

## Article

---

### "Models for Recording Age in 1692-1851 Canada: The Political-Cognitive Functions of Census Statistics"

Jean-Pierre Beaud et Jean-Guy Prévost

*Scientia Canadensis: Canadian Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine / Scientia*

*Canadensis : revue canadienne d'histoire des sciences, des techniques et de la médecine*, vol. 18, n° 2, (47) 1994, p. 136-151.

Pour citer cet article, utiliser l'information suivante :

URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/800383ar>

DOI: 10.7202/800383ar

Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

---

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter à l'URI <https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

---

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. Érudit offre des services d'édition numérique de documents scientifiques depuis 1998.

Pour communiquer avec les responsables d'Érudit : [info@erudit.org](mailto:info@erudit.org)

# Models for Recording Age in 1692–1851 Canada: The Political-Cognitive Functions of Census Statistics



JEAN-PIERRE BEAUD and JEAN-GUY PRÉVOST

## ABSTRACT

As a number of recent studies have emphasized, it is relevant to examine official statistics not just merely to assess the accuracy of historical data, but also in their own right, as political-cognitive devices which, by providing a standard to measure things, allow for an agreement regarding their objective existence and, therefore, the possibility to act upon them. In this paper, we focus on the different manners according to which, prior to the modern census era, ages of respondents were classified. Four different models emerge from this analysis, which in each case can be related to a specific political and social context.

## RÉSUMÉ

Comme l'ont souligné un certain nombre d'études récentes, il est pertinent d'examiner les statistiques officielles non seulement pour juger de leur validité comme sources de données historiques, mais aussi parce qu'elles constituent des outils politico-cognitifs qui, en permettant de prendre la mesure des choses, autorisent un accord quant à leur existence objective et, de ce fait, nous permettent d'agir sur elles. Dans cet article, nous nous penchons sur les différentes façons dont, avant l'ère des recensements modernes, les âges des répondants étaient classés. De cette analyse sont dégagés quatre modèles, chacun étant situé dans un contexte social et politique défini.

Of all the questions asked in modern-day censuses, age seems at first sight the most simple. Age looks like a naturally numerical variable, provided with a simple, standard, and familiar measurement unit: counting in years we learn in early childhood. By contrast, such concepts as ethnic origin, occupation or disease raise fairly complex problems and suppose reliance on knowledge originating from various disciplines. For example, agreeing on a classification of diseases — should it be based upon initial causes or upon symptoms? — kept the International Statistical Congress busy for no less than four decades (Quetelet raised the question as early as 1853 but the Bertillon scheme was not passed until 1893). As a matter of fact, most attention has been up to now directed towards those variables such as occupation which most evidently exhibit the influence of social and historical context.<sup>1</sup> Age looks as though there was nothing to say about it, except perhaps from an internal point of view: its story is a simple one of progressive accuracy and technical improvement, the decision to record the respondent's date of birth (instead of assigning him to a pre-defined age group) and the advent of computer technology (allowing for easy recoding) being obvious landmarks. However, a closer look reveals that, as well as other census variables, age has been sensible to the influence of context, and this, as much during the "pre-numerate age" (which, in the case of Canada, means the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) as during "the avalanche of printed numbers" that characterized the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

As a number of recent studies have rightly emphasized, it is relevant to examine official statistics not just merely to assess the accuracy of historical data, but also in their own right, as political-cognitive devices which, by providing a standard to measure things, allow for an agreement regarding their objective existence and, therefore, the possibility to act upon them.<sup>3</sup> Glancing at age statistics collected in the numerous pre-1867 censuses, one cannot avoid being struck by both the large variety of classifying schemes and the odd fact that in many censuses these schemes were different for men and women. In the pages that follow, we intend to show that, for the whole period prior to Confederation, these changes and peculiarities in the procedures for recording age can be explained by reference to context, more precisely by a complex interplay of demands for information, political pressures, intellectual influences and technical imperatives. Given the paucity of sources relative to the intentions of officials in charge of these censuses — monarchs tended to view numbers concerning popula-

tion as *secrets d'État*, and it seems that bureaucracy was at that time less prone to red tape — some of the explanations put forward may seem tentative, but on the whole we feel that they are reasonable. Taken together, they illustrate the general proposition that, as cognitive devices endowed with their own history, statistical tools at the same time embody the conceptions entertained by their authors and play an active rôle in shaping the perceptions of authorities and, in the democratic polity, of various publics. This seems fairly evident in the contemporary cases of, say, unemployment rates or figures about violence against women: but, as we intend to demonstrate, quite the same can be said of a much earlier era and of such an apparently unproblematic variable as age.

