

Enumerator's Instructions for the Census of Canada 1852 and 1861

by David P. GAGAN*

Researchers using the manuscript census for the Province of Canada for 1852 or 1861, and for the Dominion of Canada, 1871, are invariably appalled and mystified by the very uneven quality of the returns, particularly for 1852 and 1861. The accuracy and completeness of the returns, one quickly learns, can vary dramatically not only between rural and urban districts,¹ but even between contiguous census districts in the same county, township or town.

Some of the most obvious difficulties are the legacy of enumerators whose appointments apparently had more to do with political affiliation than education and trustworthiness. Phonetic spelling which reduces surnames to gibberish, terrible penmanship, and sloth which most frequently manifested itself in a too heavy dependence on the "Ditto" all conspired, in the hands of some enumerators, to render the entries for entire households and whole districts at best unreliable, at worst indecipherable.

Perhaps more aggravating, however, is the lack of consistency from one district to the next (at least in the rural districts) in the attention that was paid to form and detail. Some enumerators carefully identified each household and made an entry in every column that applied to each individual in the household. Other enumerators recorded name, sex, age, religion and occupation for each individual, then aggregated the remaining columns by household; and still others, eager to conserve space, spread the entries for some households across two non-consecutive pages, making household identification extremely difficult.

Clearly, it would be of some assistance to know the precise nature of the enumerator's instructions, particularly for the rural districts where the enumerator rather than the householder was responsible for completing the return, if only to have some standard by which to evaluate the relative accuracy and completeness of any given set of returns, and thus to be able to judge their quality and potential as primary research documents. Two sets of instructions, those for the 1852 and 1861

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¹ The rural census was taken by enumerators who questioned householders. In cities and large towns the returns were left with the householder, then collected and checked by the enumerators.

enumerations,² are reproduced below, together with lists of the column headings on both of the returns to which they refer. For the most part the instructions speak for themselves or, perhaps more correctly, account by their silence for the liberties taken by the enumerators. Nevertheless, a few comments about them may serve to clarify some obvious difficulties.

(a) *Boundaries*. Few of the enumerators had either the skill or the knowledge to draw an accurate map of their districts and the researcher must have recourse to the published returns, or the *Sessional Papers* of the Legislative Assembly for the geographical boundaries of census districts.

(b) *Household and Family*. Although the enumerators were bound to record every member of each family and household normally resident in the house, they were evidently under no obligation to identify complete households, and as a result the returns rarely indicate where the entries for one household end, and those of the next begin. As a result, definitions of household size and structure depend entirely on arbitrary decisions made by the researcher based on transitions in surnames and the position of the entries for the number of families and the type of house, which most (though not all) enumerators placed at the end of an entry. In any case, it is usually possible to distinguish between resident and non-resident inmates, and in some cases to assign non-residents to their appropriate household cohort.

(c) *Occupation*. The number of labourers encountered on the returns has created some debate among Canadian historians over the meaning of the term.³ It now seems clear that the Department responsible for the census did, in fact, wish to distinguish between farmers who occupied land and their dependent sons who merely worked on it; but this seems to have been done as a book-keeping device rather than as a prejudicial comment on their present and future status. Unfortunately, many of the enumerators we have encountered in the Peel County records after noting the head of household's occupation merely entered "ditto" for every other resident, including babes in arms.

(d) *Non-residents, Residents, Family Members and Non-Members*. Apart from the difficulty of distinguishing the household to which each individual belonged, many enumerators, contrary to the instructions, simply aggregated the totals of these columns for each household without referencing individual entries. Worse, boarders are never identified. The researcher must assume that an inmate who is not a member of the family

² I am grateful to Mr. Dan Brock for drawing the 1851 instructions to my attention. An original is in the William Cambers Papers, Special Collections, University of Western Ontario Library. The 1861 instructions were published in the *Hamilton Weekly Spectator*, 10 January 1861.

³ See Leo JOHNSON, "Land Policy, Population Growth and Social Structure in the Home District," *Ontario History*, LXIII (March, 1972), 41-60.

and who has no occupation is a boarder, or perhaps a servant whose occupation has been omitted.

