WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Since our last newsletter, the CCRI has continued to make great strides. Work on the 1941 sample of the Canadian census schedules is nearing completion while preparations for the next steps are well underway. In August, the team leaders and the coordinators had the pleasure of getting together for a successful team meeting hosted by Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John’s.

This newsletter highlights some of the CCRI’s activities as well as presenting the important geographic aspect of the project. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Samy Khalid very much for his excellent translation of this newsletter.

Wishing you an enjoyable read! Sandra Clark

Advancing Health Care with Historical Records

The Population Therapeutics Research Group (PTRG), a non-profit research team within the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University of Newfoundland, is working with the CCRI to develop a provincial database that reveals genealogical links among individuals who have experienced selected adverse events to prescribed drugs. The discovery of these links will help to understand the reasons for drug effectiveness with the end goal of reducing adverse drug reactions.

In the past, health researchers would spend years visiting residents in small communities, searching through church records, and exploring the provincial archives for genetic links. The CCRI can greatly facilitate such avenues of research by providing accurate, timely and inexpensive family links that optimally protect patient privacy.

“We now have the potential to significantly improve the research process, bringing health benefits into the community more quickly,” said Dr. Proton Rahman, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Medicine and Principal Investigator with the Population Therapeutics Research Group. “The CCRI database may change the way genetic research is conducted.”

This infrastructure would be a unique provincial asset, as the historical pattern of migration and isolation has resulted in Newfoundland being recognized as a unique founder population. Thus, conducting pharmacogenetic research in the province will shed light on the genetic basis for disease and the exploration of the best individual treatment options.

PTRG, Memorial University of Newfoundland

“The CCRI database may change the way genetic research is conducted.”

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Geographic Aspect of the CCRI

The CCRI’s mandate is to provide researchers with a body of data and information that can be used to acquire a better understanding of how modern-day Canada has developed. The spatial dimension of the phenomena to be analysed during this initiative must not be neglected. This article briefly discusses the main components of the CCRI’s geographic program and contains a progress report.

The subgroup responsible for the geographic aspect is performing the following tasks:¹

1) Reconstituting the boundaries of the divisions (CDs) and subdivisions (CSDs) used during the decadal censuses from 1911 to 1951;

2) Geocoding individuals in the micro-data samples from the appropriate CSDs;

3) Creating lists of codes used to classify the values of geographic-related variables from the micro-data samples (place of birth, etc.);

4) Transcribing certain published census tables (population by gender, religion, origin).

The boundaries of the CDs and CSDs are being reconstituted using the ArcGIS software application. This process involves modifying the polygons of the geographic files from the 2001 census in order to create polygons for the censuses from the period under study. Given that the archives consulted lack geographic maps of CSDs (apart from a few exceptions at the end of the period under study), electoral atlases are serving as our primary source (Figure 1). However, because the timing of the establishment of local administrative structures varied considerably from one province to another, the boundaries of the polygons are, in some cases, being developed using other references (Figure 2). This is especially true of the Prairie Provinces, British Columbia and Nova Scotia. Where the sources consulted do not suggest a delineation, a hexagonal-shaped replacement polygon is being used to represent the CSDs whose boundaries are unknown. The process of reconstituting the polygons has now been completed for the 1911, 1921 and 1931 censuses (Figures 3 and 4).

To locate the individuals in the micro-data samples from the appropriate CSDs, it is necessary to match the enumerator districts and census subdivision territories used for the purposes of publishing the aggregated volumes. This is a complex task, given that these two units do not necessarily fit perfectly. In other words, it sometimes occurs that domiciles belonging to the same enumerator district must be matched with different CSDs. The geocoding of domiciles captured in the 1911 sample is on the verge of being finalized.

As for the codification of geographic-related variables, this is being based on prior work, such as the list of places of residence compiled by IPUMS, or is being developed based on world atlases. The lists are in English and French and, as much as possible, factor in the name changes occurring over time. The initial lists supplied for the 1911 census will be enhanced and adjusted using the values observed in each of the micro-data samples.

