

# The Canada Year Book: What a run!

By Tony Colasante

Long before online surfing and social media became societal norms for finding information, we found ourselves manually sifting through countless encyclopaedias and various other almanacs, like the *Canada Year Book (CYB)*, for information about our country.

You could find CYB anywhere; resting on library shelves or under Christmas trees, on office desks, in student backpacks, in doctors' offices, and even on nightstands. Now, after 145 years, the 2012 edition of *CYB* marks the end of an era: the book will no longer be in print. But, that doesn't mean it's gone entirely. You can still find the 2012 edition online, along with a historical collection. A grand total of 111 editions of the Year Book have been produced since 1867. So why not 112, you may ask? Great question. Mainly, the ubiquity of the Internet, and our resolution to make our data readily available online, at no cost, to Canadians.

For those who aren't familiar with *CYB*, this book is Statistics Canada's most popular, all-time best-selling publication. It's been an invaluable source for the newest facts and analyses related to current events, important issues, and trends in Canada, from both a social and economic perspective. It's easy-to-read, comprehensive and paints a detailed picture of living and working in Canada. It manages to cover reliable, useful data in just over 400 pages, using attractive charts, tables and maps. It includes 31 key subjects that matter to Canadians, such as culture and leisure, business, crime and justice, the environment, the economy, education and health.

But what exactly gave it its well-deserved reputation? How did it endure for more than a century? These are the kinds of questions that naturally come up when we take one final look at the 'last ever' of anything. It's human nature, really. And despite being the chief promoter of the publication for almost four years, I still didn't know it all. But I can tell you that I gained some insight about *CYB* when I dug deep into the publication's history.

Few people know this, but the origins of the *Canada Year Book* date all the way back to Confederation. That's right: Confederation, which wasn't that long ago, in historical terms. So, not much has happened since, if you think about it – just the sinking of the Titanic, the Great Depression, the moon landing, the disco era, the information highway. The list goes on, but you 'get my drift.' The *Canada Year Book* has withstood the test of time because it responded to Canadians' need for accurate, up-to-date statistical information when they couldn't readily find it from other sources. A total of 111 print editions over this time span have been produced for the Canadian public.

Starting in 1867, the *Canada Year Book* was known as the "Statistical Abstract Record of Canada," a nearly 200-page annual register of facts about Upper Canada. The very first issue cost 12½ cents, or 25½ cents for the colour version that included a map.

Just as our young country was finding its legs as a nation, and re-defining its goals, purpose and identity, *Canada Year Book* was recording our factual history. In 1918, *CYB* was given a formal mandate to chronicle facts about Canada. By 1928, its subjects and organization more closely resembled that of today's *Canada Year Book*. It contained the foundational subject areas that are still included in recent editions. That the section, "The Physical Characteristics of Canada," was placed prominently as the first entry in the table of contents says something about the importance that Canadians placed on geography then, and it still holds true today. It wasn't until 1965 that the Dominion Bureau of Statistics was given government department status, and in 1971, was officially renamed Statistics Canada. By 1967, *Canada Year Book* had earned its place in Canadian history. The preface to the centennial edition of *Canada Year Book* summed up the book's official status: "...throughout these one hundred years, the story of the country's progress – economic, social and legislative – has been recorded in the *Canada Year Book* ... Thus, the whole series of this publication constitute an official record of a century of Canada's progress."

Despite pressures over the years from other Canadian almanacs, *Canada Year Book* has always prevailed. Its vast contribution to Canada is legendary, and we have always boasted about how much one little book can cover. As we commemorate the last-ever print version, we, as Canadians, can reflect on the impressive evolution of *Canada Year Book*.

*CYB* unified us. It met our needs and excited our curiosity for information. And, it always delivered. The book that has reflected Canada's growth through war and peace as well as depression and prosperity will be no more, but it will always remain an important part of our history.

To read the book for free online, go to <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-402-x/11-402-x2012000-eng.htm>.