#### RECORDING AGE IN PRE-1867 CENSUSES: FOUR MODELS

From 1665, the year Jean Talon embarked on New France's first census — “the first in modern times”, as we, Canadians, often boast of, to 1851, when the tradition of full-scale decennial censuses was inaugurated, some eighty censuses were conducted on the territory which came to be known as Canada. The scope and nature of these surveys varied widely: some of them were mere numberings (e.g. the 1731 Acadian census), while others undoubtedly suited our modern definition of a census (e.g. the 1831 and 1844 censuses of Lower Canada). The number of questions, the variables retained, the categories devised to classify answers, all differ largely from one case to another. What a striking contrast indeed between the annual censuses taken in Upper Canada from 1824 to 1841, and those taken in Lower Canada in 1831 or in the 1840s! On the one hand, we have a questionnaire reduced to its simplest terms: “Names of Heads of Families, Number in each Family, Males under Sixteen, Females under Sixteen, Males above Sixteen, Females above Sixteen, Total”;<sup>4</sup> on the other hand, we are dealing with a considerable list of questions: the form used in Lower Canada in 1831 contains no fewer than 85 questions, which, according to the author of the census report, could account for the large number of errors in the returns. Besides censuses using a minimal number of categories for each variable, we have others making use of complex (and, to the late-twentieth-century observer, sometimes amazing) nomenclatures. Beyond the purpose of numbering the people, however, a common denominator of most of these inquiries was the distribution of the population according to sex. Variables such as age and marital status were less frequent, information pertaining to age

being collected on average three times out of four. Occupation was seldom taken into account (though it had been by Jean Talon). The first object of these censuses being to measure the growth of the population, demographic variables, i.e. sex, age and marital status, were of course the most important. From His Majesty's or Colbert's letters to the intendants up to the nineteenth-century census reports,<sup>5</sup> the recurring questions were those concerning the evolution of population.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, those three demographic variables, which offered the advantage of being easily collectable, were often submitted to what we now call cross-tabulation. In the following pages, we intend to focus, as mentioned above, on the ways men and women were divided according to age.

From our corpus of fifty-three censuses cross-tabulating age and sex, we were able to extract four general models, which can be distinguished by combining two criteria. The first one is that used mostly during the French régime: we designate it as *simple* (it contains few categories) and *asymmetric* (different categories apply for men and women). The second model we encounter in Upper Canada and in the other British provinces of North America (with the exception of Lower Canada): it is also *simple but symmetric* (identical categories apply to both sexes). A third model we find in Lower Canada up to 1844 (and in Upper Canada during the 1840s), it can be described as *complex* (it has many categories, in contrast to the first two models) and *asymmetric*. Finally, a fourth model, from which later classifications were generated, was used from 1844 in Lower Canada and adopted in Upper Canada in 1851: corresponding to the last possible combination of our criteria, it is *complex and symmetric*.<sup>7</sup>

An initial observation can be made regarding the two models we describe as asymmetric. In both cases, the number of classes that apply to the ages of women is always smaller than the number that apply to the ages of men. During the French régime, married women were even counted in a unique category. Considering that these classifying schemes were devised by men, it is tempting to interpret this different treatment in terms of woman being "the other". It has been shown before, e.g. about races, that when it came to identify the others, there was a tendency to envision all of them as identical, to be blind to differences amid the others or, at least, to consider that the difference between "them" and "us" was significant enough to account for what the others were. Indeed, if one turns away from Canada and looks at early American censuses, one will be confirmed in this view: in 1790, the first census follow-

ing ratification of the Constitution, inquiry was made as to the number of free white males under and above 16, but no question was asked concerning the age of free white females, free other persons or slaves; in later antebellum censuses, there was interest in age partition, but the number of categories applying to free white persons was always larger to that applying to free colored persons or slaves (in 1840, thirteen categories were used to classify the ages of whites, while only six sufficed to distinguish blacks).<sup>8</sup> Are we dealing here with an instance of this phenomenon? As tempting (and as true) as this speculation may be, we fear it does not tell the whole story. A closer examination of the models and of the different contexts which gave rise to each of them leads us to a more intricate tale.

