

*The National Library*

*Ottawa, Thursday, December 16, 1999*

Madame ministre, chers amis, nous sommes très fiers que l'ouvrage de référence le plus exhaustif jamais créé au Canada est, grâce à votre soutien, maintenant disponible à tous les canadiens: en anglais, en français, sous forme numérique ou imprimé. L'encyclopédie canadienne est la meilleure tentative de définir, de représenter, de capturer, de cataloguer cette insaisissable et rare bête intellectuelle, l'identité canadienne.

Ever since encyclopedias first appeared 2000 years ago in China, down to Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie* in the Enlightenment, these ambitious works have been much more than simple repositories of facts. They are cultural documents that resonate with symbolic importance. They are, above all, works of hope -- hope that we can organize and define the scope of human knowledge, that we can make sense of the explosion of information, and that we can still speak with authority above the clatter of misinformation. Ours, a national encyclopedia, enables us to take stock and reflect on who we are and what we have accomplished. With such high ideals, encyclopedias are publishing's most difficult and expensive undertakings.

This one has been twenty years in the making and has involved a community of some 4000 writers and scholars from every part of Canada (including many in this great institution), who have written over 11,000 articles; 300 consultants and readers; and dozens of editors, typesetters, translators, programmers, proof readers and others who process, organize, and verify the now some 4 million words. The task of finding and maintaining contact with

these people, meeting deadlines, collecting and processing the multimedia, co-ordinating the coding, programming and typesetting, while keeping abreast of the constant changes in our society is becoming ever harder, as we struggle to compete with the likes of Microsoft's *Encarta*, which trumpets a staff of some 60 full-time editors.

The creation of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* is, as one reviewer called it, the "intellectual equivalent of the building of the CPR."

We recently received a delightful letter from a ten-year old girl who told us that she had to do an essay on AIDS and could find nothing about Canada in *Encarta*. She found it in ours. "You saved my life," she wrote, and drew a heart next to her name. There is no need to dwell on how the information in our encyclopedia is not to be found anywhere else. The real feeling of how the work invokes Canada can be found in any random sample of entry titles, a veritable poem to our diversity:

Agawa, Anka, Autumn,  
 Bay Bulls, Beautiful Losers  
 Big Bear, Bye Boat, Carignan, Chuckwagon  
 Dukek, Egoyan, Fogo, Frye  
 Gimli, Handsome Lake, Hell's Gate  
 Iskowitz, Klee Wyck, Loon  
 McLuhan, Métis, Nunavut  
 Quidi Vidi, Quilico, Safdie, Sawchuck, Schuster  
 Taiga, Vasssanji, Vimy  
 Whoop-up, Zurokowski

Any part of the alphabet would sing a similar tune.

On the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, John Castell Hopkins, the editor of the first encyclopedia of Canada, wrote that “Canada needs only to be known in order to be great.” I can do no better than to repeat that remark on the eve of the next century. This encyclopedia needs to be in every Canadian home, school, business and library. It deserves to have the kind of success and support that will allow us to ensure that we can continue to take stock of who we are and to develop new ways of reaching Canadians as technology changes.

Making *The Canadian Encyclopedia* the first fully bilingual general reference work on Canada is an important step in our mutual devotion to help Canadians know one another and fulfils a personal dream of mine. All the country is unified, symbolically at least, in a single oeuvre. I thank you minister Copps and Heritage Canada for this achievement, and I thank Avie Bennett, who, for all our benefit, rescued this enterprise and whose love of Canada has kept it alive. Thank you.