



THE MANUSCRIPT CENSUS VERSUS THE PUBLISHED CENSUS: A REFERENCE GUIDE

Census Taking in Canadian History:

Census taking has had a long history in Canada, with the first census of New France taking place in 1666 under the direction of Jean Talon. Despite its early start, the modern shape of the Canadian census and the legalities of the census did not come into being until 1867 when the taking of the census every ten years became a requirement under the British North America Act.

The census is a source of in-depth information regarding all, or a part of the country during a particular censal year. Census reports are particularly useful to researchers interested in measuring changes over a period of time concerning:

- Age of Population
- Agriculture
- Economic Growth/Decline
- Educational Attainment
- Employment
- Forestry
- Fishing
- Immigration and Birthplace
- Language
- Manufacturing
- Marital Status
- Mining
- Religion
- Urban and Rural Populations

What is the Manuscript Census and when should we use it?

The Manuscript Census refers to the actual handwritten forms that the census takers filled out as they traveled from house to house. Since these census returns were collected so long ago, they are now considered to be a part of the public domain. For census records prior to 1906, the rule for release of these records was 92 years after the taking of the census. The [Census Returns, 1825-1901](#), is a collection of returns that have been microfilmed by the National Archives of Canada and are available for public use. The materials contained within this collection include personal information on individuals such as:

- Name and age of head of household
- Name, age, and sex of family members within the household and their relationship to the head of the household as well as name, age and sex of servants, labourers and “strays” residing in the home
- Home Address
- Occupation

- Ethnicity
- Religion

When to use the manuscript census over the bound volume of statistical tables depends on what type of information the user is seeking. You may want to begin by asking the patron the following questions:

1. Are you looking for information about a particular individual or members of his family?
2. Are you looking for statistical tables?

A positive answer to question number 1 dictates consultation of the manuscript census reels, while a positive answer to the second question leads to the bound census volumes, which are filed in row 48 of the Government Documents stacks.

Searching the Manuscript Census:

The most striking thing about the manuscript census is that there is no central index to the names that appear in it. Instead the census is organized by province. Unless you know where the person lived it will not be possible for you to locate the correct microfilm reel. Before turning to the manuscript census, a certain amount of preparation, searching, and patience are required on the part of the researcher.

Finding the right reel:

In order to locate data in the manuscript census collection, you will need to look at one of the following catalogues, depending on the census year:

Census Year	Corresponding Reel Index and Call No.	Microfilm Call Number
1825-1871	<u>Check-List of Quebec Census Returns 1825-1871</u> (GDOC REF HA747 Q3R47 1963)	121
1881, 1891	<u>Catalogue of Census Returns on Microfilm 1666-1891</u> (GDOC REF HA745 C46 2987)	415 (for 1881) 416 (for 1891)
1901	<u>Catalogue of Census Returns on Microfilm 1901</u> (GDOC REF HA745 C462 1993)	417

Inside, each catalogue is organized by province, which is then divided by: sub-district, and district.

A typical entry reads:

Saint-Sauveur **TERREBONNE**
1901 T-6548

Saint-Sauveur in this instance represents the name of town or township; **Terrebonne**, the name of the district; 1901, the year of the census, and T-6548 the number of the reel.

Use the reel indexes as follows:

In the above example of **TERREBONNE**, the reel number T-6548 will be preceded by "Microfilm 417" on the shelf because it is a 1901 census, in other words it will appear as: **Microfilm 417 T-6548**

McGill's Manuscript Census Holdings:

The Government Information Service has manuscript census returns on microfilm (1825-1901) for the **province of Québec** only (these are filed in GDOC AV Room).

For patrons wishing to search the manuscript census prior to 1901, currently they have no other option but to search using the microfilm reels. However, for those searching the 1901 and 1906 censuses, two options are available: searching the microfilm or conducting an online search.

The National Archives of Canada, has created a website, ArchiviaNet, (http://www.archives.ca/02/020122_e.html), that provides access to the 1901 Census of Canada and the 1906 Census of the Northwest Provinces (concerning Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan). It is possible to search these manuscript censuses by province and by place name, but not by family name. These sites provide digitized copies of the original census returns:

1901 - http://www.archives.ca/02/020122_e.html

1906 - http://www.archives.ca/02/020153_e.html

1911 - <http://www.collectioncanada.ca/archivianet/1911/index-e.html>

Of the two methods for searching, [ArchiviaNet](#) would be the search strategy of choice. Using [ArchiviaNet](#) is quicker and easier than using microfilm and the corresponding catalogues. Simply select the appropriate province and type in the place name. It is possible to enlarge the handwritten text, although it may be difficult to decipher the script.

For the 1871 census, to date only records for the province of Ontario have been entered into a database that is searchable by the individual's surname. The database *The Federal Census of 1871: Ontario Index* (http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/020108_e.html), has been created by the Ontario Genealogical Society and National Archives of Canada. This database does not search records that are facsimiles of handwritten census returns; search results are given in a computer text format.

It is possible to search nominal Canadian census records from 1881 (along with British records from 1881 and US records from 1880) on a website created by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This does not search facsimiles of handwritten census returns; search results are given in a computer text format. This service is available at:

http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Search/frameSet_search.asp?PAGE=census/search_census.asp

At the present time the McGill Government Information Service only has reels for schedule 1, "Nominal return of the living" **for the province of Québec**. Concordia's Government Information Services at the Webster Library has the complete microfilm sets for the years 1871, 1881, 1891, and 1901. These sets include census returns for all the provinces and each of the schedules. As Concordia's holdings are recorded by reel number, you will need to check the [Catalogue of census returns on microfilm: 1666-1901](#) (GDOC REF HA745 C46 1987) to locate the correct reel before heading over to the second floor of the Webster Library.

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