



REFERENCE PAPERS

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 59

(Revised October 1964)

THE CENSUS OF 1961^{xx}

Introduction

Once every ten years since Confederation, a census has been taken of the people of Canada. The first of these decennial censuses, as they are called, was taken in 1871; the tenth, on June 1, 1961. The latter was a project of the greatest magnitude, since its organization not only extended from the United States border to the most northerly settlements in the Arctic but from the east coast of Newfoundland to the islands off the coast of British Columbia.

The 1961 census was a census of population, housing, agriculture, and merchandising establishments. Its value in determining the progress of Canada is inestimable. Its uses are so varied that there is scarcely a phase of human activity that cannot be related to it. It is of aid to government, business, social welfare, justice and education. Its information being available to everyone, the census is thoroughly democratic in its results.

Historical Background

Claims to have taken the earliest census in the New World have been made for the Incas of Peru. Censuses were also taken by the Spaniards in 1548 in Peru, in 1576, in North America and again in Peru in 1606. Virginia had a census in 1635 and New York in 1698, and there were 36 other colonial censuses in what is now the United States before the first American decennial census in 1790.

To Canada belongs the credit of taking the first modern census. This was the census of the colony of New France in 1666, which was continued periodically until 1754. The census of 1666 was the first census on a name-by-name basis, taken for a fixed date by a personal canvass, showing age, sex, place of residence, occupation and conjugal condition of each person. It recorded a population of 3,215. When it is recalled that in Europe, and elsewhere in America the first modern censuses date only from the eighteenth century, the census of New France was a remarkable innovation.

During the French regime, censuses were taken no fewer than 37 times, and, in addition, nine partial censuses were made. Some of these obtained information on areas under cultivation and pasture, the production of wheat, barley, oats, peas, corn, flax, hemp and tobacco, the numbers of horses, cattle, sheep and swine, and the numbers of public buildings, churches, grist-mills, sawmills, fire-arms and swords.

^{xx}This paper has been revised by the Census Division of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics.