

Journal of the Canadian Historical Association Revue de la Société historique du Canada



“Anyone not on the list might as well be dead”: Aboriginal Peoples and the Censuses of Canada, 1851–1916

Michelle A. Hamilton

Volume 18, Number 1, 2007

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/018254ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/018254ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (print)

1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Hamilton, M. A. (2007). “Anyone not on the list might as well be dead”: Aboriginal Peoples and the Censuses of Canada, 1851–1916. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 18(1), 57–79. <https://doi.org/10.7202/018254ar>

Article abstract

The enumeration of First Nations and Métis peoples in Canada must be considered differently from other ethnic minorities because of their colonial relationship with the state. Over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Aboriginal peoples in Canada became increasingly subject to a separate regulatory body, the Department of Indian Affairs, and legislation such as the Indian Act, both of which affected the information recorded by the census. As the census extended to Canada’s north and west, Indian Affairs officials often acted as census enumerators, and, consequently, its creation of the legal categories of Métis and status Indian blurred the ethnic definitions laid out by the census instructions. Some Aboriginal peoples viewed the census as part of the ongoing process of their nation-to-nation relationship with the British Crown or the Canadian government, but many refused to cooperate with enumerators, seeing them as part of the colonial order which Indian Affairs attempted to impose upon them. Because the public use samples of census data being released by various Canadian universities will result in new social history research, scholars need to understand the ties between colonialism and the enumeration of Aboriginal peoples in order to interpret the data.

“Anyone not on the list might as well be dead”: Aboriginal Peoples and the Censuses of Canada, 1851–1916

MICHELLE A. HAMILTON

Abstract

The enumeration of First Nations and Métis peoples in Canada must be considered differently from other ethnic minorities because of their colonial relationship with the state. Over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Aboriginal peoples in Canada became increasingly subject to a separate regulatory body, the Department of Indian Affairs, and legislation such as the Indian Act, both of which affected the information recorded by the census. As the census extended to Canada's north and west, Indian Affairs officials often acted as census enumerators, and, consequently, its creation of the legal categories of Métis and status Indian blurred the ethnic definitions laid out by the census instructions. Some Aboriginal peoples viewed the census as part of the ongoing process of their nation-to-nation relationship with the British Crown or the Canadian government, but many refused to cooperate with enumerators, seeing them as part of the colonial order which Indian Affairs attempted to impose upon them. Because the public use samples of census data being released by various Canadian universities will result in new social history research, scholars need to understand the ties between colonialism and the enumeration of Aboriginal peoples in order to interpret the data.

Résumé

L'énumération des peuples des Premières Nations et des Métis au Canada doit être considérée autrement que celle des autres minorités ethniques, en raison de leur relation coloniale avec l'État. Au cours du dix-neuvième siècle et au début du vingtième siècle, les Autochtones au Canada sont devenus de plus en

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Kris Inwood, Doug McCalla, Jean Dalgleish, Ashley Fortier, Wesley C. Gustavson, Karl Hele, Benjamin Hoy, Lynn Kennedy, Forrest Pass, Christina Wakefield, and the three anonymous reviewers for the journal. My research and writing time was supported by the Canada Research Chair in Rural History at the University of Guelph. The 1871 and 1891 Census of Canada project is funded by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation.

plus assujettis à un organisme de réglementation distinct, le ministère des Affaires indiennes, et à la législation comme la Loi sur les Indiens, qui ont tous deux eu une incidence sur les renseignements consignés au moyen du recensement. Comme le recensement s'étendait au nord et à l'est du Canada, les agents des Affaires indiennes agissaient souvent à titre d'énumérateurs du recensement et par conséquent, la création des catégories légales de Métis et de statut d'Indien est venue brouiller les définitions ethniques décrites dans les instructions du recensement. Certains Autochtones ont accueilli le recensement favorablement, considérant qu'il était partie prenante des relations entre nations qu'ils avaient entretenu avec la Couronne britannique puis le gouvernement canadien. Cependant, plusieurs ont refusé de coopérer avec les énumérateurs, les considérant comme les agents de l'ordre colonial que les Affaires indiennes tentaient de leur imposer. Comme les échantillons des données du recensement publiés à l'intention d'un vaste public par diverses universités canadiennes mèneront à une nouvelle recherche sur l'histoire sociale, les universitaires devront comprendre les liens entre le colonialisme et l'énumération des Autochtones afin d'interpréter de telles données.

As an enumerator for the 1891 census of Canada, Ronald Green frequently encountered suspicion and resistance as he attempted to document the Aboriginal population of British Columbia's northern coastal region.¹ At one cannery Green reported Native employees reluctant to cooperate. He explained that their attitude was caused by their Chinese co-workers telling them that enumerators were really poll-tax collectors, a tax to which the Chinese themselves were subjected. Green coerced them to give him their census information by informing them that, while he did not personally care if their names were recorded, "anyone not on the list might as well be dead," and thus ineligible for government assistance in the future.² Green's experiences suggest some of the ways in which the enumeration of Aboriginal peoples was part of a larger context of colonialism and the power struggles inherent in Native-newcomer relations.

Benedict Anderson sees the census as shaping the way an imperial power imagines its colonial communities, primarily through its classification of ethnic or racial identities.³ As Bruce Curtis has argued, while censuses reflect the

1 I use the term Aboriginal as inclusive of First Nations and Métis, and Native as synonymous with First Nations.

2 British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), MS-2453, Ronald Edward Green, Diary of Journey to Port Simpson and Queen Charlotte Islands, 7 and 8 July 1891.

3 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 163-5. See also David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, "Censuses, Identity Formation, and the Struggle for Political Power," in *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, ed. David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

“ANYONE NOT ON THE LIST MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD”:
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND THE CENSUSES OF CANADA, 1851–1916

existing organization of a society, they also impose an imagined order onto that society that is related to the political and cultural goals of the state, and its attempts to administer and regulate its subjects. Simply put, “censuses are made not taken.”⁴ Aside from Curtis, other scholars have revealed that the construction of questions and categories for the census schedules, the instructions to enumerators, and the physical process of enumeration influenced the type of information collected and the accuracy with which it was recorded.⁵ In particular, Rob Watts has shown that the Australian enumeration of the 1830s facilitated a kind of “racial government” in which the census categories identified and separated different groups which then could be targeted for special administrative policies. As he and Margaret Jobe have done for Aborigines in Australia and Native Americans in the United States, the enumeration of First Nations and Métis peoples in Canada needs to be considered differently from other ethnicities because of their unique relationship with the state.⁶ Over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Aboriginal peoples

4 Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 33.

5 Alan A. Brookes, “‘Doing the Best I Can’: The Taking of the 1861 New Brunswick Census,” *Histoire Sociale* 9 (1976): 70–91; Patrick A. Dunae, “Making the 1891 Census in British Columbia,” *Histoire Sociale* 31, no. 62 (1999): 223–39; David P. Gagan, “Enumerator’s Instructions for the Census of Canada 1852 and 1861,” *Histoire Sociale* 7, no. 14 (1974): 355–65; Ian Buck, et al., “Reconstructing the Geographical Framework of the 1901 Census of Canada,” *Historical Methods* 33, no. 4 (2000): 199–205; R.M. McInnis, “Some Pitfalls in the 1851–1852 Census of Agriculture of Lower Canada,” *Histoire Sociale* 14, no. 27 (1981): 219–31; Robert M. Galois, “Mapping the British Columbia Census 1881,” *Association of Canadian Map Librarians Bulletin* 47 (1983): 26–36. For outside of Canada, see Marida Hollos, “Why is it Difficult to Take a Census in Nigeria?” *Historical Methods* 25, no. 1 (1992): 12–20; and Nancy Shoemaker, “The Census as Civilizer: American Indian Household Structure in the 1900 and 1910 U.S. Censuses,” *Historical Methods* 25, no. 1 (1992): 4–11, for a discussion of census-distorted household structures. Similarly, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 114–38; Charles Hirschman, “The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (1987): 555–82; and Bernard S. Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,” *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 224–54, show that the imposition of colonial census classifications onto peoples in Malaysia and India distorted and reified existing social structures, although Cohn also argues that these new understandings of classification were later used by Indians themselves to their advantage.

