

Census Returns on Microfilm:  
1666-1901

by  
Dr. Eileen Goltz

## Definition

The Manuscript Census is a compilation of handwritten census documents, prepared by enumerators as they travelled from one dwelling to another. This, they did every ten years, covering the years from 1666 to 1901. The Public Archives of Canada has microfilmed these documents and made them available for public use. It is an important collection of primary source raw data.

The information contained in these microfilms include:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Literacy
- Name
- Occupation
- Religion
- Sex

The records also indicate who was the head of each household and his (rarely her) relationship to each household member. In the 1891 Census, the birthplace of the father and mother of each person enumerated is stated.

Researching the Census on Microfilm can be very rewarding. It can also be frustrating. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance from the Reference Desk.

## How to locate the microfilm you want

The key to locating data in the Census of Microfilm is the **Census Returns: 1666-1891** and the **Census Returns: 1901** catalogues. These are kept at the Reference Desk on the Second Floor of the Library. They list the places (towns, townships, counties, etc,...) and the location of the microfilms where the data for that place may be found.

The catalogues are organized by province. The larger divisions (i.e. districts and counties) are indicated by **BOLD-FACE TYPE**. The reel numbers are located to the right of the date.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>REEL#</b>
1891	T6355

The following is an example of an entry in the catalogues.

<b>Sudbury</b>	<b>NIPISSING</b>
1891	T6355

Some entries are more complex as is seen below.

**Collingwood GREY**

1851 C11723

1861 Pers. C1026

1861 Agr. C1028

1871 C9953-C9954

1881 C1321

**Collingwood GREY (East/Est)**

1891 T6337

**Collingwood (Town/Ville) SIMCOE**

1861 Pers. C1072

1861 Agr. Missing/Manquant

1871 C9962

1881 C13251

**Collingwood (Town/Ville) SIMCOE (North/Nord)**

1891 T6369

Since the same place name may occur in several parts of the province, it is necessary to know in which District or County your place is situated.

## How to locate a particular person in the Census on Microfilm

There is no central index to the names which appear in the Census on Microfilm, although some genealogical societies have indexed the reels which relate to their particular interests. This indexing is a very local endeavour and is not readily available to most researchers. For the first-time user of this data, preparation, searching, and patience are required.

First it is necessary to know something about the person for whom you are searching, such as:

- Birthdate (approximate)
- Name of other members of the person's family (parents, siblings, or offspring)
- Person's name (both family and given names, if possible)
- Where a person lived (town, township, county, or district)

Knowing the **person's name** is an obvious necessity. It is also helpful to realize that the enumerator may not have spelled the name correctly, or that the spelling may have changed over time. Knowing the given name is most helpful if one is searching for a **Smith** or a **LeBlanc** who lived in an area where the family name was very common.

Knowing **where the person lived** is necessary so the researcher can access the correct microfilm reel.

Knowing the **approximate birthdate** of the person allows the researcher to focus on particular census years. Unfortunately, people did not always state their correct ages. Sometimes the enumerator entered the wrong age.

Knowing the **names of other family members** will help the researcher pinpoint the person being sought. For example, if you know that **Peter Johnston** (a very common name in some areas) had brothers named **David** and **Lionel** and a sister named **Susan**, and that his father had been **James Johnston**, you might be better able to differentiate between him and other Peter Johnstons in the data.

The information is arranged according to the household, with the head of the family first, his wife second, then his offspring in descending age order. It is of interest to note that in cases where the husband/father is deceased, the eldest son becomes the head of the family, and his mother's name appears next, followed by the names of his siblings.

A typical listing might look something like this.

Johnston, James  
Muriel (wife)  
John (son)  
Peter (son)  
David (son)  
Susan (daughter)  
Lionel (son)  
Abigail (daughter)

Obviously, if this is the correct family, Peter Johnston had more than three siblings. If Peter had a sibling who did not live at home, that person would not be listed with the family. He/she would be listed elsewhere, either as a boarder with another family, or if he/she had married, as part of a new family