Arbour Day

A common Arbour Day activity was tree planting, nurturing small saplings such as this one seen outside the Fultz House Museum

One of the first holidays to celebrate nature was Arbour Day, which came to Canada around 1880. On this holiday, children would celebrate nature by cleaning up waste around their communities and by planting trees. This holiday was never official, but it was quite popular in schools until the 1950s. When the environmental movement began in the 1970s, the organizers of the new holiday of Earth Day placed their day on April 22nd - the same day as Arbour Day, to show their respect for the day that inspired its more modern predecessor.

Mother's and Father's Day

In Medieval times, Europeans honoured their mothers on "Mothering Sunday" in May, on the feast day of the Mother Mary. This practice declined until the early 1900s, when Anna Jarvis of Philadelphia proposed a day to honour her late mother, who had died in May 1905. This day quickly became popular, and the first Mother's Day was celebrated in 1907. Father's Day would follow only three years later, when another American, Sorona Todd proposed a companion day in June to honour fathers. This took longer to catch on. Mother's Day was recognized by the U.S. in 1914, and it took until 1966 for Father's Day to be similarly recognized

Victoria Day

Before the 1800s, people in Britain would celebrate their monarch's birthday. In 1837, Queen Victoria ascended the throne and her birthday on May 24th became a holiday, but in 1845 the colonial governments in what would become Canada made it an official holiday for the first time. After Victoria's death in 1902, this tradition was continued and the day was officially named Victoria Day (though it was later moved to the last Monday before May 25). This new holiday became the official day to celebrate the birthday of the reigning monarch (regardless of when they were actually born!).

Remembrance Day

At 11:00 on the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, the armistice ending the First World War took effect, putting an end to the fighting for the first time in over four years. Since then, this holiday has been a time to remember the veterans who have fought for our nation. Many Canadians mark the anniversary in ceremonies at cenotaphs (such as the one in Lower Sackville pictured below) all over the country. As well, many Canadians wear poppies to show their respect for Canadian veterans who put their lives on the line.

The History and Folklore of Holidays in Nova Scotia

Groundhog Day

Amongst many ancient cultures, there was a belief that animals could predict the weather. This tradition is still celebrated today with Groundhog Day on February 2nd, when many people flock to see a little furry mammal forecast the weather. In the Middle Ages, Europeans relied on the actions of the badger to tell them whether winter's end would be long or short, but this animal was not native to North America. In its place, they selected the similar groundhog, and the practice spread all over the continent. Every February, Nova Scotia's own Shubenacadie Sam (see above) comes out of his burrow, and if he sees his shadow and goes back in, there will be six more weeks of winter. If not, spring will come early.
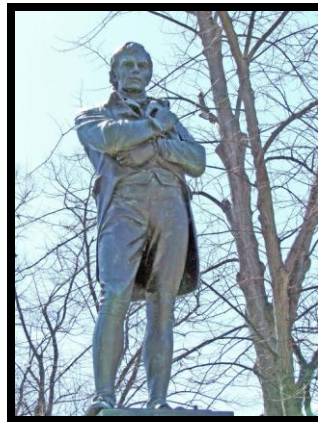
FULTZ HOUSE MUSEUM

We celebrate many holidays throughout the year, but what exactly are these days? Holidays are events that are celebrated during a certain date or season every year, and can be a religious, patriotic, or folk holiday depending on the origin of the celebration. While many holidays have their origins shrouded in the mists of history and have been celebrated in various forms for centuries, new holidays are still being created in modern times. In 2013, the government of Nova Scotia announced the creation of Nova Scotia Heritage Day, which will celebrate the diverse origin of Nova Scotians. Starting in 2015, each year will have a different name for the holiday, and the first Nova Scotia Heritage Day celebrated the civil rights icon Viola Desmond.

Boxing Day

While Christmas is a holiday that has ancient religious origins, the day after Christmas, Boxing Day, is far more modern. It is named for the practice of employers giving their employees who worked on Christmas Day the next day off as compensation, as well as a box of gifts for their families. The modern Boxing Day is quite different, for it is now the day where businesses sell their excess Christmas stock, often at very low prices. While stores in Nova Scotia are closed on December 26th, they now hold their sales the day after, and it is now a popular shopping day.

As it is "New Scotland", Nova Scotia has a rich Scottish heritage. Scots celebrate the birthday of a famous member of their nation in January: the 25th of that month is the birthday of Scotland's national poet Robert Burns, and on the anniversary of his birth Scots all over the world gather to eat traditional foods and celebrate their culture. Revelers at Robert Burns Day festivals eat such foods as haggis (which is eulogized respectfully), listen to bagpipes, and stay up all hours of the night drinking whiskey and toasting their fellow Scots.

To the left is a statue of Robert Burns, seen in Victoria Park in Halifax.

Dr. Martin Luther King Day

The third Monday in January celebrates the birthday of Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., who was born on the 17th of January 1929. While this day was signed into law in the United States as an official holiday in 1986, in Canada it is merely informally observed as a day to celebrate Dr. King's life and the struggle by those of African descent to escape racism and achieve equality under the law.

National Flag of Canada Day

Canada's national Flag, seen outside the Fultz House Museum

Before the 1960s, Canada's flag was the red ensign – a red flag with the British Union Jack in the corner and a shield on one side. Prime Minister Pearson wished for Canada to have its own unique national flag, so a contest was held and on February 15th, 1965, Canada's new maple leaf flag was hoisted for the first time. Canada Flag Day celebrates our new national flag, which has become the most iconic image of Canada around the world.

St. Patrick's Day

All over the world, people of Irish descent (and many others too!) celebrate the feast day of the 5th century patron saint of Ireland, St. Patrick. This 5th century priest and missionary spent his life building churches and preaching in Ireland, spreading Christianity to the formerly pagan Irish. As the Irish immigrated to North America, the day dedicated to their favourite saint was transformed into a celebration of Irish culture. Today, many cities hold parades, people wear their finest green clothing, and bars and pubs do a brisk business selling Guinness and green beer!