INTRODUCTION

MILESTONES, LEGACIES AND A HALF-CENTURY OF CHANGE

RANDY BOSWELL

Randy Boswell is an associate professor at Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication. He is a long-time Ottawa journalist who developed a unique national history beat as a Postmedia News writer from 2003-13. He recently published studies about Canadian environmental history in *Histoire Sociale/Social History* and archaeological history in the *Canadian Journal of Archaeology*.

In my Southern Ontario hometown, the spirit of 1967 was made manifest by the construction of a hockey arena. As in hundreds of communities across Canada, where new rinks, schools, libraries, meeting halls and other public places were built to mark that year's centennial of Confederation, the country's gift to Grand Valley, Ont. (population 800 or so at the time, about 1,600 today) achieved its central purpose — and then some.

Hockey games — boys and girls, house league and travelling teams — became a focal point of community life. The curlers and figure skaters and broomballers, too, had a new place for their sports, and the arena's upstairs hall became the go-to venue for wedding receptions, charity fundraisers, community dances and just about everything else of note that happened in our village: awards banquets, ecumenical church services, summer camps and Fall Fair exhibits; a childcare service, a 50th anniversary party and a benefit gathering for my sister's boyfriend — a hockey all-star left paralyzed by a motorcycle crash.

Nation-building isn't only about intangibles such as pride and cohesion and identity. There's also literal, bricks-and-mortar nation-building, and places like the Grand Valley and District Community Centre have been essential in fostering the simple, warm-blanket sense of togetherness found in countless Canadian communities — rural hamlets and urban neighbourhoods alike — that eventually knits together the nation and provides the basis for broader social and economic development.

So thank you, 1967, for that tremendous legacy of community infrastructure. I was born on the eve of that auspicious date, and I've only ever known the post-Expo Canada that — for all of its cultural divides and social inequities, its historic injustices and

contemporary challenges — seems to me, overall, to be progressing in the right direction, towards greater tolerance and fairness and peaceable prosperity.

Safe to say, I think, that women, immigrants, Indigenous people, and members of Canada's LGBTQ communities wouldn't want to turn the clock back 50 years, no matter what battles lie ahead.

It's a rosy view, perhaps — a wide-angle-lens perspective on Canada in this sesquicentennial year rather than a zoomed-in look at the country's carbuncles. But even a superficial scan of what goes on in the rest of the world's 200 or so nation states offers reassurance that the geopolitical project set in motion 150 years ago in the northern half of North America has been largely successful — so much so, in fact, that we can engage in microscopic scrutiny of our worst failures and still retain a semblance of satisfaction with what's generally been achieved, as well as a sense of optimism about what's to come.

And we can do all of that, over drinks and donuts at a minor hockey dance, with our signature traits of humility and humour intact.

This collection of essays, which explores the evolution of Canada over the past 50 years from a variety of vantage points, was conceived of as a way to take measure of the country's progress between the milestone years of 1967 — when the country celebrated its Centennial and Montréal hosted Expo, the World's Fair — and 2017, the ongoing 150th anniversary of Confederation.

Contributors were asked to tap their areas of expertise, personal experiences and other sources of insight and inspiration in considering the transformation of Canada over the past half-century. We wondered what those respective societies, separated by five decades, were actually celebrating. We wondered how technology, modes of communication, concepts of identity and the Canadian population itself had changed the nation in 50 years, and how Canadian values — as expressed through government policies, social mores, intercultural relations, consumer choices, citizen movements and more — had evolved over this same stretch of time. Fundamentally, we asked: Is Canada happier, more prosperous, more cohesive, more influential, more compassionate — in short, a better country — 50 years after the heady days of Expo 67?

Jack Jedwab, president of the Association for Canadian Studies, helps frame the conversation with an illuminating then-and-now comparison of public opinion surveys from 1967 and 2017 that examine — among other things — views about Québec separatism. What's revealed is that, 50 years after then-French president Charles de Gaulle sparked a national uproar with his "Vive le Québec libre!" speech, — and more than 20 years after the close-shave referendum of 1995 — a much smaller portion of the population today than in 1967 believes Quebecers want to separate from Canada, and a much greater portion of the population today than in 1967 believes relations between French- and English-speaking Canadians are improving.