#### OF MEN AND ARMS: THE SIMPLE ASYMMETRIC MODEL

As mentioned above, age was among the variables on which data were collected during New France's first census, conducted by Jean Talon in 1665-1666. Up to 1681, however, no specific classification system was imposed upon enumerators. They were not required, as they would be later, to write down the number of men within each household whose age was comprised between such and such, but simply asked to write down the age of the "habitans" and of the members of their family. Moreover, the only tables we possess that display results of the 1665-1666, 1667 and 1681 censuses, and which could offer some clues as to the classification systems used at that time, seem to have devised much later, in the 1870s, that is when following Confederation it was decided to gather, arrange, and publish all statistical data produced during earlier censuses. Those three first censuses must therefore be excluded from our corpus.

During New France's 1692 census, a double classification system was applied to ages. From 1692 to 1734, it was used eight times (in 1692, 1695, 1698, 1706, 1719, 1720, 1721 and 1734), according to the summary published in 1876.<sup>9</sup> Lalou and Boleda, who had access to a copy of the original documents pertaining to twenty-six surveys, believe that this system was used in a quasi-systematic manner between 1685 and 1739.<sup>10</sup> Although the same categories (less than 15; 15 and over) were used for unmarried persons of both sexes, different systems applied for married persons: men under 50 were distinguished from men above 50, whereas women were gathered in a sole category. In the 1765 census, a somewhat different version of this model was used. According to Landry, besides in-

quiring about the head of household and, in some cases, his occupation, enumerators distinguished women from girls, men from boys under and above 15, male servants under 15 from those above, but female servants were brought all together.<sup>11</sup> Curiously, the system used in Nova Scotia's 1817 census exhibited a logic similar to that used during the French régime. Indeed, census returns distinguished: "Men above 50 years; Men between 16 and 50 years; Boys; Women; Girls".<sup>12</sup> A final model implying a simple asymmetric partition for men and women was used in New France's 1688 and Canada's 1784 censuses. In 1688, unmarried men under 15 were segregated from those over 15, while for unmarried women the dividing line was established at 12.<sup>13</sup> In 1784, the same number of categories applied for both sexes, but the cutoff age was 15 for boys and 14 for girls.<sup>14</sup>

A regular feature of all these instances of the simple asymmetric model is the separation of married and unmarried persons. In the first case, men and women are treated alike: those under 15 are distinguished from those above 15. How can we account for this cutoff age? One may interpret this as a distinction between those too young to be married (although for girls, legal age of marriage was then fixed at 12) and the group of bachelors potentially active on the marriage market. Though by aggregating everybody over 15, the group would include elements who were much too old for marriage, this interpretation concurs with what was undeniably one of the main purposes of census activity, that is knowledge of the growth and of the possibilities for growth of the settler population. Colbert's letter to Frontenac, dated 13 June 1673, provides plain evidence of this:

*...Sa Majesté veut aussi que vous vous fassiez rendre compte soigneusement du nombre de mariages qui se font par chacun an de garçons et filles nés dans le pays, et même du nombre des enfants qui naîtront par chacun an, et que vous m'en envoyiez les mémoires certifiés de l'évêque et des curés en fin de chaque année.*<sup>15</sup>

However, another but in no way contradictory interpretation seems more obvious when we no longer consider the group of unmarried persons but the group of men, both married and unmarried, as a whole. A letter from Colbert to the Sieur de la Barre, dated 10 May 1682, is quite explicit as to the demands royal authority addresses to the governor:

...Sa Majesté veut que peu de temps après son arrivée, il fasse travailler à un rôle exact de tous les habitants divisés par habitations, dans lequel il distingue ceux qui sont en état de porter les armes des vieillards et des enfants, fera mention des femmes et des filles de tous âges et s'appliquera à donner une connaissance entière et véritable à Sa Majesté de l'état de sa colonie.<sup>16</sup>

In a letter addressed to Minister Seignelay and dated 4 November 1683, Governor Le Febvre de la Barre would announce that the census established that 2 248 men were capable of bearing arms and leave a blank for the total number of inhabitants, which indicates clearly which information was sought in priority.<sup>17</sup>