(e) *School Attendance.* Again, many enumerators aggregated these columns instead of referencing them by individual, with the result that it is frequently impossible to tell, for example, in a family with four school-age children, which two in fact attended.

(f) *Illiteracy.* Of all the columns on the 1861 return, this is the least accurate. Some enumerators listed no illiterates in their district. Yet in the very next district the rate of adult illiteracy could be as high as fifty or sixty percent. A blank column is, by definition, an assertion of literacy; since the returns vary so wildly from one enumerator to the next, it must be assumed that some other test, preferably literary, must be employed to verify the accuracy of this column.

(g) *Deaths During the Year.* As with literacy, these columns are highly suspect. We have not encountered a single death from homicide, suicide or infanticide, and very few accidental deaths from whatever cause. This leads to the assumption that the enumerators deliberately limited their notations to death from disease or illness which indeed reflected on the "healthfulness" of the population.

(h) To end on a slightly more optimistic note, the entry for column 4 (1861), "Married During the Year", supposedly was self-evident — a notation of couples married in 1860. Nevertheless, at least two of our enumerators interpreted it to imply a notation of the year in which each couple in their districts was married, erroneously creating for those districts, in effect, a marriage register which includes such variables (or the ability to compute such variables) as age at marriage, ethnicity, religious affiliation and, for mature families, the living offspring of the marriage and the intervals between their births.

One thing is certain. Most observers, including the government, agreed that the 1851 census had been rather badly done; but they ascribed its deficiencies to the suspicions of a population who associated both the decennial enumerations and the more frequent local assessments with the imposition of new or increased taxes, and who therefore withheld information.⁴ Hope for a more accurate return in 1861 was pinned on at least one article of faith, the desire of the Upper Canadians in particular to establish an exact numerical basis for their supremacy in a system of "representation by population", one of many popular antidotes to the evils of the existing system of equal representation in the legislature of the United Province.⁵ Judging by the 1861 returns, those hopes were entirely

⁴ For a comment, see J. Sheridan HOGAN, *Canada: An Essay* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1855), p. 10.

⁵ *Hamilton Weekly Spectator*, 10 January 1861.

misplaced, not least of all because the enumerator's instructions for 1861 represent only the slightest improvement over the 1852 instructions. The same might be said for the enumerators themselves. The upshot, in any event, is that the Census of 1871 seems to represent a distinct improvement, in terms of accuracy and completeness, over the two preceding "numberings of the people."

PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD CENSUS 1852

Column

1. Names of Inmates
2. Profession, Trade or Occupation
3. Place of Birth
4. Religion
5. Residence if Outside of Limits
6. Age Next Birth Day
7. Sex: Male
8. Sex: Female
9. Married or Single
10. Coloured Persons—Negroes
11. Indians, if any
12. Residents: Members, Male
13. Residents: Members, Female
14. Residents: Not Members, Male
15. Residents: Not Members, Female
16. Members Absent: Male
17. Members Absent: Female
18. Deaf and Dumb: Male
19. Deaf and Dumb: Female
20. Blind: Male
21. Blind: Female
22. Lunatics: Female
23. Lunatics: Male
24. Attending School: Male
25. Attending School: Female
26. Births During the Year 1851: Male
27. Births During the Year 1851: Female
28. Deaths During the Year 1851: No., Male
29. Deaths During the Year 1851: No., Female
30. Age and Cause of Deaths

1852

Column

31. Homes: Brick, Stone, Frame, Log, Shanty, or other kinds of residence
32. Homes: No. of Stories
33. No. of families occupying
34. Homes: Vacant
35. Homes: Building
36. Shops, Stores, Inn, Taverns Ec.
37. Public Buildings
38. Places of Worship
39. Information on Mills, Factories Ec., Ec. their cost, power, produce, Ec.
40. Number of Persons usually employed therein
41. General Remarks of the Enumerator

INSTRUCTIONS
to
ENUMERATORS.

OFFICE OF REGISTRATION,
Inspector General's Department,
Quebec, Nov. 1851.