Finally, the transcribing of the 23 tables published in the 1911 to 1951 censuses is almost complete. Optical character reader software is being used, and systematic verification of the transcription must also be performed. To complete this process, various information validation rules must be established to ensure that the disseminated data are as accurate as possible.

Completing these tasks will provide the CCRI’s users with a spatial analysis of the CCRI’s data. This analysis would, for example, make it possible to measure the representativeness of samples at various geographic scales, to group certain census subdivisions based on their belonging to a coastal community or other types of community, to select individuals/households/dwellings based on geographic criteria, to produce a cartographic rendering (themetic map) of an analysis outcome or particular variable, etc.

Laurent Richard (for the geocoding subgroup)
Université Laval

¹ Université Laval is working on Quebec and the Maritime Provinces while a team from the University of Toronto is working on the other provinces and territories. Colleagues from Memorial University and the NLSA are involved with respect to Newfoundland before its entry into Confederation.

As a CCRI team member, I am always on the lookout for works on census based research projects that will allow me to further my abilities to contribute to our work. As such I opened Erik Olssen and Maureen Hickey’s Class and Occupation: The New Zealand Reality with much anticipation. I was not disappointed. The swansong piece of Otago University’s Department of History’s Caversham Project (CP), “the first systematic attempt to identify New Zealand’s occupational structure from 1893–1938,” Class and Occupation explores a broad spectrum of issues including social stratification, social mobility and the evolution of the concept of “class” and “professionalism” in late nineteenth and early twentieth century New Zealand.

CCRI members will find much use in this informative and epistemologically challenging text. The authors discuss in some length the methodological and theoretical problems and concerns CP researchers encountered during the project’s life time. For example, they provide an enlightening discussion of the challenges involved in constructing occupational categories and then assigning individual responses to these categories. Their concern in this instance was constructing a classification system that was not only reflective of New Zealand’s unique conditions — both at a local and national scale — but also flexible enough to allow comparison across localities and with other countries. While this discussion will give readers much to mull over, the most interesting aspect of this work, methodologically speaking, relates to the sources used by the CP. In New Zealand, unlike Canada, enumerators’ returns were destroyed after they had been processed by the Census and Statistics Office, meaning that population researchers’ traditional source of information on individuals and their families does not exist in the New Zealand context. CP researchers combatted this problem through the employment of electoral rolls and street/business directories. While the authors note these sources do present their own problems, for example “neither the electoral rolls nor the directories allowed men to be located in their conjugal families”, their work demonstrates convincingly the usefulness of these sources for examining occupational structures and other interrelated topics.

Class and Occupation is equally useful on an informational level. For instance, the authors argue that early censuses in New Zealand often ignored or downplayed many characteristics of colonial New Zealand’s workforce because they reflected the social constructions and economic ideologies of New Zealand’s heavily industrialized colonial master, Great Britain, rather than colonial realities. They also demonstrate how New Zealand’s censuses evolved over time in response to the needs and concerns of the New Zealand government. Such observations raise a number of interesting questions about how censuses are constructed, and the influence the centre exerts over the way in which the periphery perceives and constructs its reality. More broadly speaking, the authors’ examination of how the ‘frontier’ nature of New Zealand influenced employment and social stratification offers much for comparison with other colonial societies, including Canada.