What the simple asymmetric model allowed for was precisely a total of all men who were of fighting age. The two instances of this model that occurred after France's defeat in the Seven Years War (those of Canada in 1784 and Nova Scotia in 1817) can also be accounted for in this manner. Knowing how many men were of fighting age was an understandable matter of concern for British colonial authorities during the American War of Independence and in the immediate aftermath of the War of 1812. What does all this amount to? Given the absence of documents dealing specifically with the genesis of these census schemes, no conclusion can prove decisive. As a matter of fact, we must not exclude the possibility that census officials might sometimes reuse older schemes without giving it further thought: *vis inertiae* also has a rôle in what is after all a routine activity. To sum up, however, it can confidently be stated that there existed at that time (and especially under the French régime) a close relation between the explicit demands of political authority, relative to potential military strength and population increase, and the devising of classification schemes used in the census.

#### YEARLY NUMBERINGS: THE SIMPLE SYMMETRIC MODEL

Another model, which applied identical age partitions to men and women, was used in almost all other censuses of our corpus. This very simple model was used in Upper Canada on an annual basis from 1824 to 1841: women and men were both divided in two classes, under or above 16.<sup>18</sup> The same model was used in New Brunswick in 1824, 1834 and 1840,<sup>19</sup> in Assiniboia from 1831 to 1849<sup>20</sup> and, in a slightly different form, in Nova Scotia in 1838.<sup>21</sup> In fact, we are dealing here with very modest censuses, which were not much more than people counts: those made in Upper Canada



during the 1824-1841 period, for example, had a very narrow scope, compared with those made in Lower Canada during the same period. Partition according to age seems to have been then of minor importance: what mattered was the actual number of inhabitants. As a matter of fact, this model simply measures, in an even cruder manner than that used during the French régime, the number of children and the number of adults.

What this last model exhibits is a link between the scope of the inquiry and the degree of complexity of the classification system. To numberings or quasi-numberings are associated simple classification schemes; to censuses of a wider scope correspond more complex schemes. Reference to the 1790 American census may be relevant here: while the model used was asymmetric (as to both sex and race), it was also very simple. But the object of this first census was strictly that which was mentioned in the Constitution, that is a population count in view of apportionment in the House of Representatives.<sup>22</sup> However, this should not lead us to formulate an iron law: the censuses held in Upper Canada at the end of the 1840s were not very different in scope from those held in the 1820s and 1830s, but the classification systems they used for age belong to our complex symmetric model. This is indeed the reason why we have felt that the usually relevant distinction between full-fledged censuses and mere population counts should not be retained here.

That leaves us with an anomaly: the model used in Canada's 1790 census<sup>23</sup> and Prince Edward Island's 1841 and 1849 censuses was symmetric and somewhat midway between what we have up to now defined as simple (two categories only) and what could qualify as complex. This model partitioned age for both sexes in four categories: under 16, from 16 to 45, from 45 to 60, 60 and over.<sup>24</sup> As to its purposes, this intermediate-symmetric model is however best understood when assimilated to the complex-asymmetric model to which we turn now.

#### ECHOES OF THE POPULATION DEBATE: THE COMPLEX ASYMMETRIC MODEL

The Act authorizing the 1825 Lower Canada census includes the questionnaire to be used by enumerators. Nine questions deal with age and from them we can extract an asymmetric but also complex system.<sup>25</sup> Adult men were divided into four groups (18 to under 25; 25 to under 40; 40 to under 60; 60 and over), whereas for adult women, there were only two groups (14 to under 45; 45 and over);

in both cases, those who were married were distinguished from those who were not. Other categories were not exclusive, since there was one for girls under 14, and three others (under 6, from 6 to under 14, from 14 to under 18) for "people" without distinction of sex.<sup>26</sup>

This case was not unique. A comparable form was used for the 1831 Lower Canada census. Enumerators had to inquire about the number of persons within each family who were 5 and under; the number of persons over 5 and under 14; the number of men from 14 to under 18, from 18 to under 21, from 21 to under 30, from 30 to under 60, and of 60 and over, making a distinction between those who were married from those who were not; the number of women under 14, from 14 to under 45, and of 45 and over, making a distinction again those who were married from those who were not.<sup>27</sup> Seven categories were thus used to divide males (five for adults, two for children), against three or four for females (since — another inconsistency — two categories were available for girls under 14). Nor was this double classification system exclusive to Lower Canada. It was to be applied in Upper Canada in 1842,<sup>28</sup> with one small difference: the same seven categories applied for men, while four were defined for women (5 and under, over 5 up to under 14, from 14 to under 45, over 45), thereby lifting the ambiguity as to where girls under 14 should be classified.<sup>29</sup>

