

A 2-4 for 30,000?

by BROCK WEIR

Whatever you want to call it, it's come and gone and now we're settling into all the realities that come with kicking off a short week.

Some of you might call it the May Long Weekend. Others, looking forward to crack open a few cold ones, might subscribe to the May 2-4 school of thought. More still simply dub it the official start of summer, using the word official in the most unofficial way possible in other words, incorrectly but any excuse for a good party, right?

I do have to admit that all these alternate names for the weekend that was irk me just a little bit, particularly when it comes to Victoria Day.

As a student of history, I've always gravitated towards names holidays or otherwise that commemorate something specific rather than something vague or ephemeral. Each is a chance for a history lesson, an interesting cultural exchange, or a chance to find inspiration from our past, and those who made a difference, in order to benefit the present and future.

Many of the names listed above, and even some that didn't make the cut, are undoubtedly fun and, in the case of that official start of summer nonsense, aspirational as, given climate change, it could have, for all we know, just as easily snowed over the weekend. And yet, they don't really have meaning or import.

Officially, at the Federal Level, Victoria Day was established not only as a tribute to Queen Victoria, under whom the present Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia came together to form the Dominion of Canada in 1967, but, later, as a permanent way to celebrate the monarch's official birthday.

Victoria's birthday on our shores were first declared a holiday more than 20 years prior to Confederation, and, following 1867, was typically celebrated on the Queen's actual birthday of May 24 before it was fixed to the closest Monday under the reign of her son, Edward VII. It was Edward VII who approved keeping his mother's birthday as the sovereign's official day of celebration presumably because May was a far more clement time of year for a blow-out bash than his own birthday in November.

Despite a few bounces-around between May and June depending on the sovereign's preference, for the majority of Elizabeth II's remarkable 70-year reign, it was fixed to what we now know as Victoria Day, and remains so in the reign of Charles III, with the proclamation as recently as May of 2023 fixing it on behalf of all future monarchs going forward.

Once again, it's a chance for a history lesson and one that can spur valuable discussions on Canada's past, present and future.

In the lead-up to the long weekend that is just now in the rear-view mirror, I don't think I heard a single reference to Monday, May 20, 2024, being the Official Canadian Birthday of King Charles III.

During the latter years of Elizabeth II's reign, those references would percolate up to the surface here and there, albeit less frequently in each passing year one of the most memorable, for me, was a passing paraphrase to a Classic Simpsons quote related to the sale of fireworks: Celebrate Her Majesty's Birthday by blowing up a small part of her Kingdom.

The best pop culture mustered up ahead of the weekend were memes of Victoria, dressed in the so-called widow's weeds, celebrating the May 2-4 weekend on the back of a Sea-Doo or even taking the aforementioned widow's weeds to a new level, picturing her coming out of a local dispensary laden down with enough bags of product to make her entire court Merry throughout a long weekend. It seems for cartoonists, pink-hued eyeballs in this last instance were optional.

While there wasn't much fuss over the last weekend, the same can't be said for the month of May as a whole.

May 6, for instance, marked the first anniversary of the Coronation and, as such, the Governor-General finally unveiled the long-awaited Coronation Medal, which is intended to honour 30,000 everyday Canadians who have made a real difference in our communities ? or, in the words from Rideau Hall, individuals who ?have made a significant contribution to Canada or to a particular province, territory, region of, or community in, Canada, or attained an outstanding achievement abroad that brings credit to Canada.?

This, in my view, is a long-overdue move ? and not just because it took a full 12 months from the medal's announcement on May 6, 2023 until the first be-crowned medallions were awarded to our Provincial Lieutenant Governors and territorial Commissioners near the same day in 2024.

In whatever wisdom, the Federal Government, the ones who actually greenlight medals military, commemorative or otherwise, opted not to issue a medal for outstanding Canadians to mark the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 2022.

Some might see these things as merely a bauble, but the Jubilee came at a time where we were just being lifted out of the restrictions and, indeed, mindsets that came part and parcel with the Global Pandemic. We were getting back into the world, we were grateful for our first responders and frontline workers who went above and beyond the call of duty to do everything they could to mitigate the health disaster, and then? well, it wasn't exactly ?crickets? but it was pretty darn close.

One can only hope that the criteria of those who ?have made a significant contribution to Canada or to a particular province, territory, region of, or community in Canada? element of the eligibility requirement includes these individuals ? individuals whose heroism now sadly appears forgotten now that we're back in the swing of things and reluctant to look back on that strange and scary time ? rather than used as a way to express political thanks by MPs and MPPs, which often appeared to be the case in 2012 when the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II was marked in a similar way.

Now that the medals have been struck, I think the only things left on the ?to do? list the Feds assigned themselves ahead of the Coronation is an official Canadian portrait of the King. That portrait was likely delayed due to the King's recent cancer treatment, but now that he appears well on the road to recovery, let's hope that's produced sooner rather than later ? and that a ?homecoming? to Canada is soon in the offing.

Hopefully before his next ?Official Canadian Birthday? on May 19, 2025 ? but it wouldn't be the worst thing to have him here for the ?Official Start of the Summer? or the ?May Long Weekend.?

Somehow, cracking open a 2-4 in his honour doesn't seem particularly on brand, but maybe let's raise a?can to our upcoming medal winners.