The discussion of colonial New Zealand, however, highlights a major flaw in this study. In an attempt to judge typicality of Caversham’s urban occupational structure within the New Zealand context, the project excised from their final analysis all rural occupations “defined as primary (farm related or based in an extractive industry)” that they encountered in their study area. Olssen and Hickey defend the project’s decision to excise these occupations from their analysis on the following grounds: one, rural occupations do not belong in the study of urban occupations; two, rural occupations are so internally heterogeneous that they sit uncomfortably in a modern occupational structure, and; three, a high proportion of farm-related jobs were fluid, flexible, seasonal and casual — hence, the “snapshot effect” of the census would engender “much more of a distortion” of rural society than of urban society. By omitting rural occupations from their analysis of class and occupation, the authors did not portray fully the ‘reality’ regarding occupation in urban New Zealand during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, the authors’ removal of rural occupations acts to mask a significant facet of the New Zealand experience. Not only did many urban centres in colonial New Zealand, Caversham included, contain primary industries — such as market gardening — within their borders, but many more also had significant numbers of household heads (up to 12% in some cases) recording their primary occupation as farmer. Moreover, Olssen and Hickey’s second and third reasons for not including rural occupations could also be applied to a number of urban occupations. Labouring jobs were, for example, often flexible and seasonal, and often it can be very hard to place some of the more obscure urban occupations of yesteryear into modern occupational structures, as those who have struggled over occupational codes will know.

These criticisms aside, I would highly recommend Class and Occupation: The New Zealand Reality to the CCRI team members. Not only does it offer insights into the way in which New Zealanders’ perceptions of class and occupations were moulded by their colonial reality, but also into how these perceptions changed over time as New Zealand’s society “matured”. The insights it provides will not only be of great use to those interested in the history of the “Land of the Long White Cloud”, but also to those interested in the development of colonial societies throughout the world.

Nic Clarke, University of Ottawa
CCRI Sessions at the Congress at York University

The 75th Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences was held at York University earlier this summer. This year’s theme, “The City: A Festival of Knowledge”, encouraged scholars to explore a range of issues and approaches to the city and was intended to stimulate discussion, debate and exchange across a variety of perspectives. Under the leadership of Augustine Park, a York graduate student and CCRI team member, four CCRI sessions, collectively entitled “The City in the Canadian Century”, were cross-listed between the Canadian Historical Association and the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association. These sessions invited delegates to consider innovative ways to use census data in their research into the transformation of urban and rural Canada and the creation of 20th century Canadian cities. Attendance exceeded normal expectations with, for example, the first CCRI session attracting a standing-room-only crowd of about 45 scholars. For the Congress’ research gallery highlighting some of York’s current major projects bearing on the ‘City’ theme, the CCRI created a poster featuring a 1935 image of a large crowd of “On to Ottawa Trek” marchers and supporters gathering in Toronto, its many faces of anonymous, ordinary Canadians suggesting aspects of the still “hidden history” of Canada. On Wednesday, York’s CCRI centre held an open house which was also well attended by some new and some old friends of the project. The success of all the CCRI Congress events is owed in large part to the quintessential CCRI collaborative spirit and efforts of the staff, graduate students and team leaders.

Nicola Farnworth, York University

Session Award for Historical Census Related Poster at the March 2006 Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America

Charles Jones and Stella Park (Sociology Department, University of Toronto) received a session award from the Population Association of America for their poster presentation, “Age, Gender, Immigration Status, Visible Minority Status and Religion as Predictors of Economic Position in Canada and the USA at 1901 and 2001.” The same poster was presented at the August 25th reception hosted in the presence of the Minister of Finance of Newfoundland and Labrador in the Confederation Building in St. John’s by the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency. The abstract for the presentation is as follows. Social Demographers have been preoccupied with the relationship between race and economic position since at least the publication of Blau and Duncan’s The American Occupational Structure. Since then the study of race differences has been broadened to include ethnicity and visible minority status, while gender has emerged as a major problematic in the study of social organization and economic inequality. This paper uses large samples from the US Census of 1900 and the Census of Canada for 1901 in order to focus upon the economic position of visible minority groups enumerated in both Censuses at that time. Having coded the Canadian data on occupation to the Duncan Socioeconomic Index (SEI) we compare the occupational status and other outcomes achieved by these visible minority groups, in comparison with the numerically dominant White population. The Canadian data also allow us to report on the role of religion. Data from the 1901 Census of Canada were made available by Peter Baskerville and Eric Sager of the University of Victoria. Data from the 1900 US Census were made available by the Minnesota Population Centre’s IPUMS project.

Charles Jones, University of Toronto