THE CONFEDERATION TRAIN

"Is everybody ready?" Pauline Vanier asked, after turning the ceremonial key during the dedication ceremony for the Confederation Train in Ottawa on New Year's Day 1967. The Governor General's wife then experienced a joy shared by children across the country that year: pressing the green button that set off the purple train's special whistle — tuned to play the first four notes of *O Canada*.

Proposed by Centennial Commissioner John Fisher back in the 1950s, the train was divided into six main sections covering Canadian history from prehistoric times to the present. It made 63 stops across all provinces except Newfoundland, where the rail gauge was too narrow.

From its official opening in Victoria on January 9, it captivated children all across the country with its collections of artifacts, dioramas, and buttons to press. The mayor of Nanaimo all but ordered adults to stay away so busloads of students could check it out. In Terrace, an attempt to force the train to stop by blocking the track with a logging truck failed. Nearly one-third of Edmontonians walked through.

During the August civic holiday, Torontonians lined up for four-and-a-half hours. The worn floor had to be replaced. A grade 10 class in Red Deer sent a telegram to the Prime Minister to reverse its closure out of respect for Georges Vanier, arguing that both the train and the late Governor General symbolized unity. Only some grumpy academics and egg-wielding Quebec separatists failed to embrace the rolling exhibition.

Despite calls to continue, the train closed its exhibits after pulling into Montreal in early December. By that time, over 2.7 million visitors had climbed aboard.

LEFT: *The Confederation Train exterior murals illuminated against the Vancouver skyline.*

INSET: *Young visitors wait alongside the cross-country travelling history exhibit.*