

Researching Atlantic Canadian Ancestors

Census and Census Substitutes

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Canadian Census

Canada has census records dating back to 17th century; however, these records can vary in their availability per province, the information collected, and in populations and regions covered. A Canadian census after confederation has occurred every decade since 1871, the most recent being the 1931 census. An exception to that rule is the province of Newfoundland which did not officially join Canada until 1949—it has a 1935 and 1945 census.

Pre-Confederation Census Records

The first census conducted in any region of Canada was in 1666 by Jean Talon. The Constitution Act of 1867 created the Union of Canada. Newfoundland did not join the Dominion of Canada until 1949. The first Census was of the Dominion of Canadian provinces in 1871. Earlier censuses for New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island were conducted on the Provincial level. The general census was taken in 1871 and subsequently every 10 years.

1851 Census

The 1851 Census includes: Canada East (Quebec), Canada West (Ontario), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. For this course on Atlantic Canada we will not be discussing Ontario and Quebec.

1851 New Brunswick

The 1851 New Brunswick census includes the entire family in each household. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving schedule.

- Name
- Gender
- Relationship
- Age
- Race – with racial breakdown of ‘White’, ‘Coloured’, or ‘Indian’
- Occupation
- Date of entering the colony of New Brunswick
- Whether they are sick or infirm at the time of the census

1851 Nova Scotia

The 1851 Nova Scotia census survives for only part of the province. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving schedules:

- Name of the head of the household only.
- The exact number of other household members broken down by category including their gender and age.
- Whether or not the head of household was of Native Canadian Indian heritage.
- Whether the head of the household was “deaf and dumb”, lunatic or an idiot.
- The religion of the head of the household.
- Other statistics are recorded per town / township reflecting the entire population.

The 1851 Census of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are available on the following websites:

FamilySearch (*transcription only*) <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1325192>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1061/>

Findmypast: <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/canada-census-1851>

Library and Archives Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

1861 Census

1861 New Brunswick

The 1861 New Brunswick census contains the entire household. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving schedules:

- Name of the Inhabitants
- Sex
- Relationship to the head of the family
- Age
- Race and where born
- Rank or occupation
- Religious Profession
- Number of children at school within the year
- Sick and Infirm
- Deaf and Dumb
- Blind
- Lunatic or Idiotic
- The whole number of any births, marriages and deaths within the preceding year.

1861 Nova Scotia

The 1861 Nova Scotia census contains the head of the household. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedules. Over 140 agricultural and other statistical questions are available only on microfilm. The only online versions only contain questions # 1-13, and 128-147.

- Population totals of Male and Females in household
- Births since March 30, 1860
- Deaths of Infants broken down into under the age of one, and between ages one and two.

1861 Prince Edward Island

The 1861 Prince Edward Island census contains the head of the household. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedules.

- Head of Household
- Ages of Males and Females in the household
- Number of Deaf and Dumb in each family
- Number of Blind in Each family
- Number who have not been vaccinated and who have had "Small Pox" in the family
- Total number in each family including servants and apprentices
- Number of Married persons in each family
- Number of Single people in each family
- Ages of Males and Females in the household
- Number of "deaf and dumb" in each family
- Number of blind and insane in Each family
- Number who have not been vaccinated and who have had "Small Pox" in the family
- Number of your family who were born, married and died in the past year.
- Male and Female Indians in the household
- Family members connected with various religions denominations
- Various details on their land holdings, and the name of the Proprietor who could be different then the head of household.

The 1861 Census of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and P.E.I. are available on the following websites:

FamilySearch: (*New Brunswick*) <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1325208>; (*Nova Scotia*) <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1460163>; (*Prince Edward Island*)

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1460172>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1570/>

Findmypast: <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/canada-census-1861>

Library and Archives of Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

1871 Census

The 1871 census was conducted on April 2, 1871. It was the first census conducted after the Dominion of Canada was established in 1867. For Atlantic Canada it includes New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, including Labrador, which was enumerated in the Northwest Territories, and Labrador sub-district. The number in order of visitation of locations included: vessels, shanties, dwelling house in construction, uninhabited and inhabited. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedule.