6 Rob Watts, “Making Numbers Count: The Birth of the Census and Racial Government in Victoria, 1834–40,” *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 121 (2003): 26–47; Margaret M. Jobe, “Native Americans and the U.S. Census: A Brief Historical Survey,” *Journal of Government Information* 30 (2004): 66–80. Other scholars have tackled aspects of enumerating Indigenous peoples. For Canada, Curtis, *Politics of Population*, 108–9, 127, 192–4; and Dunae, “Making the 1891 Census,” 230–2, have briefly identified the confusion of enumerators of how or if to record First Nations, the difficulties enumerators experienced in finding and communicating with nomadic and remote groups, and the occasional resistance to questioning. Similar issues for the

in Canada became increasingly subject to a separate regulatory body, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), and assimilationist legislation such as the Indian Act, both of which affected enumeration.⁷ As the census extended to Canada's north and west, DIA officials often acted as census enumerators and, consequently, its creation of the legal categories of Métis and status Indian blurred the ethnic definitions laid out by the census instructions. Some Aboriginal peoples viewed the census as part of the ongoing process of their nation-to-nation relationship with the British Crown or the Canadian government, but many refused to answer the questions of the enumerators, seeing them as part of the colonial order which the DIA attempted to impose.

Understanding the colonial context of Aboriginal enumeration is important because, as Curtis suggests, interpreting the information recorded within the census is necessarily constrained without knowing how the data was collected and analyzed.⁸ The need to fully explore how the colonial relationship between the Canadian state and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada affected enumeration resulted from the creation of a public use sample of the 1891 census and the indexing of the Aboriginal population within these census manuscripts at the University of Guelph.⁹ The increasing availability of Canadian data being released by the census projects at Guelph (1871, 1891), York University (1871), the Programme de recherche en démographie historique at the Université de Montréal (1851–1852, 1881), the Canadian Families Project at the University of Victoria (1901), and the Canadian Century Research Infrastructure Project

United States are considered in Hyman Alterman, *Counting People: The Census in History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), 296-9; and S. Ryan Johansson and S. H. Preston, "Tribal Demography: The Hopi and Navaho Populations as Seen Through Manuscripts from the 1900 U. S. Census," *Social Science History* 3, no. 1 (1978): 5-6.

7 A fully separate department for Indian administration was not created until 1880, but I am using the term DIA to cover its predecessors as well.

8 Curtis, *Politics of Population*, 17. Unfortunately, enumerator journals or private papers discussing the census are rare, and the surviving correspondence between enumerators and census officials in Ottawa often focuses on practical matters such as pay rates. During the 1852 and 1861 census enumerators occasionally made telling comments in the margins of the schedules. Newspapers generally only commented on total population numbers or on unusual situations experienced by enumerators. There is some correspondence between the Departments of Agriculture and Indian Affairs, but most sources are official publications from the census bureau.

9 Because the 1891 census did not include a category for race or origin, the 1891 project team created alternative ethnic markers to assist in the potential identification of First Nations and Métis individuals. See Michelle A. Hamilton and Kris Inwood, "The Identification of the Aboriginal Population in the 1891 Census of Canada," paper presented to the Indigenous Identity in Demographic Sources conference, Umeå University, Sweden, September 2006. For an overview of the 1891 census project at Guelph, see Kris Inwood and Kevin James, "Une ressource numérique pour l'analyse historique: le recensement canadien de 1891," *Cahiers québécois de démographie* 34, no. 2 (2005): 315-29.

“ANYONE NOT ON THE LIST MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD”:
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND THE CENSUSES OF CANADA, 1851–1916

led by the University of Ottawa (1911, 1921, 1931, 1941, 1951), will result in the emergence of new historical studies using this information.¹⁰ Furthermore, public policy for Aboriginal peoples regarding health care, education, housing needs, and social programs is assessed and planned based on past and projected population figures.¹¹ Thus, critical analyses of the production of the census are required to understand the census data itself.

Various boards of registration, statistics, and agriculture administered the census until the federal Department of Agriculture took over after Confederation. In 1912 control of the Census and Statistics Office passed to the Department of Trade and Commerce.¹² Over the nineteenth century, these departments increasingly coordinated their efforts with the Department of Indian Affairs, particularly in the northwest, finally culminating in the specific

-
- 10 For the creation of historical census samples and research stemming from these samples, for example, see Peter Baskerville and Eric Sager, eds., *The Canadian Families Project*, special issue, *Historical Methods* 33, no. 4 (2000); Eric W. Sager, ed., *New Perspectives in Canadian Families*, special issue, *Journal of Family History* 26, no. 2 (2001); Chad Gaffield, ed., *Canadian Century Research Infrastructure*, special issue, *Historical Methods* 40, no. 2 (2007); Kris Inwood and Richard Reid, eds., *Use of Census Manuscript Data for Historical Research*, special issue, *Histoire Sociale* 28, no. 56 (1995); Kees Mandemakers and Lisa Dillon, “Best Practices with Large Databases on Historical Populations,” *Historical Methods* 37, no. 1 (2004): 34-8; Lisa Y. Dillon, “Challenges and Opportunities for Census Record Linkage in the French and English Canadian Context,” *History and Computing* 14, nos. 1-2 (2002): 185-212; Lisa Y. Dillon, “International Partners, Local Volunteers and Lots of Data: The 1881 Canadian Census Project,” *History and Computing* 12, no. 2 (2000): 163-76; Christopher Clubine-Ito, “Multilevel Modeling for Historical Data: An Example from the 1901 Canadian Census,” *Historical Methods* 37, no. 1 (2004): 5-22; Eric W. Sager and Peter Baskerville, eds., *Household Counts: Canadian Household and Families in 1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Melanie Buddle, “The Business of Women: Female Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1901–1941,” *Journal of the West* 43, no. 2 (2004): 44-53; Kenneth Michael Sylvester, “All Things being Equal: Land Ownership and Ethnicity in Rural Canada, 1901,” *Histoire Sociale* 34, no. 67 (2001): 35-59; Peter Baskerville, “Did Religion Matter? Religion and Wealth in Urban Canada at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: An Exploratory Study,” *Histoire Sociale* 34, no. 67 (2001): 61-95; Kris Inwood and Richard Reid, “Gender and Occupational Identity in a Canadian Census,” *Historical Methods* 34, no. 2 (2001): 57-70; Gordon Darroch and Lee Soltow, *Property and Inequality in Victorian Ontario: Structural Patterns and Cultural Communities in the 1871 Census* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).
- 11 Mary Jane Norris, “Contemporary Demography of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada,” in *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues*, ed. David Alan Long and Olive Patricia Dickason (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1996), 179; Don Kerr, Eric Guimond, and Mary Jane Norris, “Perils and Pitfall of Aboriginal Demography: Lessons Learned from the RCAP Projection,” in *Aboriginal Conditions: Research as a Foundation for Public Policy*, ed. Jerry P. White, Paul S. Maxim, and Dan Beavon (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 39.
- 12 For a history of these administrative changes, see David A. Worton, *The Dominion Bureau of Statistics: a History of Canada's Central Statistical Office and its Antecedents, 1841-1972* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).

instructions in 1901 that Indian Agents should be the enumerators for Native communities. As the supposed experts who governed Aboriginal peoples, the DIA seemed to be the practical choice to facilitate census-taking. In part this coordination stemmed from the ever-expanding territory and the diversity of Aboriginal peoples that the census was supposed to cover. The 1851–1852 and 1861 censuses of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick included territory settled for some time by Europeans and their descendants and for which treaties, or at least reserves, had been negotiated. These Native communities appeared to be settled and assimilated, at least outwardly, and the process of their enumeration resembled that of non-Native areas. The expansion of the census to more northerly parts of Ontario and Quebec in 1871, in the 1880s to some parts of western Canada, and in 1891 and 1901 to even more northern and western land, meant that census officials encountered Aboriginal groups which were more unfamiliar. In the more isolated areas, First Nations were often dispersed and moving as they pursued seasonal subsistence rounds. The DIA, accustomed to working with Hudson Bay officials and missionaries, employed these individuals, who knew the territory and its inhabitants, to help enumerate the Aboriginal population. The lack of a common language in northwestern areas also hampered enumeration, but the DIA was accustomed to employing interpreters.