This double system would still be put to use in the 1848 Upper Canada census. Men were then distributed among eight categories (the large 30 to 60 group was broken down in two with 40 as the cutoff point), but the same four were used for women.<sup>30</sup> Finally, we still find a complex asymmetric system in the 1850 Upper Canada census: it is indeed much more complex, since it uses twelve categories for men (less than 1, 1 to 2, 2 to 5, 5 to 10, 10 to 14, 14 to 18, 18 to 21, 21 to 30, 30 to 40, 40 to 60, 60 to 100, and over 100) and ten for women (less than 1, 1 to 2, 2 to 5, 5 to 10, 10 to 14, 14 to 30, 30 to 40, 40 to 60, 60 to 100, and over 100).<sup>31</sup> But it cannot be assimilated to the previous complex asymmetric models, since it lacks the 45 cutoff age for women that was the common and in our view decisive feature of all the others.

From the model used in the 1825 and 1831 Lower Canada censuses and in the 1848 Upper Canada census emerge two distinctive conceptions of age: a biological one centered on the idea of reproduction and which applies to women; one more related to the universe of labour and which applies to men. In these schemes, women's lives are presented as marked out by physiological events:

14 and 45 are indeed the ages which, on average, indicate the beginning and the end of their fertility. What was thus sought was the number of women of childbearing age. Men's lives, on the other hand, are presented as punctuated by events of social or occupational dimensions: 18, 21, and 30 indeed can be looked at as stages in social as well as physical maturity; 60 indicates retirement from the occupational world (if not from the world itself). The dominant idea here is that of production, in its traditional and manly sense.

We think the context against which this complex asymmetric model must be set is that of the population controversy. D.V. Glass has documented this 18th-century debate as to whether England and Wales's population had grown or declined since the Glorious Revolution, a debate which gave rise to many a population theory and ultimately prompted the establishment of national censuses in Britain.<sup>32</sup> One of the high points of this controversy was of course the publication of Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798, barely three years before the first decennial census of England and Wales (1801). Our view is that the characteristic feature of the complex-asymmetric model (the 14-45 category for women) has been devised to meet questions that echoed the English debate. That this debate had some echo in Canada is showed notably by Lower Canada Legislative Assembly's decision to acquire Malthus's *Essay* for its library in 1807.<sup>33</sup>

More importantly, Malthus's theory was discussed at length by Robert Gourlay in his 1822 *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*.<sup>34</sup> Gourlay, a radical who knew well Sir John Sinclair, author of the monumental twenty-one volume *Statistical Account of Scotland*, had been immersed in the population debate since his Scottish days. Indeed, one of his early articles had been cited with approval by Malthus himself in the 1803 edition of his *Essay*. According to his biographer, Gourlay's *Statistical Account*, the first of its genre in Canada, was widely read by political authorities.<sup>35</sup> This concern about population growth cannot be assimilated to that expressed by the monarchy during the French régime: what we have here is not simply an interest in the total number of inhabitants but a worry informed by theory. The theory may be crude; yet, to seek not merely a total to be compared with that of the last census but also the number of women of child-bearing age reveals a degree of sophistication: one can detect here the notion of trend. An indirect confirmation of this hypothesis is given by Michael Thomas Sadler's *The Law of Population*.<sup>36</sup> Sadler, an English businessman and

M.P., published in 1830 this lengthy volume (1300 pages), in which he intended to refute Malthusian pessimism. To this end, he relied, among other data, on the results of the early American censuses, namely that of 1820, in which the model used to record age enabled him to devise a ratio of children under 10 to women from 16 through 44. Notwithstanding a little difference as to the lower limit, the range here is strikingly similar to that of our complex asymmetrical model. What it reveals is the existence of a shared problem and of shared methods for tackling it.

