

After the British occupation, there were censuses at various times, but it was not until 1841 that the first Canadian Census Act was passed. Under this act, a census of Upper Canada was taken in 1842 and, in the following year, provision was made for a census of Lower Canada. A regular periodical census, to be taken every ten years, was initiated for the united provinces in 1851 and, since censuses were taken at the same time in 1851 and 1861 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick respectively, the act of 1851 may be regarded as originating the present decennial census.

Three years after Confederation, an act was passed providing for "the first census in Canada to be taken in the year 1871". The census was to obtain, for the four provinces and each of the electoral districts and their divisions, statistics on population and population characteristics, housing, land, the valuation of real and personal property, agriculture, fisheries, lumbering, mining, manufacturing and other industries, and municipal, educational, charitable and other institutions. The Census Act of 1905 made provision for the quinquennial census of the Prairie Provinces, a step confirmed by the Statistics Acts of 1918 and 1948. It was under the authority of the Statistics Acts of 1918 and 1948 that the decennial censuses of 1921, 1931, 1941 and 1951 and the quinquennial censuses of the Prairie Provinces of 1926, 1936, 1946 and 1956 were taken; the tenth decennial census of 1961 was taken under authority of the Statistics Act of 1948 as amended in 1952.

Objects and Uses of the Census

The Canadian census is taken primarily to determine the representation of each of the provinces in the Federal House of Commons. The British North America Act of 1867 provided that, in respect of representation in the House of Commons, the Province of Quebec should have the fixed number of 65 Members and that there should be assigned to each of the other provinces such a number of Members as would bear the same proportion to the number of its population as the number 65 bears to the population of Quebec. This act also provided that, on the completion of a census in 1871 and of each subsequent decennial census, the representation of the several provinces should be adjusted from time to time using the formula of 1867.

This act was amended in 1946 to ensure that representation would be proportional to the population of each province. Representation was fixed as follows: The membership assigned to each province shall be computed by dividing the total population of the provinces by 254 and dividing the population of each province by the quotient so obtained. If the number of Members thereby assigned to a province should be less than the number of Senators for that province, then the number of Members of Parliament for that province is increased to equal its number of Senators.

The act was amended again in 1952. The effect is that the representation of any province shall not be reduced by more than 15 per cent at any one readjustment, subject, however, to the qualification that the representation of a province with a small population shall not be greater than any province with a larger population. Subsequently, Parliament enacted "an Act to readjust the Representation in the House of Commons, 1952", effective in the general election of 1953, which increased the representation to a total of 265 Members.

A second reason, of great importance from the provincial standpoint, is the fact that a number of the federal subsidies to the provinces are based on population. The original subsidies granted under the British North America Act were based on population, namely, those respecting government and legislation, debt allowance and the general per capita subsidy. Subsequently, the tax agreements entered into with eight of the provinces were predicated, amongst other things, on population increases in relation to other factors.