Like Watts' "racial government," the Department of Indian Affairs also had its own particular interests in obtaining census information. After the 1871 census the DIA admitted that it had discovered the existence of some previously unknown bands in Ontario and Quebec. Since these groups did not receive treaty annuities, it concluded, they had had no inducements to report themselves to department officials. The DIA 1871 annual report was adjusted to include these groups.¹³ Likewise, in 1891 and in 1911, the Department amended its own internal register of the "Nomadic Indians" in Ontario and Quebec according to the Dominion censuses.¹⁴

For the Department of Indian Affairs to be able to effectively govern, or control, these communities, specific information gathered by the census was required. Jobe suggests that in the United States detailed information about Native Americans was not required until westward settlement increased and the Indian Removal Act was proposed.¹⁵ Similarly, in Canada, as immigrants moved westward and encroached upon untreated Aboriginal land, the census provided information which could be used in planning for negotiations with Aboriginal groups. Population numbers would allow government officials to

13 Department of Indian Affairs (hereafter DIA), *Annual Report, 1871*, 38-9.

14 DIA, *Annual Report, 1891*, 323; Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 10, DIA, C-11240, Vol. 2565, File 115 111, DIA to Rev. L. V. Thibaudie, 2 February 1892; DIA, *Annual Report, 1911*, xxii.

15 Jobe, "Native Americans and the U. S. Census," 69-70.

anticipate the required land base for reserves and the total of yearly per capita annuities before treaty negotiations. Such numbers would also indicate the required amount of scrip, a certificate given to the Métis in the northwest which could be cashed for money or used for land allotment. Information about languages spoken would indicate whether interpreters were needed in treaty or scrip negotiations. Religious information could show the apparent need for missionaries to be sent to Native communities, and the number of children indicated if a residential school was needed, or if all the children attended an existing institution. As Watts has noted for Australia, the location of certain Aboriginal groups as recorded on the census could also indicate where a possible uprising might occur, a fear in the Canadian northwest even after the Riel Rebellion.¹⁶ As new northwest territories entered Confederation, population totals were used to apportion the representation in the House of Commons. While there was no agreement on the status of Aboriginal peoples (the 1895 western censuses included Métis and excluded First Nations on the basis of not being citizens, but British Columbia counted both towards political representation in their 1871 Terms of Union),¹⁷ the government needed to know how many individuals in new provinces or territories were of First Nations, Métis, and European background.

For these reasons, over the nineteenth century the census bureau increasingly coordinated its efforts with the Department of Indian Affairs. In the earliest censuses, regular enumerators included Aboriginal families in their house-to-house visits, a task made easier by the fact that most of the Aboriginal population in the areas enumerated had settled on reserves. By 1881, with the extension of the census to more unsettled areas, a variety of approaches were used to enumerate the Native population. Aboriginal groups that had negotiated treaties were counted through the annuity payment records of the DIA, but the eastern part of the northwest territories (later Ungava and part of Keewatin) was enumerated through household visits. For most of the northwest territories, however, the 1881 census report confessed that it was “almost impossible” to enumerate the resident Aboriginal peoples. Consequently, census officials estimated the population of the western northwest territories outside of treaty areas, and in the northern and interior parts of the province of British Columbia.¹⁸

16 Watts, “Making Numbers Count,” 41.

17 For the 1895 census purpose, see LAC, RG 18, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Vol. 108, File 348-95, [?] to L. W. Herchimer, 30 May 1895, and Circular 107, Commissioner’s Office, 15 April 1895. For British Columbia’s interpretation of the Aboriginal population, see the Terms of Union, 1871, section 3; Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28 March 1871, 661-2. In 1893 British Columbia politicians expressed outrage over their belief that the Aboriginal population had been undercounted by the 1891 census, thus affecting the money and political representation they received from the Dominion government. For this debate, see BCA, GR-0429, Attorney-General Correspondence, 1894, Box 3, Files 1 and 2.

18 *Census of Canada, 1880–81*, Vol. 1 (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger and Co., 1882), xiv.

This latter estimate was taken from one of the 1871 census reports written by Joseph-Charles Taché, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Statistics, who based his calculations on a complicated mix of other censuses conducted by missionaries, explorers, and the Hudson Bay's Company.¹⁹ Census officials assumed this estimate to be accurate because a comparison between the regularly enumerated areas in 1881 and the estimates of the same areas for 1871 matched approximately. Still, the 1881 report cautioned, reliable information about birth, death, and other categories was "not obtainable" for most of the Aboriginal population in Manitoba, British Columbia, and the territories.²⁰

The western census of the districts of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Assiniboia during 1884–1885 did not attempt to enumerate the Aboriginal population through household visits because the Department of Agriculture feared it would "excite" them. It assumed that Natives would not understand the "real object" of the census and instead perceive a "wrong and perhaps a mischievous motive."²¹ Accordingly, for those Aboriginal people receiving supplies and treaty payments, the census bureau obtained its information from the files of the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa.²² For Manitoba, the census report noted that some reliance on Indian agents was unavoidable due to the nomadic nature of Natives and a lack of enumerators who could speak Aboriginal languages. For those who did not fall under treaty areas, enumeration was attempted through household visits.²³

Because the ethnic origin column was removed from the 1891 census, there is less explicit information about the protocol to enumerate Aboriginal peoples at this time. One British Columbia Census Commissioner, R. E. Gosnell, stated that Indian Affairs had not been consulted for the taking of the census nor had they made any reference to the Department's own census returns.²⁴ Gosnell's statement may, however, only refer to Native communities

19 *Censuses of Canada, 1665 to 1871* (Ottawa: I.B. Taylor, 1876), lil-lxxxiv.

20 *Census of Canada, 1880–81*, Vol. 1, xiv; *Census of Canada, 1880–81*, Vol. 2 (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger and Co., 1884), v. The U.S. Census Act of 1890 instructed special agents, usually officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to enumerate Native reservations. See Alterman, *Counting People*, 295. According to Shoemaker, "Census as Civilizer," 7, the 1900 and 1910 censuses of the United States also used enrollment lists provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs instead of household enumeration.

21 *Census of the Three Provisional Districts of the North-West Territories. 1884–5* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger and Co., 1886), xvi.

22 LAC, RG 17-A-I-2, Department of Agriculture, General Letterbooks, T-121, Vol. 1552, John to Thomas Spence, 31 August 1885, 14; Ibid., T-122, Vol. 1552, Lowe to Stewart Mulvey, 10 September 1886; Ibid., RG 17-A-I-1, Department of Agriculture, Deputy Minister and Secretary, General Correspondence, 1852–1920, Vol. 502, Docket 55175, Mulvey to Lowe, 7 September 1886, and E. H. St. Denis to Lowe, 10 September 1886.

23 *Census of Manitoba 1885–6* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger and Co., 1887).