THE ORDEAL OF INFANT MORTALITY:  
THE COMPLEX SYMMETRIC MODEL

On November 14, 1843, the Legislative Council committee reported on the Legislative Assembly's Bill entitled "An Act for taking the Census of the Inhabitants of Lower Canada and for obtaining certain Statistical information therein mentioned":

That they have examined the said Bill with much care, and being deeply impressed with the necessity of rendering it as efficient as possible to secure the ends contemplated by such a measure, have deemed it proper and expedient to recommend a few amendments to the body of the Bill. To meet the views of Members of the Medical Faculty, who are desirous of ascertaining the number of deaths under five years of age in this Province, in order, if possible, to raise the standard of health during infancy, Your Committee have adopted the division of age, as applied to the sexes, observed in Belgium, by which the ages under five are taken by each year; between five, and twenty, by periods of five years; between twenty and sixty, by periods of ten years; and all above sixty years, included in one column.<sup>37</sup>

This totally new model was both complex (it contained no less than 13 categories) and symmetrical (the same categories applied for men and women alike). After being adopted as an amendment by the Legislative Assembly on November 17, it was first used in the 1844 Lower Canada census. From 1851 on, it was applied in Upper Canada as well. As mentioned in the quotation, the context which gave rise to this complex symmetrical model is the severe infant mortality which affected Canada in those years. After the 1830s cholera epidemics, the nascent and hence not yet well-established medical profession, no longer prone to fatalistic attitudes and eager for legitimacy, was intent on doing something. In Canada as well as in Europe and in the U.S. (which encountered

comparable rates of infant mortality), doctors and statisticians — they often moved in the same circles — probed the relation between age and death. At the centre of these debates was of course Adolphe Quetelet, at that time an illustrious figure: not only had he addressed the problem in his 1842 *On Man*, he was also the foremost authority responsible for the Belgian census (to which the above-mentioned Legislative Council report explicitly referred). In Canada, a Doctor William Kelly had in 1834 severely criticized the dismal state of registration and census statistics; such as they were, these data were useless for the student of infant mortality. That Kelly was taking part in a transatlantic discussion is suggested by the fact that his lecture seems to have been named after Bisset Hawkins's 1829 *Elements of Medical Statistics*.<sup>38</sup>

What we witness here is a change in the source of the demands addressed to census officials. While under the French régime census classifications were devised according to the wishes of political authorities overseas, the complex symmetric model was clearly shaped in response to the requests of local doctors desirous to investigate infant mortality. The idea that census statistics collected on a periodic basis were an adequate tool for such an inquiry is of course dubious: but this specific demand must be seen as one element in an ongoing debate about the usefulness of statistics (whether they originated from the census or from other sources) for the improvement of public health. This is the first instance in Canadian history (at least the first documented instance — the echoes of the population debate which we saw as the key to the complex-asymmetric were dim and may have been restricted to colonial authorities) of official statistics becoming a matter of public debate, that is a debate in which a specific public, namely members of the medical profession, emerged as interested in numbers up to then the preserve of the government. It was the emergence of such publics that more generally prompted the spectacular explosion in the collection of numerical data witnessed in the Western world during the first half of the nineteenth century — and everywhere doctors were at the forefront. It has been said that counting people makes sense only “if their common personhood is (...) seen as somehow more significant than their differences”:<sup>39</sup> where can this equivalence be more acutely experienced than in the face of death?

