CCRI Newsletter

Canadian Century Research Infrastructure

Welcome Message from Chad Gaffield

More than four years ago, researchers from across Canada came together to begin imagining how different disciplinary expertise and institutional support could be brought together to enhance our understandings of the making of modern Canada. The central question was both straightforward and infinitely complex: What were the fundamental changes in Canada’s transformation from a sparsely populated, predominantly rural society on the international periphery to a highly urbanized country on the world stage? After years of planning that led to many new partnerships within an unprecedented interdisciplinary, multi-institutional and pan-Canadian team, we have now begun construction of an infrastructure that will enable research on the profound and diverse experiences that characterize the 20th century in vastly different communities from coast to coast. Our hope in this newsletter is to keep you informed about our progress as we begin making available the CCRI databases that will support research on the social, economic, demographic, cultural, political and other changes that explain what has been called Canada’s Great Transformation. We look forward to your comments, suggestions and inquiries.

Yours in CCRI, CG

What is the CCRI?

The Canadian Century Research Infrastructure is a pan-Canadian, interdisciplinary and multi-institutional effort to construct interrelated databases centered on the census enumerations for 1911, 1921, 1931, 1941 and 1951. The databases will be added to others that cover the periods from 1852 to 1901 and from 1971 to 2001. Once completed in 2008, the CCRI will enable unprecedented research on the individuals, families, households and communities that experienced the complex transformations of Canada since the mid-19th century.

A photo of CCRI team members who attended the Crabtree Conference held at the University of Ottawa in April, 2004.

This newsletter is a bilingual publication of the CCRI. It will appear periodically over the course of the project.

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Who will use the CCRI?

Census enumerations contribute to and reflect changes in Canadian society. From the questions that were asked to the responses that were written down, census documents provide evidence about the lives of residents in Canada as well as the aspirations and thinking of those responsible for each enumeration. As a result, scholars, including historians, sociologists, demographers, geographers and economists, will be able to use the infrastructure for diverse research projects. In addition, specialists in other fields will find aspects of the CCRI significant. Media scholars, for example, will be able to contribute to our understanding of the history of communications by focusing on a question posed in 1931 that asked if the household had a radio. Researchers will be able to examine aspects of World War II by studying the relevant questions about military service posed in the 1941 and 1951 enumerations. Urban and rural planners will be able to inquire about housing, size of dwellings and place of residence. These examples are but some of the ways in which the CCRI will support unprecedented analyses of Canada’s transformative decades. But even more importantly, the CCRI will raise questions about the making of 20th-century Canada that we have not yet even imagined. In this sense, the full research enabled by the CCRI will only be known in the years to come.

Openings

During the past year, CCRI centres have been established at the seven partner universities. Each centre includes work stations furnished with high-end computers thanks to our partnership with IBM. The centres are each protected by sophisticated security systems while our computers communicate across the country within a Virtual Private Network. In addition, the CCRI team includes researchers at Statistics Canada whose collaboration is essential at each step of construction of the research infrastructure. Similarly, colleagues at the Library and Archives of Canada participate actively to support the building of the various databases, especially those that relate to pan-Canadian collections. The CCRI Atlantic Centre is uniquely privileged to have the full engagement of the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency which houses the centre and provides expertise within their partnership with Memorial University of Newfoundland. Indeed, the NLSA hosted the most recent CCRI launch ceremony that occurred in the Confederation Building on December 6th, 2004. Previous launch events took place at York University and at the University of Ottawa where more than 200 guests from the private and public sectors witnessed the “Ribbon-Connecting Ceremony” that symbolized both the spirit of CCRI collaboration and construction of databases that will link research efforts from coast to coast and internationally.

Above from left: Chad Gaffield, CCRI Principal Investigator; Lorna Marsen, York President and Vice-Chancellor; Carmen Charette, Senior Vice-President of Canada Foundation for Innovation; David Bogart, Executive Vice-President of Ontario Innovation Trust; and Gordon Darroch, York CCRI Team Leader, at the York launch in October, 2003.

Left: Surrounded by CCRI Team Members, Chad Gaffield, David Strangway, Hon. Maurice Belanger and Gilles Patry participate in the “Ribbon Connecting Ceremony” in Ottawa.