24 BCA, GR-0429, Attorney-General Correspondence, 1893, Box 3, File 1, R.E. Gosnell to Theo Davie, 21 April 1893.

“ANYONE NOT ON THE LIST MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD”:
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND THE CENSUSES OF CANADA, 1851–1916

not yet regulated by Indian Affairs, because at a meeting of the Census Commissioners with George Sargison, the Chief Officer, in March of 1891, it was resolved that “Indian Reserves, as such, not to be taken, as Belonging to Government, and Obtainable from Indian Department by Census Department.”²⁵ Moreover, Sargison personally provided lists of First Nations taken from Indian Affairs reports for each district, in order to inform enumerators of the groups each could expect to encounter.²⁶

Examining the 1891 census manuscripts themselves suggests that the Department of Agriculture cooperated with the DIA in some parts of Canada. In Manitoba treaty and non-treaty Natives were enumerated differently. Throughout this province’s schedules there are treaty Indian tallies listed at the end of each district, which contain only numbers of male and female Natives. These tallies cannot be a summary of individuals enumerated in the preceding schedules because the numbers often exceed the total number of individuals enumerated within that district. As well, in some cases, families within the regular enumeration schedules have been annotated as non-treaty Indians. It seems that the Natives who had taken treaty and therefore lived on reserves were not enumerated in the style of the rest of the population and that the tallies were taken from Indian Affairs records. In contrast, a review of the 1891 census manuscripts for Alberta and Assiniboia suggests no Natives were enumerated at all. The presence of Indian Agents, interpreters, and farm instructors in the census with no accompanying Native presence is telling, as is the lack of treaty Indian tallies written onto the manuscripts. In Saskatchewan it appears that reserve or treaty Indians were included in the regular house-to-house enumeration process, as evident from the presence of Aboriginal style names and occupations.²⁷

Although they were not universally obeyed, the 1901 census instructions were the first to explicitly state that for Treaty Indians “it will generally be found advantageous to employ officials and other agents in place of the regular enumerators. In every such case the commissioner for the district will be notified, and he will be required to withdraw the schedules dealing with the particular subjects from the regular enumerators and to inform them accord-

25 Ibid., MS-0367, George A. Sargison Notebook, 56.

26 Sargison also talked with a Mr. A.W. Hewson of Victoria, who he saw as an authority on First Nations of the province and suggested that enumerators confer with him. See BCA, MS-2454, Letterbook 1890–1900, George Sargison to J. S. Bennet, 8 April 1891, 123; Sargison to R. E. Gosnell, 9 April 1891, and 8 April 1891, 123, 124; Sargison to M. Bray and W. K. Leighton, 9 April 1891, 125; Sargison to John Stevenson, 10 April 1891, 126; Sargison to Bennet, 16 April 1891, 137.

27 Ashley Fortier, “Aboriginal Presence in the 1891 Canadian Census: Notable Regional Variations,” unpublished paper, University of Guelph, 2006, 4-6. One exception of treaty Indians regularly enumerated in Assiniboia can be found in LAC, RG 31, Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1891, T-6426, District 199, Subdistrict C4, 5-6.

ingly.”²⁸ Assessing this arrangement, Dominion Statistician and Controller of the Census Robert Hamilton Coats asserted that because of the need to speak many languages and the suspicion with which Aboriginal peoples regarded anyone asking personal questions, Indian agents had been the logical choice since 1901 to be the enumerators for Native reserves and in northern or sparsely settled areas. He considered agents to be the best equipped since their job required “minute knowledge” of their wards, they had the “confidence” of the Native community, and their own records included some of the information needed for the Department of Agriculture censuses. In fact, Coats argued, experience had shown that reserves could not be enumerated satisfactorily by anyone *but* agents. Thus Coats wrote to Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, recommending that this arrangement continue for the 1916 census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, a suggestion with which Scott agreed.²⁹ For this census the Department of Agriculture employed 45 Indian agents in addition to the North West Mounted Police who covered the northern parts of these provinces.³⁰

Coordination of the census with the DIA meant that its colonial policies shaped how enumerators recorded census information on the nominal schedule. While the census instructions defined an “Indian” or “half-breed” based on biological ancestry — that is race or ethnic origin — the DIA created other definitions based on legal terms under the Indian Act, an important distinction which affected enumeration when Indian agents assisted or carried out the census on their reserves. The census of 1851 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick included a column called race which allowed any ethnic origin to be entered. The 1852 census of Canada East and West simply had a column to indicate if an individual was an Indian. In 1861 the census schedule grouped “coloured,” “mulattos,” and “Indians” together in one column; enumerators were to mark down “Ind” in this space if applicable.³¹ By 1871 the question about race had developed into an identification of ethnic origin which could include a response of Indian. This category was repeated in the 1881 national enumeration, and in the 1884–1886 censuses of the districts of Assiniboia, Alberta and

28 Canada, Office of the Census, *Fourth Census of Canada 1901, Instructions to Officers* (Ottawa, 1901), 6.

29 LAC, RG 31, Statistics Canada, Files by R. H. Coats and H. Marshall, Office of the Dominion Statistician, Vol. 1417, *The Census of Indians*, n. d.; *Ibid.*, RG 10, DIA, C-8544, Vol. 6823, File 494-16-5, Part 1, *Statistics Relating to the Indian Population*, 2-5; *Ibid.*, Minister of Trade and Commerce, Recommendation to His Royal Highness that Governor-General in Council re the employment of Agents of the Department of Indian Affairs as enumerators in taking the Census of the Northwest provinces, June, 1916; *Ibid.*, R. H. Coats to Duncan Campbell Scott, 13 April 1916.

30 *Census of Prairie Provinces. Population and Agriculture. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta. 1916* (Ottawa: J. DeLabroquerie Taché, 1918), xii.

31 Full instructions are reproduced by Gagan, “Enumerator’s Instructions,” 355-65.

“ANYONE NOT ON THE LIST MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD”:
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND THE CENSUSES OF CANADA, 1851–1916

Saskatchewan, and the province of Manitoba. In the 1891 national census the origin category was removed and replaced by a column to identify French-Canadians and another for the birthplace of parents. This shift had been devised as a solution to the earlier problem of respondents answering “Canadian” to the origin question, which was considered by census officials to be an invalid response even if an individual had been born in Canada.³² In 1901 the origin column was reintroduced, labelled “racial and tribal origin,” and defined much more clearly. For First Nations, specific tribal or band names, rather than the simple label “Indian,” were to be recorded. For non-Aboriginals the instructions indicated that origin was to be traced through the father’s lineage, but did not explicitly suggest how Aboriginal origins should be traced.³³ In 1911 and 1916 the instructions clearly state that Indians inherited their origin through their mother’s family.³⁴

The censuses of the mid-1880s began a series of enumerations to measure immigration to and settlement of the Canadian west. As a result, these censuses of the districts of Assiniboia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the province of Manitoba were the first to distinguish Métis as individuals with mixed Native and European ancestry. Previously, the Métis had been classed as being of European descent.³⁵ Consequently, just two Métis in total had been recorded by the 1871 census of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. There were few persons of mixed blood in these provinces, the census report explained. However, the report also stated that an entry of “not given” for origin was often written down when there was no “definite answer,” a common occurrence when enumerating families of mixed origin.³⁶ In the western censuses of the 1880s, there were five options for Métis classification: English, French, Scotch, Irish, or “Undefined” “Half-Breed.”³⁷ In 1901 the Department

32 Chad Gaffield, “Language, Ancestry, and the Competing Constructions of Identity in Turn-of-the-Century Canada,” in *Household Counts*, ed. Sager and Baskerville, 425.

33 Canada, *Fourth Census of Canada 1901*, 14.

34 Canada, *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911. Instructions to Officers, Commissioners and Enumerators*, section 100; Canada, *Census of Population and Agriculture for the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Instructions to Commissioners and Enumerators* (1916), section 88. A survey of the changing categories for a variety of ethnicities can be found in John Kralt, “Ethnic Origins in the Canadian Census, 1871–1986,” in *Ethnic Demography: Canadian Immigrant, Racial and Cultural Variations*, ed. Shiva S. Halli, Frank Trovato, and Leo Driedger (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 13–29; and Pamela M. White, Jane Badets, and Viviane Renaud, “Measuring Ethnicity in Canadian Censuses,” in *Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World: Science, Politics and Reality, Proceedings of the Joint Canada-United States Conference on the Measurement of Ethnicity* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1993), 223–69.