Sir,

THE Census Commissioner for your County having appointed you one of the Enumerators, I am directed by the Board of Registration to convey, through him, to you the following instructions:—

In the first place you will make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the limits of your Enumeration District, and draw up an account thereof, describing its boundaries, rivers, roads and general character.

On receiving your Blanks you will, before commencing to take the Census, perfectly understand each column, and if any difficulty should arise, the Census Commissioner will advise you.

On the second Monday in January you will proceed to your labour, you will write at the head of the sheets given to you, a description of the boundaries of your District.

In the 1st column you will take the name of every person who sojourned in the house on the night of Sunday, the 11th of January, as well strangers as members of the family, and also those members of the family who are temporarily absent, but whose usual residence it is.

Col. 2—Enter the TRADES, PROFESSIONS and CALLINGS of each person, being careful to note that where a son works for the benefit of his parent, he is to be noted—if the parent be a farmer, as a labourer, but if his parent be of a trade, then of the same trade or calling.

Col. 3—The BIRTH PLACE of each person: you will here note that those born of Canadian Parents are to be marked with an F.

*Col. 4—RELIGION.

* "Name the Religious denomination they call themselves—'No Religion' only when they don't believe in a Revelation..." [handwritten notation of enumerator].

- Col. 5 — When a person chanced to stay in a house on the night of the 11th of January, you are to mark if possible the place where his usual residence is: in very many cases this will be impossible, and you are then to write the word "UNKNOWN" in the column.
- Col. 6 — The age of each person, next birth day.
- Cols. 7 & 8 — The sexes.
- Col. 9 — Whether the person be married or single: widowers to be noted Wr. and widows W.
- Cols. 10 & 11 — You will at once apprehend by the term "colored persons," is meant negroes.
- Cols. 12 & 13 — Those who are actually members of the family, staying in the house on the night of the 11th of January.
- Cols. 14 & 15 — Those who stopped in the house on that night, but who are not members of the family, such as travellers, lodgers, clerks, servants, &c.
- Cols. 16 & 17 — Those being members of the family or usual FIXED residents, who may perchance have been absent on the night of the 11th of January.

With these columns you can easily check your returns: thus if columns 7 & 8 and the columns 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 & 17 agree each with the number of names on the sheet, you are correct, thus if the sheet give 50 names: column 7 being 31 and column 8, 19-50.

Col. 12, 14M.	Members of family,	24.
13, 10F.		
14, 10M.	Not members	17.
15, 7F.		
16, 6M.	Members absent	9.
17, 3F.		
		50.

Should any discrepancy appear, the error can easily be corrected.

The columns for Deaf and Dumb, Blind and Lunatics, need no explanation.

- Cols. 24 & 25 — By the words "attending school," not only those actually attending school at the time, but those who usually attend during some or any portion of the year, are meant to be included.

The columns for Births and Deaths refer only to year 1851 — you will please be very particular in noting the ages of the persons that have died and where possible the complaint or cause of death.

Having perfected your Personal enumeration, you next proceed to the House, giving in

- Col. 31 — The sort or kind — in 32 the number of flats or stories according to the usual custom of noting them — in 33 the number of families which occupy each house.
- Cols. 34 & 35 — Houses vacant or building.
- Col. 36 — All Shops, Stores, Inns, Taverns, &c., &c.

- Col. 37— All Public Buildings, such as Markets, Prisons, Court Houses, Public Halls, &c.
- Col. 38— All places of worship, to what denomination belonging, whether held in common between two or more congregations—the material of which built, and as near as you can come to the number of persons each is capable of holding.
- Col. 39—In this column you will enter all Factories of whatsoever kind—distinguishing whether wrought by steam, water, wind or other power, as far as possible the average produce thereof per year, and where you can arrive at it, the value of property invested—and you will please note any circumstance that may attract your attention in relation thereto.
- Col. 40—The number of hands usually employed in each.
- Col. 41—General observations.

It is hoped that the form now adopted will not only save the enumerators much trouble, but also render mistakes or inaccuracies easily to be avoided.

