

The Romans, indeed, were assiduous census-takers, both under the Republic and in the days of the Roman Empire.

In the Middle Ages the outstanding example of a census was the survey of England made in 1086 by William the Conqueror which we know as Domesday Book. The survey was made by commissioners who empanelled juries to state under oath the extent, value and nature of each estate, the names, number and social status of the inhabitants and the amounts due to the royal treasury. It was an unpopular procedure and, thereafter, no other such survey was made in England for several centuries. Indeed, as late as 1753, it was stated in Parliament that the taking of a census might be a prelude to "some great public misfortune or epidemical distemper".

Claims to have made 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, 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 census of modern times. 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 modern 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. The Census recorded a population of 3,215. When it is recalled that in Europe and America the first modern censuses date only from the eighteenth century, the taking of the census of the Colony 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, saw-mills, fire-arms and swords.

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 the 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,