



Across the country in schools and at special events, Canadians proudly sing our national anthem, “O Canada.” But did you know that for more than 100 years of its history, Canada did not have an official national anthem?

The Search for an Anthem

After Canada became a country in 1867, some politicians decided that we should have a national song. They had hoped to hold a songwriting contest, but did not have enough time to organize it for an upcoming celebration. So, they asked Calixa Lavallée to compose music for a French poem. Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier had written the poem. The song was played for the first time, in French, on

June 24, 1880. Unfortunately, it wasn’t exactly a smash hit! In 1901, the words were translated into English, but Anglophones didn’t like the anthem either.

The Choice: “O Canada”

Many people tried to come up with new words, but critics always found fault with them. In 1908, Robert Stanley Weir wrote the English version that we sing today...well, almost! Politicians tried several times to make this song our anthem. Some people wanted “From far and wide” to replace one of the repeated lines, “Stand on guard.” But the government did not own copyright to the song, and the Weir family would not agree to change the words.

At last, in 1970, the government bought the rights to the song for \$1. After the rights were purchased, the words we know and sing today were added. On July 1, 1980, “O Canada” became our official national anthem.



The writers and composers of “O Canada”

Did You Know...?

There are no rules for when to play the anthem at events or ceremonies. The anthem can be played either at the beginning or at the end of an event. You can find the lyrics of “O Canada” on the Internet.