Jedwab makes the point, too, that the relative economic prospects of French-speaking Canadians — and their share of employment and leadership influence in the federal public service — have risen dramatically since 1967, so much so that certain grievances stoked by de Gaulle's speech at the time

are barely remembered by today's young Quebecers.

Jack Bumsted, the distinguished Manitoba historian, wonders aloud if Canada — despite profound changes in communications technology, for example, and immigration from non-European nations — is not as deeply altered since 1967 as many would think. "With the possible exception of our food culture," he observes of the influx of many new immigrant communities, "there is an argument to be made that Canada has been more influential on these groups than they have been on Canada." And while noting that landmark apologies have been made, for example, to Japanese, Sikh and Jewish communities for historical injustices inflicted by past Canadian governments, these did not fundamentally challenge the nation's sense of itself: "Apologies to Indigenous people, on the other hand, have been so difficult because they came close to striking at the foundations of our society."

Dominique Clément, University of Alberta historian and human rights scholar, traces the roots of a transformative shift in the past 50 years in the way Canadians seek state protection of their fundamental rights. Certain rights in this country were once only safeguarded as tenets of British and later Canadian citizenship, he argues. But the passage of the country's first human rights laws in the 1960s — including landmark statutes in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in 1967 — redefined such protections as inviolable in a broader sense, for any human being. "For most Canadians, the centennial celebrations and Expo '67 symbolized a coming of age for the country and an asserting of its place on the world stage. The transformation of Canada's rights culture at this time was equally symbolic of a new engagement with the world."

Prize-winning popular historian Ken McGoogan, author of *Lady Franklin's Revenge* and *50 Canadians Who Changed The World*, offers an insightful and entertaining interpretation of how the Baby Boom generation — which came of age at about the time Canada turned 100 in 1967 — have been spearheading Canadian political and social change from the era of Trudeau I to today's age of Trudeau II, "turning Canada into a global beacon of tolerance and diversity."

Veronica Strong-Boag, pioneering Canadian scholar of women's and gender studies, argues that continued critical scrutiny of the use of language and the framing of historical narratives is needed to keep Canada progressing towards a more just and equitable society. With a teacher's classic assessment that the country has strong potential but needs to work much harder to reach its goals, Strong-Boag states that, "When I survey Canada, my vision takes hope, admittedly sometimes fragile, from our collective capacity to embrace language that extends the idea and the practice of equality and fair dealing."

Victor Rabinovitch, former CEO of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (today's Canadian Museum of History) and now a Distinguished Fellow at the Queen's University School for Policy Studies, sounds an alarm about the future of Canadian culture. He explains first how a uniquely Canadian "affirmative cultural model" — a skilful orchestration of state funding and policy instruments to unleash the creative energy of the nation — had a transformative impact on Canada's cultural industries over the past 50 years. But this post-Centennial "blossoming of Canadian content in virtually every sector of cultural production," he warns, is now at

risk of being reversed: "Today's rapid rise of digital distribution systems owned by American Internet giants is, by far, the greatest threat to Canadian cultural expression."

Concordia University historian Jean-Philippe Warren looks at the wider canvas of Canadian history since 1760 to explore the unexpected ways in which the country has evolved. As he puts it, his essay is meant to show "how history, far from being a rectilinear and perfectly planned march, follows unpredictable curves and bumps." Among the examples he offers of how "chance and luck" have so frequently shaped Canada's destiny is the back-firing of Bill 101 — the Québec language law that was intended to both bolster the protection of French and advance the cause of Québec independence, but the success of which unexpectedly reduced the sense of urgency around the sovereignty project.

Finally, University of Toronto political scientist and Canadian Studies Program director Nelson Wiseman paints a vibrant picture of post-1967 Canada as "more secular, polyethnic and religiously diverse." At the same time, he highlights certain tensions — best symbolized, perhaps, by the niqab, now the focus of political furor in Québec — that have emerged as Canadians try to come to terms with the "construction and reconstruction of Canadian society" over the past 50 years, and the fact that "national identity has always been provisional, continuing to evolve…"