35 *Census of Manitoba 1885–6*.

36 *Census of Canada, 1870–71*, Vol. 1 (Ottawa: I.B. Taylor, 1873), xxii–xxiii.

37 *Census of the Three Provisional Districts of the North-West Territories. 1884–5*, 11; *Census of Manitoba 1885–6*, xiii–xiv.

of Agriculture set out a system of initials to more precisely identify all origins of the Métis. Thus, for example, “o.f.b.” meant “Ojibway French breed.” For this census any person of mixed Native and European ancestry was to be classed as “red...irrespective of the degree of colour,” marked by an “R” in the appropriate column. Only “pure whites [should] be classed as whites.”³⁸ This census was the only one to ask for multiple origins, and in 1911 the origin of the Métis was recorded through the patrilineal line, in comparison to Indians who were considered to trace their heritage through their mother’s ancestry.³⁹ Clearly, this evolution of terms resulted in different numbers of Aboriginal peoples for each census.

Of course, the enumeration experience did not neatly match this system of classification. Despite their instructions, officials often expressed uncertainty about how to determine Aboriginal identity. One 1861 enumerator for the Nipissing district in Ontario noted on his forms, “These people are so mixed up with Indian that I scarcely know what to call them. The principal mixture is white, and they cultivate the soil so I call them white.”⁴⁰ In 1891 the column to identify French-Canadians confused enumerators who were unsure whether to include the Métis of Manitoba and the northwest territories in this category.⁴¹ Enumerators did not always follow instructions either. In British Columbia in 1891, George Sargison, the Chief Census Officer, questioned the absence of a place to distinguish First Nations on the enumeration schedules, believing that it was necessary for statistical purposes.⁴² He apparently communicated his concern to the enumerators under his charge, for the 1891 British Columbia census manuscripts abound with the earlier short form “Ind,” even though there was no specific column for this designation. In 1911 some census-takers continued to record “half breed” in the racial and tribal origin column even though they were asked to identify only one origin.

The various versions of the Indian Act created legal definitions of what it meant to Indian or Métis, and these did not always match those laid out by the census instructions. An 1850 statute for Lower Canada defined an “Indian” as anyone Native by birth, married to an Indian, known to belong to a group of Indians, or the child of any such person. It also included anyone adopted in infancy as Indian, regardless of ancestry, and their descendants, a clause revoked one year later. This modified definition continued after Confederation,

38 *Fourth Census of Canada 1901, Instructions to Officers*, 13-14.

39 LAC, RG 31, Statistics Canada, Files by R. H. Coats and H. Marshall, Office of the Dominion Statistician, Vol. 1417, *The Census of Indians*, n.d.

40 Ibid., RG 31, Statistics Canada, *Census of Canada, 1861*, C-1091, District 6, Nipissing, 42, lines 4-17.

41 *Census of Canada, 1890-91* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1893), xviii. See also Gaffield, “Language, Ancestry, and the Competing Constructions of Identity,” *Household Counts*, ed. Sager and Baskerville, 425-6.

42 BCA, MS-2454, Letterbook 1890-1900, George Sargison to E.H.St. Denis, 6 March 1891, 89.

but was adjusted in 1869 to exclude anyone from treaty money who was born after that year and had less than one quarter Indian blood.⁴³ In 1876 the term Indian was redefined as a male of Indian blood reputed to belong to a band, his children, and any woman who was or had been married to an Indian.⁴⁴ Unlike the census instructions which stated in 1911 that Indian ancestry was traced through maternal descent, legal Indian status was inherited through the paternal side.

The law also outlined ways in which the Indian status could be lost, gained, or altered. Policies of enfranchisement which awarded the vote and full citizenship also revoked legal Indian status. As early as 1857 an individual could apply to be enfranchised and his change in status extended to his wife and children. The Indian Act of 1876 automatically enfranchised any individual who had a university degree or practiced as a medical doctor, lawyer, or minister. While the amended 1880 Act omitted the automatic implementation, it allowed any Natives to apply if they were judged to be intelligent enough to exercise the privileges of enfranchisement, of good moral character, and temperate in living by a clergyman or two Justices of the Peace.⁴⁵ Relatively few Natives became enfranchised, however. More numerically significant was the number of women who lost their status through marriage. After 1869 a Native woman who married a non-Native man lost her official government status, although she retained her share in treaty payments if her band agreed. The child of a Native mother and a non-Native father did not receive status because the DIA traced ancestry through the father. In contrast, a non-Aboriginal woman who married an Aboriginal man became, by law, an Indian. After 1876 the Department of Indian Affairs also could exclude any illegitimate child who had not shared in band money for over two years at any time, or any individual who had resided in another country for over five years without the consent of the Superintendent-General.⁴⁶

43 *An Act for the Better Protection of the Lands and Property of Indians in Lower Canada*, 1850, Chapter 42, section 5; *An Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians, the Better Management of Indian Affairs, and to Extend the Provisions of the Act 31st Victoria*, Chapter 42, 1869, Chapter 6, section 4, 32 Victoria. For a survey of status changes and related legislation, see J. R. Miller, *Lethal Legacy: Current Native Controversies in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2004), 1-49.

44 *An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Respecting Indians*, 1876, Chapter 18, section 3, 39 Victoria.

45 *An Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in the Provinces, and to Amend the Laws Respecting Indians*, 1857, Chapter 26, 20 Victoria; *An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Respecting Indians*, 1876, Chapter 18, section 86 and 88, 39 Victoria; *An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Respecting Indians*, 1880, Chapter 28, section 16, 43 Victoria.

46 *An Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians, the better management of Indian affairs, and to extend the provisions of the Act 31st Victoria*, Chapter 42, 1869, Chapter 6, section 6, 32 Victoria; *An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Respecting Indians*, 1876, Chapter 18, section 3, 39 Victoria.

Amendments in 1887 further strengthened the power of the Department of Indian Affairs to control who was and was not a legal Indian. After their passage, the Superintendent-General or Indian Agent could determine if any band member was entitled to share in the moneys and property belonging to the band; this decision was final although subject to an appeal to the Governor-in-Council. Indian Affairs could stop any payment of money to a Native man who deserted his family, or to a childless woman who left her husband to live with another man.⁴⁷

Government policies also legislated who was legally considered Métis. For example, in places such as northern Ontario, where there was no consideration of Métis rights during treaty negotiations, some Métis had opted to take treaty and legally become Indians, although the DIA later struck many of these individuals off their registers. In the settlement of the northwest, the government treated the Métis differently. The government offered scrip to the heads of Métis families and their children.⁴⁸ But taking scrip equalled giving up legal Indian status according to the Indian Act of 1876. No Métis head of family (with the exception of a widow who had earlier taken treaty) could be considered an Indian or be entitled to treaty rights. After 1888 any Métis individuals who had previously taken treaty were allowed to withdraw from it and such withdrawal affected any unmarried minor children.⁴⁹

These legal definitions become problematic when considering census data. First, Indian agents enumerating their reserves sometimes chose to use the legal definition of being Indian, which did not always match the census definitions. Second, Métis who took treaty as Indians would be labelled as such despite their own self-subscribed identity, while anyone who withdrew from treaty or had been removed from the Indian register would appear differently from one census to the next. It is also possible that the census overlooked individuals who continued to live on a reserve after their official status had been revoked by the government or if they had applied for enfranchisement. Native groups whose traditional territory spanned the Canadian-American border often moved across this boundary to join family members or to seek employment, and could be struck off the Indian register, even if they returned to their home reserve. For all such individuals, Indian agents may not have considered them Indians, and

47 *An Act to Amend the "The Indian Act,"* 1887, Chapter 33, 50 Victoria.