- Name
- Gender
- Age and whether born within last twelve months
- Country or Province of birth
- Religion
- Family Origin
- Occupation or Trade
- Married or Widowed
- Married within the last twelve months
- Attending school
- Physical infirmities
- Remarks column

The 1871 Census of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Labrador are available on the following websites:

FamilySearch (*transcription only*): <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1551612>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1578/>

Findmypast: <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/canada-census-1871>

Library and Archives of Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

1881 Census

The 1881 Census for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island was conducted April 4, 1881. The number in order of visitation of locations included: vessels, shanties, dwelling house in construction, uninhabited and inhabited. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedule.

- Name
- Gender
- Age and whether born within last twelve months
- Country or Province of birth

- Religion
- Family Origin
- Occupation or Trade
- Married or Widowed
- Married within the last twelve months
- Attending school
- Physical infirmities
- Remarks column

The 1881 Census of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are available on the following websites:

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1804541>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1577/>

Findmypast: <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/canada-census-1881>

Library and Archives of Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

1891 Census

The 1891 Census for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island was conducted April 6, 1891. The number in order of visitation of locations included: vessels, shanties, dwelling house in construction, uninhabited and inhabited. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedule below. For the first time it is now including the identity of relationships of each household member and the place of birth of each person's parents.

- Name
- Gender
- Age
- Married or Widowed
- Relation to Head of Family
- Country or Province of birth
- French Canadian
- Place of Birth of Father and Mother
- Religion
- Occupation and or an Employer
- Wage Earner
- Unemployed during the week preceding the census
- Employer to state number of hands employed
- Whether they can read or write
- Infirmities

The 1891 Census of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are available on the following websites:

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1583536>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1274/>

Findmypast: <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/canada-census-1891>

Library and Archives of Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

1901 Census

The 1901 Census for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island was conducted March 31, 1901. Besides the personal schedule of the population, a schedule dealing with buildings, lands, churches, and schools survived. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedule below. For the first time it is now including the full date of birth, and the date when someone immigrated and was naturalized in Canada.

- Name
- Gender
- Color
- Relation to Head of Family
- Single, married, widowed or divorced
- Exact birthdate
- Age at last birthday
- Country or Province of birth
- Year of immigration to Canada
- Year of naturalization
- Racial or Tribal origins
- Nationality
- Religion
- Questions 17-21: Principal Profession or Trade
- Questions 22-27: concern "Wage Earners"
- Questions 28-33: concern education and language spoken
- Infirmities

The 1901 Census of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are available on the following websites:

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1584557>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8826/>

Findmypast: <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/canada-census-1901>

Library and Archives of Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

1911 Census

The 1911 Census for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Labrador was enumerated in the Northwest Territories, Labrador sub-district. The census was conducted June 1, 1911. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedule below.

- Name
- Gender
- Relation to Head of Family
- Single, married, widowed or divorced
- Month and year of birthdate
- Age at last birthday
- Country or Province of birth
- Year of immigration to Canada
- Year of naturalization
- Racial or Tribal origins
- Nationality
- Religion
- Questions 17-21: Principal Profession or Trade
- Questions 22-29: concern "Wage Earners"
- Question 30-32: questions about insurance
- Questions 33-37: concern education and language spoken
- Questions 38-41: Infirmities

The 1911 Census of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are available on the following websites:

FamilySearch (*transcription only*): <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2143998>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8947/>

Findmypast: <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/canada-census-1911>

Library and Archives of Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

1921 Census

The 1921 Census for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island. Census was conducted June 1, 1921. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedule below.

- Name
- Place of residence and type of abode

- Relation to Head of Family
- Gender
- Age
- Single, married, widowed or divorced
- Place of birth, and that of both parents
- Year of immigration to Canada
- Year of naturalization
- Nationality
- Racial or Tribal origins
- Language spoken
- Religion
- Questions 26-28: concern education
- Questions 29-35: concern employment

The 1921 Census of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are available on the following websites:

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8991/>

Library and Archives of Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

1921, 1935, and 1945 Newfoundland Census

The 1921 Census for Newfoundland is the first census to cover all families in Newfoundland before joining Canada in 1949. There are also a 1935 and 1945 Newfoundland census. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedule below for the 1921 Census.

