a national holiday. From this year on, the celebrations grew in size and throughout the province. Parades were organized, there were bonfires, concerts, and more. Back then, religion was incorporated into many aspects of daily life and therefore the Saint-Jean-Baptiste was also religious. Every year, a little curly blond-haired boy would play the role of Saint-Jean-Baptiste with his little lamb on a parade float.

Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Montréal, QC, 1867

William Notman [Public Domain], via Wikimedia Commons

1948 - National Flag

Our flag turned 73 years old this year on January 21st. It was adopted in 1948 by the Fédération des Sociétés Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Its name is "fleurdelisée." The white lily flower comes from the gold lily flower of the French monarchy. The white cross in the



middle represents Christianity and also goes back to old royal French flags. The deep

³ <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/fr/article/la-fete-nationale-du-quebec-fete-de-la-saint-jean>

blue represents the King's vêtements (clothing) and sometimes the Virgin Mary. Here is a picture taken during the Montreal Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day parade in 1946. You can



"Parade Saint-Jean-Baptiste"

1946 Photograph by Wikimedia Commons Author Projet Poirier

see the flag with the fleur-de-lys tilted and pointing towards the center.

1968 - Lundi de la Matraque / Nightstick Monday

I have an interesting personal story to tell here. On Monday, June 24, 1968, at the Montreal SJB parade, the event went from celebrations to patriotic riots. What triggered the uprising was the presence of Canada's Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, in the reviewing stand. The people were upset by his presence and shouted insults at him. The event escalated and resulted in many injuries, police arrests and much more violence. My uncle was among the ones who were arrested. He was a supporter of the future separatist party. He was tied behind a horse and was beaten by a policeman's baton. His teeth were broken and so was his leg. His younger brother had to go bail him out of jail. Afterwards, my uncle never spoke about his political preferences.

National Indigenous Peoples Day

From time immemorial, the First Nations, Inuit and Métis of Canada have been celebrating the summer solstice and their heritage. For this reason, June 21st



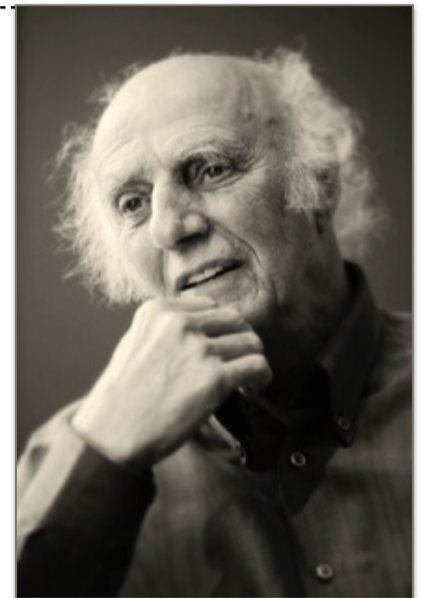
has been proclaimed National Indigenous Peoples Day. In the United States, there is also an Indigenous Peoples Day whose date varies annually. Worldwide, there is the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on August 9th which was introduced by the United Nations General Assembly back in December of 1994.

Of course, nowadays, Quebecois(es) from all over continue to celebrate our national day. Will you join us this year?

 ***National Anthem***

Did you know that the first French-Canadian national anthem was *À la Claire Fontaine*? This song was elected in 1878.

However, almost a hundred years later, on June 24, 1975, during the Saint-Jean-Baptiste National Day concert on Mount Royal in Montreal, Quebec's famous poet and songwriter Gilles Vigneault sang this song for the first time. That's when the Quebecois(es) fell in love and "adopted" this song to be their unofficial national anthem.



Gilles Vigneault
Photo: Gilles Vigneault Website

Mr. Vigneault wrote the lyrics and co-signed the music with Gaston Rochon. Since that day, this song has become the Quebec unofficial anthem and also a symbol for the Parti Québécois (sovereigntist political party). Nonetheless, this song also became a birthday song that we now sing for someone's birthday; we change the "Gens du pays" for example to: "Mon cher André, c'est à ton tour..." or "Ma chère Louise, c'est à ton tour..."

To relive this moment, you can watch the video available on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqCailScnFc>.

Gens du Pays (Gilles Vigneault)
Quebec Unofficial Anthem

Gens du pays, c'est votre tour
De vous laisser parler d'amour
Gens du pays, c'est votre tour
De vous laisser parler d'amour

Le temps que l'on prend pour dire Je t'aime
C'est le seul qui reste au bout de nos jours
Les voeux que l'on fait, les fleurs que l'on sème
Chacun les récolte en soi-même
Au beau jardin du temps qui court

Gens du pays, c'est votre tour
De vous laisser parler d'amour
Gens du pays, c'est votre tour
De vous laisser parler d'amour

Le temps de s'aimer, le jour de le dire
Fond comme la neige aux doigts du printemps
Fêtons de nos joies, fêtons de nos rires
Ces yeux où nos regards se mirent
C'est demain que j'avais vingt ans

Gens du pays, c'est votre tour
De vous laisser parler d'amour
Gens du pays, c'est votre tour
De vous laisser...



Save the Date!

La Fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste – Sibley Historic Site

Join us online on **Thursday, June 24 at 6 p.m.** for Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, celebrated in Quebec each year for more than four centuries! Named after the patron saint of Quebec, this French-Canadian holiday typically involves music, bonfires, and drinks!

To keep everyone safe this year, we invite you to login on Zoom and enjoy live music, learn about the fur trade, and taste a few Unibroue beers.

Brewed in Quebec, the beers are named after different legends and, throughout the event, we'll explain the origins of four of them:

La Fin du Monde
Maudite
Trois-Pistoles
Blanche de Chambly

You can buy/order them individually, or the variety pack (Sommelier Selection) ahead of time at a Total Wine near you.

We'll toast to Quebec and the French-Canadian heritage of Minnesota!

This event is sponsored by the Friends of the Sibley Historic Site and is offered free of charge. To sign up and receive the Zoom link, visit www.dakotahistory.org/events-at-sibley.

Bonne Saint-Jean!