## NOTES

- 1 The authors wish to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Statistics Canada for their financial and material aid and Isabelle Lanthier (graduate student, Université du Québec à Montréal) who helped with the research work.  
On occupations, see: Alain Desrosières et Laurent Thévenot, *Les catégories socioprofessionnelles*, Paris, La Découverte, 1988; Margo A. Conk, *The United States Census and Labor Force Change: A History of Occupation Statistics*, Ann Arbor (Michigan), UMI Research Press, 1980; Simon R.S. Szreter, "The Genesis of the Registrar-General's Social Classification of Occupations", *The British Journal of Sociology*, XXXV, 4 (1984), pp. 522-546; Jean-Pierre Beaud et Jean-Guy Prévost, "La classification canadienne des occupations pendant l'entre-deux-guerres: réflexion sur un cas d'indépendance statistique", *Revue canadienne de science politique*, XXV: 3, septembre 1992, pp. 489-512, and "Classement statistique, représentations sociales et discours économique: les métiers et professions dans les recensements canadiens", *Interventions économiques*, no 24, automne 1992, pp. 129-149.
- 2 See Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986 and Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- 3 This view is best exposed in Desrosières, *La politique des grands nombres. Histoire de la raison statistique*, Paris, La Découverte, 1993.
- 4 *The Statutes of the Province of Upper Canada*, 4 George IV, Chapter VII, 1824.
- 5 See, for instance, the 1825 census report: "Appendice (Q.)", *Journaux de la Chambre d'Assemblée de la Province du Bas-Canada*, session 1826.
- 6 It should be mentioned that preoccupations relative to the growth of wealth were often present also: land and livestock were of course the items about which questions were asked.
- 7 We have been able to confirm the information contained in Ministère de l'agriculture, *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, Ottawa, 1876, by going back to the original documents (census acts, census returns or census reports) in a number of cases: 1665-1666 (New France), 1667 (New France), 1681 (New France), 1817 (Nova Scotia), 1824 (Upper Canada), 1825 (Lower Canada), 1826 (Upper Canada), 1831 (Lower Canada), 1842 (Upper Canada), 1844 (Lower Canada), 1848 (Upper Canada) and 1850 (Upper Canada). We have also relied on the work of Yves Landry ("Étude critique du recensement de 1765", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 29 [1975], pp. 323-351) and Richard Lalou and Mario Boleda ("Une source en friche: les dénombremens sous le régime français", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 42 [1988], pp. 47-72), who used original documents (or a copy of them) to study the 1765 census and the countings done between 1692 and 1734.
- 8 See Margo Anderson, *The American Census. A Social History*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1988, p. 14.

- 9 See Ministère de l'agriculture, *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, pp. 29, 35, 41, 48, 52, 53, 57.
- 10 Lalou et Boleda, "Une source en friche: les dénombrements sous le régime français", p. 53.
- 11 "Les recenseurs ont relevé les informations suivantes: d'abord le nom du chef de ménage, et, dans certains cas, sa «qualité ou occupation»; suivent le nombre de «maisons» habitées par le ménage, le nombre d'hommes, de femmes, d'«enfants mâles au-dessus de 15 ans», d'«enfants mâles au-dessous de 15 ans», d'«enfants femelles», de «domestiques mâles au-dessus de 15 ans», de «domestiques mâles au-dessous de 15 ans», de «domestiques femelles» et d'étrangers;..." (Landry, "Étude critique du recensement de 1765", p. 326.)
- 12 On this, see the 1817 census returns, Public Archives Canada, Ottawa, reels M5219 and M5220 (of which the originals are in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax). See also Ministère de l'agriculture *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, p. 82.
- 13 Ministère de l'agriculture, *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, p. 22.
- 14 Ibid., p. 74. This last model may have had a legal origin, the minimum age for marriage having been set for a long time at 14 for boys and 12 for girls. According to the authors of the *Code civil du Bas Canada* (1863, p. xlii), "D'après l'ancien droit français, d'accord avec le droit romain et le droit canonique, l'âge avant lequel l'on ne peut se marier est: quatorze ans pour les garçons et douze ans pour les filles. Le Code Napoléon a innové sous ce rapport, en fixant cet âge à dix huit ans pour les uns et à quinze ans pour les autres (C.N. 144). Malgré les raisons assez plausibles sur lesquelles a été bâsée (sic) l'adoption de ces changements, les Commissaires ont cru devoir s'en tenir à l'ancienne règle ...".
- 15 Quoted in Jacques Dupâquier et Éric Vilquin, "Le pouvoir royal et la statistique démographique", in François Bédarida et al., *Pour une histoire de la statistique, tome 1: Contributions*, Paris, INSEE, 1977, p. 94.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 94-95.
- 17 "Ayant été obligé de faire faire un travail pour le recensement des peuples de ce pays, j'ay trouvé que nous avons en tout 2,248 hommes capables de porter les armes, et environ [espace resté blanc] ames (...)." *La Nouvelle-France sous Joseph-Antoine Le Febvre de la Barre 1682-1685. Lettres, mémoires, instructions et ordonnances*, texte établi par Pauline Dubé, Sillery, Septentrion, 1994, p. 102-103.
- 18 Ministère de l'agriculture, *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, pp. 83, 86, 92, 93, 100, 101, 102, 104, 112, 113, 114, 119, 120, 121, 122, 126, 128, 131; see also *The Statutes of the Province of Upper Canada*, 4 George IV, Chapter VII, 1824; "Appendix O.", *Journal of the Legislative Council of Upper Canada*, 1826.
- 19 Ministère de l'agriculture, *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, pp. 84, 115, 129.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 105, 116, 118, 124, 130, 141, 161, 175. In this case, the model applies only to members of the family other than the head.