- Name
- Place of residence
- Gender
- Relationship to head of the household
- Single, married, widowed, divorced or legally separated
- Month and year of birth, and age at last birthday
- Town and country of birth
- Year of immigration to Newfoundland if not born here
- Year of Naturalization if formerly an Alien
- Nationality
- Religion
- Whether a Micmac Indian
- Occupation, industry employed and whether they are an employee or the employer
- What other work do they perform as a means for a living?

The 1921 Census of Newfoundland is available on the following websites:

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61491/>

Library and Archives Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Census/Index>

The 1935 and 1945 Census of Newfoundland is available on the following websites:

FamilySearch: (1935) <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2246711>; (1945)

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2246699>

Ancestry.com: (1935) <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61493/>; (1945)

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61492/>

1931 Census

The 1931 Census for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island was conducted June 1, 1931. It contains the following genealogical details in the surviving personal schedule below including questions about unemployment.

- Name
- Place of residence and description of abode
- Relation to Head of Family
- Gender
- Single, married, widowed or divorced
- Age at last birthday
- Place of birth, and that of both parents
- Year of immigration to Canada
- Year of naturalization
- Nationality
- Racial origins
- Language spoken
- Religion
- Questions 26-27: concern education
- Questions 28-32: concern employment
- Questions 33-40: concern unemployment

The 1931 Census of Newfoundland is available on the following websites:

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/62640/>

Library and Archives Canada: <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/index1931>

Census Substitutes

Suggestions for Census Substitutes

- **Assessment and tax records or return of inhabitants** compiled by local village or township.
- **Military Records.** Surviving nineteenth century militia rolls, which may list men in a community within a certain age group.
- **Group petitions** (which exist for Upper and Lower Canada, as well as New Brunswick and Nova Scotia): these petitions may be found in the land petitions series under the name of a region signed by members of the community requesting government assistance to build a road or to provide land for a church. Many petitions may be requesting land grants for personal settlement.
- **School Records.** Listing the names of teachers and occasionally students.
- **The Canadian National Registration of 1940.** The National Resources Mobilization Act and War Measures Act resulted in a compulsory registration of all people 16 years of age or older, from 1940 to 1946. A copy of this registration may be ordered from Statistics Canada, for a fee, providing the individual has been dead for more than 20 years.

Nova Scotia Census Substitutes

- Acadian Censuses 1707-1752 including ecclesiastical
- Census Returns, Assessment and Poll Tax Records 1767-1838
- Census Returns, 1767-1787
- Census Return, Granville, '1772 or 3'
- 'Valuation Real Estate Halifax and surrounding areas 1775 and 1776'
- Assessments for Shelburne and outlying communities, 1786 and 1787
- Poll Tax Records, 1791-1795
- Census Returns, 1811, 1817 and 1818
- Census Returns, 1827
- Census Returns, 1838
- Available from the Nova Scotia Archives (nearly 70,000 images):
<https://archives.novascotia.ca/census/>

New Brunswick Census Substitutes

- 1820 Census of the Colony of Madawaska. Names of heads of household

- 1843 and 1848 Census. Names of heads of households for Harvey and Teetotal Settlements

Prince Edward Island Census Substitutes

- 1798 Census. Transcribed from Duncan Campbell's *History of Prince Edward Island*
- 1841 Census: Includes part of Prince, Queens and Kings Counties. Available on FamilySearch.org
- 1848 Census: Only includes Charlottetown and Charlottetown Royal.
- 1855 Census: Patriotic Fund. A list of contributors to the Crimean War (3,000 residents).

Newfoundland and Labrador Census Substitutes

The following years are partial surviving communities census substitutes available from FamilySearch.org
1675, 1677, 1681, 1706, 1753, 1794-1797, 1800, 1801, 1836, 1838, 1847, 1858, 1884, 1891 and 1911

These early census substitutes are available online:

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Newfoundland_and_Labrador_Census

Locating Census Records Online

- **FamilySearch.org** – overview of the catalog and databases for Canadian Census.
Library and Archives Canada Census Finding guide <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/Pages/census.aspx>

Bibliography

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