48 For an explanation of the scrip system, see Frank Tough and Erin McGregor, "'The Rights to the Land may be Transferred': Archival Records as Colonial Text — A Narrative of Métis Scrip," in *Natives and Settlers: Now and Then: Historical Issues and Current Perspectives on Treaties and Land Claims in Canada*, ed. Paul W. DePasquale (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2007), 33-63.

49 *An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Respecting Indians*, 1876, Chapter 18, section 3, 39 Victoria; *An Act to Further Amend "The Indian Act,"* 1888, Chapter 22, section 1, 51 Victoria.

their names would not have appeared on annuity payment lists. If the census enumerator did not visit reserves personally, and instead resorted to the files in Ottawa as they did for the western censuses of the mid-1880s, these individuals would not likely have been enumerated at all.

This complex conjunction of Indian Affairs regulations and census enumeration can be illustrated by the cases of the Garden River, Batchewana Bay, and Dokis bands in northern Ontario, which consisted of Anishinabeg (Ojibwa and Ottawa) peoples and their Métis relatives. During the negotiations for the Robinson-Huron treaty of 1850, some of the Anishinabeg chiefs of the Garden River and Batchewana Bay communities asked for some 60 of their Métis kin to be included in the settlement of land rights.⁵⁰ Rather than using purely biological considerations, the Métis distinguished themselves from their Anishinabeg relatives by their sedentary settlements in the seigneurial style of long thin river-front lots, belief in Roman Catholicism, political independence from Native chiefs, and employment as farmers and in the fur trade.⁵¹ In response to the chiefs' request, William B. Robinson, the Province of Canada negotiator, protested that he did not have the power to award special rights to individuals of mixed ancestry. Instead he and the chiefs allowed numerous Métis to become part of their bands, forcing them to choose between a legal Native identity or a non-Native one. Families such as the Bells, Birons, Pereaults, Boissoneaults, Laroses, and Cadottes joined the Garden River or Batchewana bands. As well, Algoma district Judge John Prince induced numerous Métis families to sell their land in the town of Sault Ste Marie and move to the Garden River reserve in the 1860s; under Prince many Métis individuals became legal Indians.⁵² As the federal government became increasingly parsimonious in its promise to pay annuities under the Robinson-Huron treaty, and looking to profit from the mining and timber resources that were supposed to be protected under that treaty, it sought to reduce the number of registered members. The first investigation occurred in the 1850s and resulted in the striking off of about 200 names from the list, some of whom were considered to be American Indians living in the United States, and others who were deemed Métis, not Indian, based on biology and on their lifestyle. Later investigations in the 1870s and 1890s sought out families of mixed ancestry now judged ineligible for treaty rights and payments.⁵³ Indian Lands Agent William Van Abbott also stripped numerous women who married non-Aboriginals of their official

50 Karl Hele, “Manipulating Identity: The Sault Borderlands Métis and Colonial Intervention,” in *The Long Journey of a Forgotten People: Métis Identities and Family Histories*, ed. Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 178.

51 Ibid., 170-1.

52 Janet E. Chute, *The Legacy of Shingwaukonse: A Century of Native Leadership* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 178.

53 Hele, “Manipulating Identity,” in *Long Journey*, ed. Lischke and McNab, 178-9.

status.⁵⁴ The census of 1861 for Garden River and Batchewana shows many families of the aforementioned names listed as Indian, but by the late nineteenth century they were labelled French or half-breed.

The mix of census and DIA policies used to identify racial, ethnic, or legal identities can also be demonstrated by the documentation of the D'Aigle or Dokis family. Migisi, otherwise known as Michel d'Aigle, was born of a French Canadian fur trader father and an Anishinabeg woman. As a child he acquired the name Dokis and, at the time of the Robinson-Huron treaty negotiations, he was recognized as a chief and awarded a reserve on the French River for his own family and extended kin. Although biologically Métis, Dokis was raised as an Anishinabeg.⁵⁵ The 1901 census listed this band as all Ojibwa half-breeds and used their official last name D'Aigle, but in 1911 all band members were labelled Indian with the last name of Dokis.⁵⁶ These discrepancies were due to the different enumerators. The 1901 enumerator was a French-speaking individual hired by the Department of Agriculture who would have used the census definitions to define the biological component of the D'Aigles' ancestry. George Cockburn, Indian agent for this area, took the 1911 census. Cockburn would have known them as the legally registered Dokis band, identified them as holding this last name, and chose their origin based on their legal status.

If census officials viewed enumeration as a colonial tool to identify and classify different ethnic groups, many Native communities viewed themselves as sovereign allies to the Crown and the census as part of their ongoing relationship with the Queen.⁵⁷ The 1861 enumerator for the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve in Ontario recorded that one man resisted giving information and enquired if the census might be related to tax adjustments. When the enumerator decided to "touch upon his loyalty" and suggested that the Queen wished to know "*how many good loyal subjects*" she had, the man "immediately replied and said — *set me down.*"⁵⁸ First Nations also drew symbolic objects of loyalty into the enumeration process. As part of treaty negotiations and other conferences, officials often gifted medals to First Nations as a way to symbolize their alliance to the Crown. This practice had been done by the Prince of Wales in the summer of 1860. Thus, an enumerator's approach,

54 Chute, *Legacy of Shingwaukonse*, 199.

55 James T. Angus, "Migisi," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 13 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 702-3.

56 LAC, RG 31, Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1901, T-6484, Nipissing district, 92, London and Falconer townships, 2, page 1; Ibid., Census of Canada, 1911, T-20386, Nipissing district, sub-district Indian Reserves, page 7.

57 Unfortunately, there are no existing records written by Aboriginal people, even those few who acted as enumerators, about the census; but nevertheless there are glimpses of their viewpoints in non-Native authored documents.

58 LAC, RG 31, Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1861, C-1009, District 2, Tuscarora, 23.

couched in terms of the Prince wanting to know how many “Red Children his mother has” in the winter of 1861 so he could send medals to each, was a compelling tactic to prod Natives for information. While Algoma Census Commissioner Richard Carney considered a request for tobacco. “etc.,” in return for providing information, a bribe, it is more probable that the individual’s demand stemmed from the customary protocol of gift-giving that accompanied many meetings between government officials and Native groups engaged in nation-to-nation business.⁵⁹ In another case in 1891, one Native community refused to answer questions because the enumerator had not brought a British flag with him, a symbol present at negotiations with government officials. Once such a flag was procured, the community answered all questions “willingly.”⁶⁰

Aboriginal peoples also found ways to negotiate or challenge the census. Beginning with the 1871 census, enumerators were instructed to pose questions to the head of each household and write down the response, rather than fill out the forms according to their own observations or local knowledge. This approach allowed Aboriginal peoples some measure of self-identification of their origins, despite the census or Indian Act classifications. As has been noted in more recent censuses, individuals could choose to hide their Aboriginal origins from a sense of shame or to escape notice of the Department of Indian Affairs, or, alternatively, identify as Native to take advantage of government programs.⁶¹ “Ethnic drifters” could choose a different origin than their parents, or change their answer between censuses, particularly if they had more than one origin from which to select.⁶² Identities could also be simplified over generations; as Neal McLeod argues, those who now think of themselves as Cree because of the language they speak, really possess a mixed ancestry of Saukteaux, Assiniboine, and Cree.⁶³ Demographers have noted a difference between Aboriginal origins and Aboriginal identity; individuals may have been biologically of Aboriginal ancestry but had no personal or familial ties to an Aboriginal identity and thus did not think of themselves as Aboriginal.⁶⁴ The

59 Ibid., C-1091, Algoma district, Memoranda, 22 April 1861.

60 E.J. Toker, “How a Census is Taken,” *Canadian Magazine* XVI, no. 5 (March 1901): 431; “Results of a Census,” *The Statistical Year-Book of Canada for 1895* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1896), 157.