Sheet N^o. A. or the Personal Census, being thus completed, you will proceed with B. or the Agricultural Census. In this you will observe that only the occupiers of land are to be inserted. The columns need very little explanations. N^{os}. 37, 38 and 39 are left blank, in order that you may insert any crop not before given. Experience has shown the great difficulty of arriving at a correct return of the various crops, you will please pay particular attention to these columns. You will take care in filling columns 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, the total of 5 and 9 should agree with the quantity given in 4 — thus if a person hold

	<u>200</u> acres.
Cleared—Col. 5	160
Wild—Col. 9	40
	<u>200</u>

and 6, 7 and 8 must agree with 5.

Lands cleared	<u>160</u>
Under Crop, 100	100
Under Pasture, 45	15
Under Gardens or Orchards	15
	<u>160</u>

- Col. 33— The produce of HAY is to be given in the usual method of the Country, whether by bundles or tons.

The several columns of this return are to be added up previous to their being delivered to the Census Commissioner. In column 55 you will make such remarks as you think best, in regard to the nature of the soil, how watered, general value of the land, &c.

By comparing the present forms with those formerly used, you will at once perceive the desire of the Board to lighten as much as possible the labours of the enumerators and at the same time facilitate the acquirement of the necessary information.

Your Enumeration District must be perfected within 14 days.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

W. CROFTON,

Secy. to the Board

PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD CENSUS 1861

Column

1. Names of Inmates
2. Profession, Trade or Occupation
3. Place of Birth
4. Married During the Year
5. Religion
6. Residence if not in Limits
7. Age Next Birth Day
8. Sex: Male
9. Sex: Female
10. Married of Single
11. Widowers
12. Widows
13. Coloured Persons, Mulatto or Indian
14. Residents: Members of Family, Male
15. Residents: Members of Family, Female
16. Residents: Not Members, Male
17. Residents: Not Members, Female
18. Members of Family Absent: Male
19. Members of Family Absent: Female
20. Deaf and Dumb
21. Blind
22. Lunatics or Idiots
23. Children Attending School Within the Year: Male
24. Children Attending School Within the Year: Female
25. Persons over 20 who cannot read or write: Male
26. Persons over 20 who cannot read or write: Female

1861

Column

- 27. Births in 1860: Male
- 28. Births in 1860: Female.
- 29. Deaths in 1860: No. Male
- 30. Deaths in 1860: No. Female
- 31. Age and Cause of Death
- 32. Houses: Brick, Stone, Frame, Log, etc. etc.
- 33. Houses: No. of Stories
- 34. Houses: No. of Families Living in House
- 35. Houses: Vacant
- 36. Houses: Being Built

THE CENSUS [1861]

The following are the instructions issued to the Census Enumerators from the Bureau of Agriculture and Statistics.

Sir—The Census Commissioner for your County having appointed you one of the Enumerators for taking the Census, I am directed by its Board of Registration and Statistics to convey to you through him the following instructions:—

In the first place, you will make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the limits of your Enumeration District, and draw up an account thereof describing the boundaries, roads, etc., and general character, and, if competent, draw a sketch thereof on the front of your book. On receiving your blanks, you will, before commencing to take the census, endeavour perfectly to understand each column, and if any difficulty arise the Census Commissioner will advise you.

On the second Monday in January, which will be the 14th day of the month, you will proceed to your labor, having previously left the schedules with each family, if in town or city. You will write at the head of the sheets given to you a description of the boundaries of your District.

1st. In the first column you will enter the name of every person who sojourned in each house, on the night of Sunday, the 13th of January, as well strangers as members of the family who are temporarily absent, but whose usual residence it is.

2nd. In the second column enter the Trade, Profession, or calling of each person. Where a son works for the benefit of his father—if the father be a farmer, enter the son or sons as labourers—if a mechanic or tradesman, enter the son as the same, unless he follows a different trade.

3rd. In the third column give the Country in which each person was born, (not the particular town or city) and distinguish between Lower Canada and Upper Canada, and Prussia and the German States.

4th. requires no comment.

