

Heritage Branch Celebrates the Coronation

On Friday, May 5, Heritage Branch-Montreal hosted a “Pre-Coronation Celebration” for members of the Branch and of the Sir John Johnson Centennial Branch. Also in attendance were representatives of various local groups and associations, including the St. Andrew’s Society of Montreal, the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society, the Royal Commonwealth Society, the Monarchist League of Canada, the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network, the 78th Fraser Highlanders Regiment, the Black Watch Regiment, and many personal friends who value Canada’s constitutional monarchy..

The Celebration took the form of wine-and-cheese party, from 5 to 8 p.m., held at the Maison Forget, one of the remaining 19th century mansions of Montreal’s famous “Golden Square Mile”, on Sherbrooke Street West in the downtown area of the city. The building now belongs to the Macdonald-Stewart Foundation, whose Executive Director, Mr. (also Major) Thomas Leslie, made us most welcome. The guests feasted on various cheeses and grapes, sandwiches and hors d’oeuvres, washed down with copious quantities of red and white wine or non-alcoholic drinks. The paper plates were decorated with stickers depicting the royal cipher, accompanied by special Coronation-day paper serviettes in multiple colours. From the outset, back in February, my wife Maura McKeon, our Branch Treasurer, worked hard on developing the guest list, recording acceptances and regrets, and negotiating food and service details with the caterers, whose operations she carefully supervised on the “big day”.

The guest of honour and guest speaker was none other than His Honour, the Honourable J. Michel Doyon, Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec. He came, together with his chef de cabinet and an aide-de-camp. He spoke at some length on the special challenges he faces in his position in Quebec, the often-ambiguous attitude of many ordinary francophone Quebecers to the Crown, the essential role of the monarchy in Canada, the contributions of the Loyalists to the Province, and his delight at having the opportunity to meet with members of the anglophone community. Introduced by the undersigned in both French and English, he was thanked in both those languages by Michel Racicot, President of the Sir John Johnson Centennial Branch, His Honour was then presented with a copy of *The Loyalists of Quebec: A Forgotten History 1784-1825*, the Branch’s official publication. Then the Very Reverend Bertrand Olivier, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, offered a bilingual prayer for the King and Queen and all members of the Royal Family.

The undersigned proceeded to read aloud a letter he had sent to King Charles as Heritage Branch President, congratulating him on his crowning. The letter also recalls that the original Loyalists fought and suffered for his royal ancestor George III and then re-settled in Canada, in order to continue to enjoy the blessings of British rule, which to them meant peace, security, new hope and freedom under the Crown. The letter noted that the Loyalists constituted the first large group of political refugees to have come to this country over the last two centuries seeking those same blessings, followed by many other such groups right down to the present day. The letter concludes by expressing the support and good wishes of all present to His Majesty going forward, together with the hope that he, together with Queen Camilla, will visit Canada in the foreseeable future.

Toasts to the King, Canada, Quebec and the Loyalists were drunk with glasses of sparkling Prosecco in hand, followed by three “Huzzahs”, loudly voiced by the assembly, at the instance of the undersigned. Major Leslie, gifted as he is with a trained operatic voice, then led all present in singing *God Save the King* and *O Canada*, to the piano accompaniment of Miss Diana Wall, a faithful supporter of Heritage Branch for many years, all followed by further shouts of “Huzzahs” that rang through the building after each anthem.

Dessert followed, featuring “designer cupcakes” specially made (in three flavours) by a local bakery, with the royal cipher of the King Charles (edible) on top of each, as well as crown-shaped chocolates imported from Fortnum and Mason in London, plus scrumptious homemade lemon squares, courtesy of Maura. The guests socialized for a while before hurrying home, to get up early on Coronation Saturday to watch the ceremonies from London on television.

During the event, the Lieutenant Governor’s aide-de-camp, on behalf of His Honour, distributed the official Canadian Coronation lapel pins, designed by the Canadian Heraldic Authority. My wife Maura, for her part, distributed special bookmarks commemorating the Coronation, which the Branch had ordered from England.

The day after the Coronation, the undersigned and wife Maura attended a special choral evensong at Christ Church Cathedral, at the special invitation of Very Rev. Olivier, where we met Her Grace Bishop Mary Irwin-Gibson, who is also of Loyalist stock, but could not attend the Celebration due to prior commitments. At the invitation of Mr. Al-Dahdah, we later dropped in on the Monarchist League’s Coronation celebration at the Burgundy Lion Pub in the Saint-Henri district of Montreal. Both those events were also attended by His Honour.

Our Pre-Coronation Celebration afforded a wonderful networking opportunity for many supporters of the Canadian monarchy at an historic moment. Many old friendships from pre-COVID days were rekindled, and many new friendships were made. I also believe that our celebration raised the profile of Quebec’s two UEL branches. His Honour indicated that he would welcome further opportunities to meet with English-speaking Quebecers. Letters and emails of thanks have since arrived from many who enjoyed the event.

A very special thank-you is owed to the Sir John Johnson Centennial Branch, for its significant financial assistance, as well as to the Macdonald-Stewart Foundation, for making the elegant premises of the Maison Forget available for this unforgettable festivity. Without their tangible support, our Pre-Coronation Celebration could never have occurred.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert C. Wilkins, U.E.

President, Heritage Branch-Montreal, U.E.L.A.C.