Above from left: Christopher Loomis, Vice-President (Research); Sean Cadigan, Atlantic CCRI Team Leader; Alton Hollett, Director, Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency; Chad Gaffield, CCRI Principal Investigator; Terry Quintan, Atlantic Coordinator; Douglas May, Memorial University, at the CCRI Atlantic launch in December, 2004.
The ambition of the CCRI team is to construct an infrastructure that will facilitate research on the transformation of Canadian society from the late-19th to the mid-20th centuries. The CCRI will be composed of two kinds of databases: those that contain 'primary sources', namely the contents of historical evidence, and those that contain 'secondary sources', the material created by CCRI researchers and others that will enhance appropriate analysis of the historical evidence. Each of the various databases is represented graphically in the above diagram by a green balloon. Integral to all these databases will be a geographical framework constructed using a Geographic Information System.

GIS map layers for the entire country are being created for the 1911–1951 period to enable the location, selection, aggregation and analysis of census data.

Four major databases will contain the content of the primary sources, each of which is depicted graphically as one of the balloons on the lower part of the image. The most important component of the CCRI will be the census microdatabases of the 1911–1951 enumerations. In addition, we are building textual databases created from documents related to the administrative history of each census enumeration as well as from newspaper coverage and political debate in the House of Commons and the Senate. The goal of these textual databases is to provide researchers with the contextual evidence necessary to undertake appropriate analysis of the census microdata.

The secondary sources of the CCRI will facilitate research on the primary sources (especially the census microdata). Represented by the small green balloons on the upper part of the image, these databases will range from introductions to the various census enumerations and census questions to technical discussions of data entry and coding issues as well as bibliographies of relevant research publications. The objective of providing this material is to support research on the CCRI primary sources by helping users understand and benefit from the intensive work undertaken to construct the census microdatabases as well as previous and related research efforts.
Did you know ...  
... that several enumerators died during the census?

Buried amongst the plethora of newspaper accounts about census taking in 1911, one can find numerous interesting snippets of information crying out for analysis. Take the topic of death, for example. Surprisingly, the Chci team came across several announcements about enumerators who died during the period of their appointment. Assistant Census Commissioner W. K. Fitzgerald drowned while on duty in White Horse Rapids (Ottawa Citizen); a Montreal census enumerator for Maisonneuve drowned while rowing with friends (Mail and Empire); and Daniel McPherson, one of the oldest citizens of Cobourg and who was appointed census commissioner for the county of Northumberland, “died suddenly” in a local hotel (Ottawa Citizen).

But enumerators encountered death in the course of the enumeration work itself, presenting unique classificatory challenges. One hostile Vancouverite made life difficult for an enumerator when she claimed to be dead (Vancouver World). Indeed, some enumerators were found to have put the names of living persons on Schedule Two for the dead (La Presse). It should be noted that payment for reporting deaths in 1911 was 10 cents and for living persons 5 cents (Le Devoir).

Become a Friend of the CChI!

Friends of the CChI will receive periodic mailouts, such as this one, about related events and the progress of the project, as well as information about the databases as they are created and as research using them becomes possible. If you, or someone you know, would like to become a Friend of the CChI, please complete the online form found on our website at www.canada.uottawa.ca/ccri/contact.htm, or you can send your complete address and e-mail information to ccri@uottawa.ca.

Funding

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Related Projects

The CChI initiative collaborates with other important projects both in Canada and internationally. For example, the 1881 Canadian Census Project began as a collaboration of the Institute of Canadian Studies (University of Ottawa) and the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints and is now continued at the Université de Montréal under the leadership of Professor Lisa Dillon. This project has produced a database of the complete 1881 census containing records for over 4.3 million residents in Canada. This effort is now being extended to include the 1852 enumeration, thanks to the support of the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI). Similarly, the CFI has made possible the 1891 Canadian Census Project under Professor Kris Inwood at the University of Guelph. The CChI’s key international partner is the Minnesota Population Center (MPC) under the direction of Professor Steven Ruggles at the University of Minnesota. The MPC’s innovative efforts include the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) that offers samples from thirteen censuses, and the North Atlantic Population Project that brings together microdatabases from Canada, Great Britain, Norway, Iceland and the United States as a way to support comparative analysis of historical change.