

The chief sources of statistics for the first half-century of British occupation were sporadic reports prepared by the colonial governors though censuses of different sections were taken at irregular intervals. There was a census of Canada in 1765 and others in 1784 and in 1790. Censuses of Upper Canada (Ontario) were taken on an annual basis from 1824 to 1842 and for Lower Canada (Quebec) censuses were taken in 1825, 1827, 1829, 1831, 1832, 1842 and 1844. During this period, censuses of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, the Assiniboine and the Red River District (Manitoba) were also fairly frequent.

The Census Act passed Sept. 18, 1841 was the first legislative attempt to institute a policy of regular census taking. It provided for a census in the year 1842 and every fifth year thereafter but under this Act only a census of Upper Canada was taken. Subsequent legislation provided for a census of Lower Canada in 1842 and a census of the two Provinces in 1848 and 1850. However the Act which provided most effectively for the taking of a periodical census was passed in 1851 and the censuses of 1851-52 and 1861 were carried out under it. In the same years censuses of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were also taken so that the present decennial census may be said to date from 1851.

The first census following Confederation, that of 1871, was taken under a new Act passed in 1870, an amendment to which in 1879 provided for the taking of a census in 1881 and in every tenth year thereafter. Such decennial censuses have been taken and as the country has progressed economically and government and business administration has become more complex the scope of each successive enumeration has increased. The present legislative authority for the taking of the census is the Statistics Act (R.S.C. 1952, c. 257 and amendment).

The original legal *raison d'être* of the census was to determine representation in the Federal House of Commons. Under the British North America Act it was provided that the first rearrangement of seats in the House should be made on completion of the Census of 1871, a similar readjustment to follow every subsequent decennial census. (The application of the census to this problem is dealt with at pp. 73-74.) But the census of today has far wider uses than to determine electoral representation, important as that purpose is. It constitutes in fact nothing less than a periodical stock-taking of the people—their numbers, geographical distribution, ages, marital status, place of birth, nationality, origin, language, schooling, occupations, earnings, family composition, housing conditions, and so forth. Census data on the population are useful in determining provincial subsidy payments, school grants and other forms of public expenditure where amounts paid are on a per capita basis. Simple counts of the population are also essential in calculating birth, death and marriage rates, production and consumption rates, and many other per capita measures. Census population counts also serve as benchmarks in the making of intercensal estimates of population. At each level of government population figures from the census are regarded as official counts of numbers of persons living in provinces, cities, towns, villages, etc.

Statistics on such characteristics of the population as age, marital status, language, occupation, etc., likewise serve a variety of uses. Age figures for example are required in estimating the costs of social security measures such as family allowances and old age pensions, in estimating schooling needs, in producing life tables, and for a variety of purposes in the study of social and economic problems. Marital status statistics from the census are used to compare the incidence of various diseases among single and married persons, to estimate the proportion of married women in the labour force, to determine the changes taking place in the number of widowed and divorced persons in Canada. Statistics on language and mother tongue are useful to educational authorities, advertising agencies and the foreign language press in the publication and distribution of information in various languages.