- 21 Ministère de l'agriculture, *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, p. 125.
- 22 Anderson, *The American Census*, ch. I.
- 23 Ministère de l'agriculture, *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, p. 75.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 132, 174.
- 25 *Statuts provinciaux du Bas-Canada*, 5 George IV, chap.7, 1825.
- 26 We do not deal here with the complex case of children. As an interesting exercise, one should compare the 1825 questionnaire, the table appearing in Joseph Bouchette's *The British Dominions in North America; or a Topographical and Statistical Description of the Provinces of Lower and Upper Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, the Islands of Newfoundland, Prince Edward, and Cape Breton, vol I* (London: Rees, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman, 1832, p.355) and that published in 1876, and then wonder how young girls have been enumerated.
- 27 On this, see the 1831 census returns, Ottawa, National Archives Canada, reels C719 to C724. For the 1825 census, see reels C717 and C718.
- 28 Lower Canada and Upper Canada will be used as designations up to the 1861 census.
- 29 On this, see the 1842 census returns, Ottawa, National Archives Canada, reels C1344 and C1345 together with the *Statuts provinciaux du Canada*, 4<sup>o</sup> & 5<sup>o</sup> Victoria, Cap.42, 1841.
- 30 See the 1848 census returns, Ottawa, National Archives Canada, reel no M5909. It should be noted that the authors of the 1876 volume have rounded in one category men from 30 to 40 and from 40 to 60. See Ministère de l'agriculture, *Recensements du Canada, 1665 à 1871, Statistiques du Canada*, volume IV, p. 166-7.
- 31 See the 1850 census returns, Ottawa, National Archives Canada, reel no M5915. It should be noted that no summary of this census appears in the 1876 volume.
- 32 D.V.Glass, *Numbering the People. The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain*, Farnborough, Hants, D.C. Heath Ltd, 1973.
- 33 John Hare et Jean-Pierre Wallot, *Les imprimés dans le Bas-Canada 1801-1810*, Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1967, p. 115.
- 34 *Statistical Account of Upper Canada Compiled with a View to a Grand System of Emigration in Connexion with a Reform of the Poor Laws*, London 1822. L'ouvrage comprend trois forts volumes, si l'on inclut l'imposante introduction de 500 pages, publiée séparément.
- 35 Lois Darroch Milani, *Robert Gourlay, Gadfly. The Biography of Robert (Fleming) Gourlay, 1778-1863, Forerunner of the Rebellion in Upper Canada, 1837*, London, 1971, Ampersand Press, p. 225. On the relations between Malthus and Gourlay, see also Robin Neill, *A History of Canadian Economic Thought*, Routledge, London, p. 9-11 and Craufurd Goodwin, *Canadian Economic Thought. The Political Economy of a Developing Nation, 1814-1914*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1961, p. 8-11.
- 36 Michael Thomas Sadler, *The Law of Population. A Treatise in Six Books in Disproof of the Superfecundity of Human Beings and Developing the Real*



*Principle of Their Increase*, London, 1830. On Sadler and the whole debate, see E.P. Hutchison, *The Population Debate. The Development of Conflicting Theories up to 1990*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967.

37 *Journals of the Legislative Council of the Province of Canada*, 1843.

38 William Kelly, "On the Medical Statistics of Lower Canada", *Transactions of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec*, 3, 1833-1837, p. 193-221.

39 Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking*, p. 25.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Jean-Pierre Beaud and Jean-Guy Prévost are both professors of Political Science at the Université du Québec à Montréal. They have published many articles on the history of official statistics, notably in *The Canadian Historical Review* and *The Canadian Journal of Political Science*.

Jean-Pierre Beaud et Jean-Guy Prévost sont tous deux professeurs de science politique à l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Ils ont publié plusieurs articles sur l'histoire des statistiques officielles, notamment dans la *Revue canadienne de science politique* et dans *The Canadian Historical Review*.