Canada Census Preservation and Accessibility

In December, OGS President, Shirley Sturdevant, sent a letter to the Head Statistician for Statistics Canada with concerns about the preservation and accessibility of Canadian censuses. A copy of this letter was also sent to Hervé Déry, Acting Librarian and Archivist of Canada, Library and Archives Canada.

A letter of response from Marc Hamel, Director General, Census or Population Program (c.c.: Hervé Déry) was recently received. In it he discusses the stringent quality control used in microfilming the censuses and the part played by Library and Archives Canada. At the time of the release of the 1921 Canada Census through Ancestry.ca, some members indicated that the surnames or even surnames and given names were cut off in images for some townships where they were seeking ancestors. Mr. Hamel explains that a random check was done to review the quality of the digitized images but, since no defect was located, asked that specifics be provided to further direct their investigation. OGS asks that those currently aware of such instances send specific details to president@ogs.on.ca so the facts can be gathered and sent in one message.

Please take time to view Mr. Hamel’s letter, which can be viewed at https://www.ogs.on.ca/home/advocacy.php#census, to view future plans for the preservation and release of census and the National Household Survey records for 2006 and beyond. Please note that third party information has been concealed and know that contact has been made with Library and Archives Canada on your behalf. See more below.

Also, be aware that, according to Mr. Hamel, the legislation governing the 92-year policy for releasing census information will be reviewed prior to the 2016 Census.

The Ontario Genealogical Society and the public-at-large need to consider all things related to the collection, preservation and release of census data in any form in order to be prepared for these discussions which will be debated in Parliament. Together, we must gather information and make informed recommendations. Together we must speak for those who will one day seek their ancestors as we have sought ours.

Fabien Lengellé, Director General Content Access Branch of LAC, explains that conditions and camera quality were less than perfect in the late 1950s when the census records to that date were microfilmed so it is not surprising that there might be errors. Their decisions for the 1921 census release will be the same for the 1931, 1941 and 1951 censuses. LAC views censuses as extremely important. They are trying to look at records being generated during our time and determine what people will want to see 100 years from now. Commenting on the LAC decision to release the 1921 census through Ancestry, M. Lengellé, explained that Ancestry had 18 million visits to their site for those records almost immediately. The LAC site could never have handled that. LAC continues to work with a number of other companies to deliver information to researchers as quickly as possible.