61 See Jeremy Hull, “1981 Census Coverage of the Native Population in Manitoba and Saskatchewan,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 4, no. 1 (1984): 147-56; and Jack D. Forbes, “Undercounting Native Americans: The 1980 Census and the Manipulation of Racial Identity in the United States,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 6, no. 1 (1990): 2-26.

62 Eric Guimond, “Changing Ethnicity: The Concept of Ethnic Drifters,” in *Aboriginal Conditions*, ed. White, et al., 96.

63 Neal McLeod, “Plains Cree Identity: Borderlands, Ambiguous Genealogies and Narrative Irony,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 20, no. 2 (2000): 437-54.

64 Norris, “Contemporary Demography,” in *Visions of the Heart*, ed., Long and Dickason, 181.

reverse was also true; many with a mixed ancestry thought of themselves as Native.

Already displeased by the government treatment of them, numerous Aboriginal communities refused outright to take part in enumeration and tested the assumption that Indian agents had the power to collect census information. The government belief that Indian agents should take the census of their own reserves in order to improve the accuracy of the results and the ease of enumeration was often overly sanguine. Rather than holding the "confidence" of the community, as Robert Coats thought, agents' relationships with reserve members were frequently marked by suspicion and avoidance. After 1871 the DIA took its own census annually and numerous First Nations communities disliked participating in these as well. Harry Guillod, a British Columbia Indian agent remarked that the Natives at Friendly Cove were "more superstitious and prejudiced against the whiteman than any tribe on the coast, saying when I took the census, after I got their names on paper, I should cause them to die by poison."⁶⁵ Similarly, in 1886 A.M. Muckle in Manitoba noted, "The taking of the census was a great trouble. Indians are suspicious, and would like to be left alone. They cannot see what good it does them to give the ages of themselves and families, and they suspect it might do them harm; no explanation would change their opinion in this respect."⁶⁶ A.E. Howse of the Okanagan Agency reported in 1882 that his "efforts to secure correct returns ... have not been attended with the desired result." Many refused to answer his questions, stating that they were the same as last year, or asked for money in return. They "cannot understand why the Government want [*sic*] to know so much about their private business. I have explained most clearly the objects, but they cannot be induced to furnish the desired information." Howse blamed this perversity on Natives from Washington state who often visited Okanagan communities. "They claim unfair treatment from the hands of the American government," Howse explained, "and give various reasons for it, often blaming themselves for giving so much information, which they believe to have been the cause of their trouble."⁶⁷

Native communities also resisted answering the questions for the national census enumerators who were associated with the DIA. Richard Carney, a magistrate who became involved in reforming local politics on reserves in the Algoma district in northern Ontario was appointed a Census Commissioner for this area in 1861. He remarked that First Nations gave information with "great reluctance" because they had been deceived so many times by the government. At another spot, Native individuals expressed their confusion over why the

65 DIA, *Annual Report*, 1881, 162.

66 Ibid., *Annual Report*, 1886, 46.

67 Ibid., *Annual Report*, 1882, 66-7.

government would want information about how many animals they had trapped during the year, and, consequently, there was much talk and “circumlocution.”⁶⁸ In at least one place during enumeration, one community had decided to provide Richard Carney’s son John with the requested information only because they had heard his father was a “friend” to Natives. Otherwise, they would have refused.⁶⁹ But many of the Anishinabeg people around the north shores of Lakes Huron and Superior were so incensed by the census questions, as well as years of violation of their fishing and mineral rights under the Robinson treaties, the withholding of treaty annuities, and the stripping of treaty status from numerous individuals, that many refused to meet enumerators or provided false information to them. Richard and John Carney had been told that during enumeration they should collect information about the level of “civilization” of the Anishinabeg in the area because if individuals appeared assimilated enough, they could be struck off treaty annuity lists, reducing government payments. The more individual treaty rights that could be extinguished, the more land would fall under the control of the federal government, which was eager to sell or lease mining and timber rights to private companies. Both Carneys and George Ironside, another enumerator and an Indian superintendent who had assisted in reducing the lists of treaty Indians at Garden River and Batchewana Bay, recognized that the Algoma district returns were full of omissions and inaccurate information because of the suspicion of the Anishinabeg.⁷⁰

Those not associated with DIA still encountered suspicion and resistance. On the Naas River in British Columbia in 1891, Frederick Greer received many enquiries from Natives about his purpose. A few asked to be compensated for their information, or for information provided about families away hunting or berry-picking. In one place elders suspiciously stated that Greer’s purpose must be “to find out how many of them there were, and then the Government would do away with them to get their land.”⁷¹ Others wondered why such information was being recorded again when only the previous year Indian Affairs had asked similar questions.⁷² Ronald Green reported “unusual trouble” with the First Nations in Port Essington, who required him to explain his purpose at “every place” and then wished to discuss it in private amongst themselves before cooperating. At another community, Green strategically visited the chief first, a

68 LAC, RG 31, Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1861, C-1091, Algoma district, Richard Carney, Memorandum, 22 April 1861; Ibid., Richard Carney, note on district 1 return, 76. For more about Carney’s activities with the Anishinabeg, see Chute, *Legacy of Shingwaukonse*, 169–74.

69 Ibid., Richard Carney, Memorandum, 22 April 1861.

70 Chute, *Legacy of Shingwaukonse*, 177.

71 Dunae, “Making the 1891 Census,” 232.

72 “An Indian Census Man’s Adventures,” *The Gazette*, Montreal (30 December 1891), 1.

tactic used by other enumerators to gain approval of village leaders and, hopefully, of the rest of the residents. Green still faced hostility at this village though; leaving one house he fell through the steps of its porch, cutting and bruising his leg. The Native owner demanded recompense which Green paid, but he wondered who would pay him for his injury, which was so severe that "the mark made is on the bone and I shall carry it to my grave."⁷³

Under each census act, refusal to answer questions resulted in a fine, but few individuals, Native or otherwise, were ever prosecuted. One case, that of Michel D'Aigle or Chief Dokis of northern Ontario, further illustrates the resistance of Aboriginal peoples to what they perceived to be a colonial imposition. George B. Mills, an enumerator for the Nipissing district, first visited the home of Dokis' eldest son whose wife gave him the desired information. His other two sons and his own wife refused to cooperate until they had spoken with the chief. Consequently, Mills arranged for a meeting the next morning but when the chief did not arrive, Mills asked one of Dokis' sons to fetch him. Neither returned, so the enumerator sought out the family camp. Mills reported later that the chief fully understood the nature and purpose of enumeration and even that Dokis remembered the 1881 census and the name of the local enumerator. All day and the next the chief declined to answer any of the questions even though Mills twice informed him that he was bound by law to do so. Finally, one of Dokis' sons gave the required information for himself and Mills decided to return to Sturgeon Falls, where he had warrants issued and sent constables to apprehend Dokis and his one son. Even so, Mills was willing to settle the matter if only the men would provide him with the required information. Dokis once again refused.⁷⁴

Dokis appeared before a magistrate who charged him a fine of \$26.60, which included Mills' expenses spent waiting at Dokis' camp, constable fees, and warrants.⁷⁵ Sturgeon Falls merchant and Justice of the Peace Joseph Michaud took up the matter with Indian Affairs. Dokis, Michaud argued, had been suspicious of the enumerator and the interpreter. In particular, the interpreter had been involved in an attempt to press Dokis and his band to sell timber limits. Thus, the use of the interpreter for the census had caused Dokis to question whether enumeration was related to this issue. Beginning in 1881 Dokis had received numerous bids to cut timber on his reserve and pressure from the DIA to comply.⁷⁶ Because the chief had simply tried to protect his band, Michaud deemed that the fine Dokis had to pay for breaking the law was

73 BCA, MS-2453, Ronald Edward Green, Diary, 21 and 24 July 1891.

74 LAC, RG 17 A-I-1, Department of Agriculture, Vol. 701, Docket 80352, Report of George Mills, stamped 22 September 1891.