5th. In the fifth column give the religion, carefully distinguishing the class of Presbyterian or Methodist where such there are—thus, if Presbyterians in connection

with the old Kirk, or Church of Scotland, mark them C of S; if with the Free Church or Presbyterian Church of Canada, mark them F.C.; and if United Presbyterians, mark them U.P. The Methodists you will mark with W, for Wesleyans; E. for Episcopal; and N.C. for New Connection, and if none of these, mark them "Other" Methodists. There are no sects other than these two requiring special distinguishing marks.

6th. The sixth column is only intended to note the residence of any strangers that may have been in the house on Sunday night, the 13th of January. If their residence cannot be found out mark in "unknown" in this column.

Columns 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 need no explanation.

13th. In this column mark a figure (1) every coloured person's name, i.e. negro or negress. This was much neglected last census, and the number of coloured persons was not ascertained. If Mulatto, mark M after his or her name — thus, (1) M; and if Indian, mark "Ind."

Nos. 14, 15, 16, and 17. These four columns should include all the residents in the house, whether members of family, clerks, servants, or apprentices — but one casual traveller or visitors, as they are noted in the fifth column.

Nos. 18 and 19. In these columns note the members of the family temporarily absent.

Those six columns from 14 to 19, both included, should, when added up agree with columns 8 and 9 together. You are requested to take care that they do agree.

Nos. 20, 21 and 22. Partial blindness need not be noted. Be careful to distinguish between Lunatics and Idiots. Lunatics are persons whose faculties are impaired; Idiots are such as never possessed vigorous faculties at any time.

Nos. 23 and 24. These columns are intended to include all children generally attending school through the year, although casually or temporarily absent.

Nos. 25, 26, 27, 28. Require no comment.

Nos. 29, 30, 31. These are to note the age and cause of death where deaths have occurred in the family common within the year 1860; and you will be very particular in endeavouring to arrive at the truth in every case both as to the age and cause of death, if such information can be obtained, as these show the healthfulness of the country or otherwise.

Nos. 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36 require no comment.

Nos. 37 to 45. These columns are intended to apply only to Live Stock of persons resident in cities, towns, villages, etc., and who are not Farmers. The Stock held by the latter will be returned in the Agricultural Census.

The succeeding columns are easily understood, but in the last it is desirable to include all churches and places of worship, the extent of their accommodation and value.

Care must be taken to note in the columns left for such purposes, Shops, Stores, Inns, Taverns, Schools, etc., also Factories of all kinds... Woollen Factories, Lathes, etc., etc., and note whether wrought by steam, water, or wind power. You will also endeavour to procure accurate information as to the average annual produce of the Factories, whether in Lumber, Flour, Leather or Cloth, etc., etc., and also the value of property invested, if possible to be ascertained, and the number of hands employed in each factory, distinguishing the number of Male and Female — in fact, all the information with regard to manufacturers which you can obtain. The last Census was very deficient in this respect. You will fill one sheet before commencing another, and put an equal number of names on each sheet, except, of course, the last, which there may not be names to fill.

AGRICULTURAL CENSUS

In taking the Agricultural Census, which is to contain only the names of heads of families occupying lands, whether male or female, you will take care that opposite each person's name (in Column 4) the total number of acres occupied within the limits of your Enumeration District, by him or her, is legibly set down in good figures, and that column 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, when added, correspond with column 4.

The other columns are easily understood.

In column 50 it has been thought desirable to designate the value of working horses separate from other animals, as they are an important element in the agricultural policy of the country.

Column 54 should include the value of all the live stock mentioned in columns 46 to 53 inclusive. They form a very important item in the wealth of the country, and will be a criteria of the comparative state of agriculture in each township or county, and also in Canada as compared with other countries.

In columns 62 and 63 you will set down the number and value of pleasure carriages and pleasure sleighs, cutters, etc., kept by each person. Where two or three are kept by the same person, the value of all may be set down in one sum in dollars.

Column 68 is left for remarks you may think right to make, as to cause of deficiency in any particular crops etc., etc.

You will endeavour to impress upon the people in your Enumeration District that the information here sought has no reference whatever to taxation, and that accuracy in their returns is of the highest importance in order to ascertain the state of the resources of the country and encourage the introduction and investment of Capital in the Colony, where the statistics, truthfully taken, warrant the investment.

William Hutton
Secretary.