

# Tea drinkers consume four billion pounds yearly

Tea was cultivated first in China, starting as a medicine and gradually taking its place as a beverage. By the 8th century it was in use as a drink. It was not, however, until the end of the 16th century that travellers from the East began taking back word of tea's pleasing properties; introduced first to Europe by the Dutch East India Company in 1610, then shortly after to England where it quickly caught the fancy of the fashionable world who willingly paid as much as \$15 a pound for the new luxury.

The real story of those early days of tea is bound up with romance, teeming with anecdote and interest. During the 18th century a very high duty was placed on tea by the British government; just the way to encourage the smuggler. Many a hiding-place for unlawful tea chests is still remembered along the rocky coasts of England.

It was just 150 years ago, at the dawn of the great Victorian era, that our great empire tea industry had its beginnings in India. Stories

of tea growing wild in the moist uplands of Assam had been handed down for generations. It was even said that tea was first introduced into China from India. Legend has it that a Hindu holy man was first given tea by heaven, and he, in gratitude, told others of its wonderful properties and eventually carried it with him on a mission to China.

Be that as it may, the stories were investigated and it was found that the Indian tea was in every way superior to the Chinese.

The first sample of one pound was sent home to England in 1836 and in 1839 the first consignment of British Empire grown tea reached London and was sold at auction, where it realized prices from \$3 to \$7 a pound.

From that moment a great empire industry sprang up which was to bring prosperity to millions and a teapot into every British home.

In the 1870's, Ceylon was rescued from ruin by the growing taste for tea. A coffee growing

**Indo Canadian**  
Joan Mayo



island, its plantations were devastated by a leaf disease and in five years a flourishing industry perished. Then like a Phoenix rising from its ashes, tea sprang up in coffee's place. Half a million acres are under tea today. Sri Lanka and India together, produce teas which suit all tastes and are world-famous for their exquisite qualities and aroma.

Canada too helped promote the tea trade. There is mention in 1815 of a Hudson's Bay frigate bringing "three canisters of tea" consigned to Governor James Knight at York factory. The great East India

Company had ships called "tea wagons" plying waters between China and Montreal and in 1825 two of these, the Moffat and the Julianna, sailed up the St. Lawrence to discharge their cargos of tea from Canton. In 1826 the ship "Countess of Harcourt" arrived at Halifax with 6,517 chests of tea.

The introduction of free trade into Britain and the repeal of her navigation laws threw her foreign markets open to the world. It was then the famous "Yankee Clippers" caused consternation in British shipping circles by making

a bid for the tea trade. Clippers like the "Lightning" and the "Flying Cloud" built in Boston rushed the first season's tea from China to London at a speed hitherto unknown, and in consequence could demand and get twice as much per ton for cargo.

From Britain came an urgent demand for more and faster ships. Canada with her wealth of timber responded magnificently and all around the coastline from Quebec to St. John could be heard a ceaseless hammering as nails and bolts were driven into planks that soon were fashioned into ships like the famous "Marco Polo" and the "Star of the East."

Tea was the first freight to travel East by rail in July 1886 from Port Moody. The last spike had hardly been driven before a barque from the Orient arrived along side the tracks. This little 800 ton wooden

sailing vessel, The "W.B. Flint" with her 17,430 half-chests of tea was the pioneer ship of the trans-Pacific route linking up with the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Few know what tea is like. It has beautiful white or rose-colored flowers slightly fragrant and belonging to the Camellia family. Fine tea consists of the tips and tender shoots of the leaves.

About four billion pounds of tea are produced annually. India grows the most and China is second.

Grades of tea vary only according to the size of the leaves. The largest leaves, selected for packaging as loose tea, are classified, in order of size, as orange pekoe, pekoe and pekoe souchong. The smaller or broken leaves, generally used in tea bags, are classified as broken orange pekoe, broken orange pekoe fannings and fannings.