

Researching the Canadian Census and Early 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. Canadian census after confederation has occurred every decade since 1871, the most recent being the 1931 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 was in 1871. Pre-1871 censuses for Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward and Quebec Island were conducted on the Provincial level or by local officials. The general census has been taken since 1871 and every 10 years thereafter.

1851 Census

The 1851 Census includes: Canada East (Quebec), Canada West (Ontario), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

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
- 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://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1851/Pages/1851.aspx>

1851 Ontario and Quebec

The 1851 Quebec and Ontario Census population reflects each person in the house on the night of January 11, 1852, as well as those who usually lived at the house but were absent that night.

- Name
- Profession, Trade or Occupation.
- Place of Birth.
- Religion
- Residence if out of limits of the town enumerated.
- Age at next birthday.
- Gender
- Marital Status.
- Race
- Whether Native Canadian
- Whether actually a family member of the household
- Whether not a family member of the household
- Whether a member of the family, but not present
- Whether deaf and dumb, blind, or a lunatic
- Whether attending school
- Whether born or died during the year 1851
- If died, age and cause of death

The 1851 Census of Ontario (Upper Canada) is available on the following websites:

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

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

Library and Archives Canada: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1851/Pages/1851.aspx>

1851 Quebec

The 1851 Census of Quebec (Lower Canada) is 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://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1851/Pages/1851.aspx>

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
- Gender
- 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 than the head of household.

1861 Ontario and Quebec

- Name of Inhabitants
- Profession, Trade, or Occupation
- Place of birth
- Whether married during the year
- Religion
- Residence if out of the limits of the town enumerated.
- Age at next birthday
- Gender

- Marital Status
- Race
- Deaf and Dumb, Blind, Lunatics or Idiots.
- Attending School within the year
- Persons over 20 who cannot read or write
- Births in 1860
- Deaths in 1860 including age and cause of death.

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

FamilySearch:

- New Brunswick: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1325208>
- Nova Scotia: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1460164>
- Ontario: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1460163>
- Prince Edward Island: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1460172>;
- Quebec: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1460173>

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://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1861/Pages/1861.aspx>

1871 Census

The 1871 census was first census conducted April 2, 1871, after the Dominion of Canada in 1867. 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 Canada is 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://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1871/Pages/1871.aspx>

1881 Census

The 1881 Census for Canada 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 Canada is 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://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1881/Pages/1881.aspx>

1891 Census

The 1891 Census 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 Canada is 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://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1891/Pages/1891.aspx>

1901 Census

The 1901 Census 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 Canada is 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://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1901/Pages/1901.aspx>

1906 Northwest Provinces Census

The 1906 census of Canada for the Northwest provinces includes Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta.

This census is available online from the following websites:

FamilySearch (*index only*): <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1584925>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8827/>

MyHeritage: <https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10457/1906-canada-census-of-alberta-saskatchewan-manitoba>

Library and Archives Canada: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1906/Pages/1906.aspx>

1911 Census

The 1911 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 Canada is 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://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1911/Pages/1911.aspx>

1916 Prairie Provinces Census

The 1916 census of Canada for the Northwest provinces includes Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta.

This census is available online from the following websites:

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1529118>

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1556/>

MyHeritage: <https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10458/1916-canada-census-of-alberta-saskatchewan-manitoba>

1921 Census

The 1921 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 Canada is available on the following websites:

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

Library and Archives of Canada: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1921/Pages/search.aspx>

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/>

1926 Prairie Provinces Census

The 1926 census of Canada for the Northwest provinces includes Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta. This census is available online from the following websites:

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3005862>

Library and Archives Canada: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1926/Pages/search.aspx>

1931 Census

The 1931 Census 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>

Early Census Substitutes pre-1871

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, 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.

Manitoba Census and Substitutes

Manitoba Censuses for 1827-1856 were taken by or for the Hudson Bay Company. The 1870 census was taken with the direction of Canada's Department of Agriculture. These are available from FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/57918?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

Nova Scotia Census and 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 and 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

Newfoundland and Labrador Census and 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

Ontario Census and Substitutes

The 1842 Census of Ontario (Upper Canada) names the head of household only.

This census is available online from the following websites:

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1834342>

Library and Archives Canada: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1842-canada-west/Pages/1842-canada-west.aspx>

Prince Edward Island Census and 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).

Quebec Census and Substitutes

The following years are partial surviving communities census substitutes available from FamilySearch.org 1666, 1825, 1831, and 1842. These early census substitutes are linked from FamilySearch Wiki:

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

The **Library and Archives of Canada** has the following census and census substitutes.

1667: [https://recherche-collection-search.bac-](https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Record?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=2318857)

[lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Record?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=2318857](https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Record?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=2318857)

1681: https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c6815/16

1825: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1825/Pages/1825.aspx>

The website for **Canadiana Héritage** has the following census and substitutes: 1699, 1700, 1760, 1761, 1764, 1765, 1766-1787 (Montreal baptisms, marriages and burials), 1769-1772 (Householders in the accounts of the Inspector of Chimneys), 1778 (Loyalist Head of household provision list), 1784, 1785, 1792, 1795, 1798, 1805, 1811, 1813 1815, 1816, 1817, 1819, 1830, 1831, 1832-1835 (various Montreal lists).

These early census substitutes are linked from FamilySearch Wiki for each year listed above:

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

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Obee, David, *Counting Canada : a genealogical guide to the Canadian census* (Victoria, B.C. : D. Obee, 2012).