75 Ibid., Docket 80351, Form of Information or of Complaint on Oath.

76 See James T. Angus, "How the Dokis Indians Protected Their Timber," *Ontario History* 81, no. 3 (1989): 181-200.

“terrible [for] he done [*sic*] no harm,” and urged that Indian Affairs remit Dokis the amount. In response the DIA only replied that it could not interfere since the law had been broken. Michaud continued to plead Dokis’ case and accused the department of having “so little interest” in First Nations. He also stated that communication had been problematic. The chief had not been able to understand the interpreter who spoke poor French and no Ojibwa, the two languages Dokis knew. In contrast to Mills’ claim, Michaud also stated that the Native band knew nothing about the census enumeration.⁷⁷

In response to Michaud’s petitions, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Lawrence Vankoughnet wrote to John Lowe, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, and asked that Dokis be recompensed the amount of the fine due to extenuating circumstances.⁷⁸ The Department of Agriculture then began its own enquiry through William Hogarth, the Census Commissioner for the Nipissing district. Hogarth’s investigation revealed that Mills had taken full advantage of the situation. Although Dokis had directly paid Mills the \$26 for the amount of expenses incurred by the enumerator and his assistant, Mills had also charged the Department of Agriculture for the same time and expenses. Hogarth reported to the Department of Agriculture that Dokis confirmed to him that he had not understood the purpose of the census and if he had, he would have complied. Hogarth concluded that Dokis should be reimbursed and that Mills’ salary should be docked for the doubly charged amounts.⁷⁹ In the meantime, Michaud kept pressing Indian Affairs to resolve what he called a “gross injustice,” and threatened to bring the matter before Parliament in Ottawa if it was not settled.⁸⁰ By late August the Department of Agriculture continued to enquire about the paid fine, but there is no indication whether Chief Dokis ever received reimbursement.⁸¹

The DIA also attempted to use the provisions of the Indian Act to coerce Native communities to cooperate, even if the Act itself did not have a clause regarding census-taking. During the 1916 western census, the chief of the Ojibwa Roseau Rapids reserve in Manitoba forbade his councillors and people to provide any information, as he had done twice before. Indian Agent Archibald Ogletree explained that, if charged, the chief and his councillors

77 LAC, RG 17 A-I-1, Department of Agriculture, Vol. 693, Docket 79421, Joseph Michaud to DIA, 2 July 1891; Sinclair to Michaud, 8 July 1891; Michaud to R. Sinclair, 9 July 1891; and Lawrence Vankoughnet to John Lowe, 13 July 1891.

78 Ibid., Vankoughnet to Lowe, 13 July 1891.

79 Ibid., Vol. 701, Docket 80351, William Hogarth to G. Johnson, 24 August 1891; and Michel Dokis to Hogarth, 4 August 1891; Ibid., Vol. 693, Docket 79421, Johnson to Hogarth, 14 July 1891; and Hogarth to Johnson, 15 July 1891.

80 Ibid., Vol. 698, Docket 79975, Michaud to Vankoughnet, 15 August 1891; Ibid., Vol. 701, Docket 80352, Michaud to DIA, 1 September 1891.

81 Ibid., Vol. 699, Docket 80042, Vankoughnet to Lowe, 31 August 1891.

would go to jail because they had no money to pay the fine. Ogletree was reluctant to proceed because the chief and one councillor were blind and another a "cripple." Instead he suggested that the chief and three of his councillors be dismissed from their office. Another proposed solution was to withhold their treaty money until they provided the requisite information. Ultimately, John D. McLean, the Assistant Deputy Superintendent General, allowed the matter to drop, but threatened that next time these leaders would be deposed under section 96 of the Indian Act, which set out provisions for removing traditional leaders under the vague grounds of "dishonesty, intemperance, immorality or incompetency."⁸² Of course, not all those who refused to answer questions were Aboriginal, because there was a widespread suspicion among the public at large that the information would be used to increase taxes; but the resistance of Aboriginal peoples must be seen in light of their particular colonialist relationship with the Department of Indian Affairs. Resistance meant that some Aboriginal groups were not recorded at all on the census or that the information provided was inaccurate.

Despite Aboriginal resistance, a great deal of information was collected by enumerators between 1851 and 1916. Officials interpreted this data based on their nineteenth-century preconceptions that Aboriginal culture was inferior to European-settler societies, and also used it to justify policies. In a contradiction common to accepted evolutionary theory of the time, it was believed that First Nations would die off as Canadians supplanted their communities, or would assimilate into mainstream society. In 1861 Thomas Johnson, enumerator for a large part of northern Ontario, assumed that "the Red Men of the Forest are fast passing away," and so he thought the documentation of their numbers through the census was important to see their "gradual decline."⁸³ Joseph-Charles Taché, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Statistics, also commented on the decline of Aboriginal peoples after the 1871 census. Those who lived solely by hunting and fishing, Taché argued, could not increase their numbers beyond a certain limit. Such peoples were decreasing in number as their Euro-Canadian neighbours encroached upon their natural resources, or as they intermarried with them.⁸⁴ Essentially, Taché validated the common belief that contact between Aboriginals and settlers led to extinction or assimilation.

On the other hand, an increase of the Aboriginal population documented by the 1891 census was touted by the Department of Agriculture as the "strongest possible evidence of the wisdom of the policy pursued by the Government." It speculated that most of the increase came within the Aboriginal groups of eastern Canada because they had been under government supervision longer.

82 *Revised Statutes of Canada*, 1906, Chapter 81, section 96.

83 LAC, RG 17-A-IV, Department of Agriculture, Census and Statistics Branch, Vol. 2419, Thomas N. Johnson to William Hutton, 11 February 1861.

84 *Censuses of Canada, 1665 to 1871*, lil-lxx.

Similar policies, lately implemented in the northwest, the department concluded, would accordingly result in an increase in these areas in the future.⁸⁵ In 1893 the *Statistical Year-Book of Canada* offered a modified opinion that the First Nations population had almost reached a “stationary limit.” Considering the short time that many Natives had had to assimilate, the extent of intermarriage, and their resistance to medical treatment, this publication continued, it could be assumed that a “survival of the fittest” had been reached and therefore only a slight increase could be expected.⁸⁶ In such interpretations of the census data, Aboriginal peoples were viewed as passive. If their numbers were decreasing, it was because of their predetermined evolutionary limit; if their numbers were increasing, it was due to the policies of the Department of Indian Affairs, not their own strategies to adapt to the increasing pressures of Canada’s settler society. Whatever the numbers gathered by the census, the government used them to justify its own particular goals.

The links between the census and colonialism altered the enumeration process for Aboriginal peoples in Canada, especially for those living in the northern and western parts of the country. Census officials increasingly believed that those working for the Department of Indian Affairs were best suited for taking the census in Aboriginal communities. Some Aboriginal individuals viewed the census process as part of their long-term alliance with the state, a concept based on sovereignty, but one which was anathema to the DIA. Rather than facilitating enumeration, DIA officials often angered Aboriginal individuals with their questions, resulting in prevarication or outright refusal to participate. Further inaccuracies and omissions in the census data resulted from the two different systems of cultural identification — the biological one set out by the census bureau and the legal one created by the Indian Act. Thus, all of the census data regarding Aboriginal peoples must be understood in the context of their colonial relationship with the Canadian state.

* * *

MICHELLE A. HAMILTON is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in Rural History and a member of the 1871 and 1891 Census of Canada project team at the University of Guelph.

MICHELLE A. HAMILTON est actuellement détentrice d’une bourse de perfectionnement postdoctoral de la chaire de recherche du Canada en histoire rurale et membre de l’équipe du projet du recensement de 1891 à l’Université de Guelph.

85 Department of Agriculture, *The Statistical Year-Book for 1891* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1892), 85; Ibid., *Statistical Year-Book for 1892* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1893), 109.

86 Ibid., *Statistical Year-Book for 1893* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1894), 913.