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By CLIFFORD KRAUSS

TORONTO, June 26 — Linda Chopra and Linda Sperry, a lesbian couple from Cleveland, were planning to come to Toronto for a librarians' convention anyway. But when they read the news that Canada was now recognizing same-sex marriage, they decided to fill their trip with a whole lot more than the latest tips about reference books.

They came to the Toronto city hall this week, where the rainbow gay flag now flies on the roof to celebrate Pride Week and the new social revolution going on inside, and filled out a marriage license application, which still has blanks for bridegroom and bride.

"I would like to have my relationship acknowledged legally, so this seemed like the thing to do," said Ms. Chopra, 56, who has been with her partner for 16 years. "But I don't think I will be able to use the document and get spousal benefits in a state like Ohio, and I don't think it's fair."

Nevertheless, she said she wanted to get married anyway, in part so that when her granddaughter comes to visit, "she will have two grandmothers in the same house and know that our relationship is legally acceptable."

Gay and lesbian couples, some from as far away as California and Britain, are coming to Toronto to marry. They are coming — in small numbers, so far — to take advantage of a ruling by the Ontario Court of Appeal two weeks ago to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples.

That decision has been endorsed by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien

A trickle flows over the northern border; will it become a flood?

and the federal cabinet and is expected to be applied nationwide by the end of the year.

American gay rights activists are hopeful that the Canadian marriage license will be a potent legal weapon to test in American courts to win same-sex couples enhanced rights and privileges covering parentage, health benefits, insurance and inheritance.

The decision this week by the United States Supreme Court that struck down a Texas law banning homosexual sex is strengthening gay civil rights groups' hopes that barriers to same-sex marriage in the United States will also prove vulnerable.

So far, same-sex couples from 12 states have obtained marriage licenses in Toronto since it became legal for them to do so June 10. A handful of other American gay and lesbian couples have secured licenses in Ottawa and Windsor.

Canadian marriage licenses have always been accepted in the United States, but now that the definition of marriage here has been broadened, American gay rights advocates expect years of legal fights.

More often than not, the gay and lesbian Americans who come to marry here say they are reluctant to think of themselves as revolutionaries or even activists. But they are

A Few Gay Americans
Tie the Knot in Canada

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aware that they are in the vanguard of a movement they hope will eventually bury a taboo that so far has been surmounted only here and in the Netherlands and Belgium.

"I wouldn't say we're doing it as a political statement," said Brian Vetruba, a 35-year-old librarian from St. Louis, as he picked up a marriage license application on Tuesday and reserved a date for a marriage ceremony for himself and his partner in city hall later in the week.

"But with the presidential race coming," he added, "Americans will see that same-sex marriage has not altered Canadian society, especially in regards to the stability of families. Civil unions and gay marriage are already in the political discourse, and if a Democrat gets into the White House it will happen."

Actually, Canadian wedding bells are ringing for relatively few American same-sex couples, in part because many are not optimistic that their licenses will be respected in the United States any time soon.

[As of Friday, 24 American same-sex couples had received marriage licenses in Toronto since the Ontario court decision, as part of a total of 239 same-sex couples including Canadians.]

Some gay activists attribute the relatively small number of Canadian couples who have decided to marry to a decline in the belief that marriage is a necessary institution.

"Not everyone wants to be a June bride like me," said Kyle Rae, a gay activist and member of the Toronto City Council who got married earlier this month. "There are people who don't want marriage and don't need it, while there are others who are waiting to gather their families and friends for the occasion."

For Ms. Sperry, marriage would not be necessary if Ohio permitted civil unions, as Vermont currently does, offering same-sex couples nearly all the rights and obligations of marriage without calling the union marriage. But now that she and Ms. Chopra are ready to take their vows, she recognizes the social significance of their decision.

"It's kind of a big deal," said the 42-year-old librarian. "Our two countries are so close, share so many ties." Nevertheless, she added, "It's more for the two of us."

The number of same-sex marriages may rise considerably this weekend, when many Americans are expected to arrive here by the busload for a gay pride parade.

Meanwhile, a Canadian marriage license has at least one major drawback. While there is no residency requirement to marry in Canada, there is a one-year residency requirement for at least one member of the couple for the right to divorce.

"You have to think twice to make that kind of commitment," said David Kloss, a 53-year-old retired offshore oil exploration rig manager from San Francisco, who came to city hall the other day pick up a marriage license application with his Canadian partner.

Mr. Kloss would like to live with his 34-year-old partner, Remi Collette, here in Toronto, so the residency requirement is not a factor for them, but both would also like their marriage accepted in the United States.

"You spend your life paying taxes," said Mr. Collette, a 34-year-old leather goods salesman, "So you want the right to choose and have the opportunity to live like anyone else."