

# The Canadian Vital Record Closure Gap

By Bob Dawes

The current discussion about the privacy release question in the 2006 Canadian census has prompted me to have a look at what rules the different provinces employ with regard to the privacy of their vital statistics. I have been looking for a family branch that settled in the Copper Cliff area of Ontario after WW II without much success because the records in Ontario are closed for marriages after 1923. I have tried to find the family in the Sudbury Star with only limited success and the descendants of this family group ignore my telephone messages and letters so it is a dead end until 2024 when I can view the 1949 marriages. The only problem is that I'll be 78 and may not be here to enjoy this hobby anymore. Now, if it was New Brunswick or British Columbia where I was researching I wouldn't have a problem because marriages in New Brunswick are open up to 1955 and deaths in BC are open up to 1985.

What spurred me on was a recent visit to our son and his family in BC last May. Since we were flying out of Victoria, we used our last day for some research at the BC Provincial Archives. Off the topic, this is a very nice building, adjacent to the Royal BC Museum, where almost every microfilm reader is equipped with a printer, the staff are friendly and helpful and everything is easy to find.

I was helping Barbara by looking up a list of BMD's she needed and I was surprised that their deaths were up to 1985. What is the reason for the disparity between our provinces for these records? The worst case is Ontario with 1933 and the best is PEI which is open up to 2005. I decided to try and find the closure periods for every province and have summarized them in the following table:

Province	Start Date	Births to	Marr's to	Deaths to	Web site
Newfoundland	1891	1899	1922	1949	<a href="http://www.therooms.ca/archives/family_history_collections.asp">www.therooms.ca/archives/family_history_collections.asp</a>
Nova Scotia	1864	1906	1931	1956	<a href="http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/vitalstats/">www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/vitalstats/</a>
PEI	1906	1900	1910	2005	<a href="http://www.gov.pe.ca/infopei/onelisting.php3?number=43516">www.gov.pe.ca/infopei/onelisting.php3?number=43516</a>
New Brunswick	1888	1910	1955	1955	<a href="http://archives.gnb.ca/APPS/GovRecs/VISSE/Introduction.aspx?L=EN">http://archives.gnb.ca/APPS/GovRecs/VISSE/Introduction.aspx?L=EN</a>
Ontario	1869	1908	1923	1933	<a href="http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/interloan/vsmain.htm">www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/interloan/vsmain.htm</a>
Manitoba	1882	1906	1926	1936	<a href="http://web2.gov.mb.ca/cca/vital/index.html">http://web2.gov.mb.ca/cca/vital/index.html</a>
Saskatchewan	1888	1906	1931	1936	<a href="http://vsgs.health.gov.sk.ca/vsgs_srch.aspx">http://vsgs.health.gov.sk.ca/vsgs_srch.aspx</a>
Alberta	1850	1906	1931	1956	<a href="http://governmentervices.gov.ab.ca/vs/genealogy.cfm">http://governmentervices.gov.ab.ca/vs/genealogy.cfm</a>
British Columbia	1872	1903	1930	1985	<a href="http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/textual/governmt/vstats/v_events.htm#indexes">www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/textual/governmt/vstats/v_events.htm#indexes</a>

I apologize for not including Quebec or the territories but a quick check of their archive websites showed that this would be a fairly complicated task and more than I bargained for in a quick article. Also, civil registration in Quebec only started in 1965, much later than anywhere else in Canada.

In a nutshell, we have a range of 11 years for births with ranges of 45 and 72 for marriages and deaths respectively. Why? If it's a privacy issue does that mean that some provinces care less about our privacy than others?

Since the genealogy community was so effective at getting the post 1901 censuses released, maybe this should be our next cause? To establish a reasonable privacy period for each type of record and then to lobby our MPP's to change the rules regarding their vital record closure periods for the whole country.

After all, the British government has a 99 year policy for census privacy but allows the electoral rolls to be released up to the current year. These show all the people living at the same address which is what the privacy rule is supposed to avoid for the census. Is that stupid or what? Check out [www.192.com](http://www.192.com) to see what I'm talking about.