

# *A Written Portrait: Saint John Photographers and Their Studios in the 1871 Census*

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Most scholars, indeed most Canadians, are aware that since Confederation a census of the entire country has been carried out every ten years, with the first of these decennial compilations taking place in 1871. The results of this initial federal census are now held in the Federal Archives Division of the Public Archives of Canada, as part of Record Group 31, Statistics Canada. The finding aid for this collection<sup>1</sup> reveals that the 1871 census consisted of nine schedules: the nominal return of the living; the nominal return of deaths within the last twelve months; the return of public institutions, real estate, vehicles, and implements; the return of cultivated land, field products, plants, and fruits; the return of livestock, animal products, homemade fabrics, and furs; the return of industrial establishments; the return of forest products; the return of shipping and fisheries; and the return of mineral products. The second census, in 1881, saw the nine schedules reduced to eight, with the return of public institutions, real estate, vehicles, and implements being combined with that of industrial establishments into a single schedule. Regrettably, of the eight schedules of the 1881 census, only the first schedule is still extant and available to the public for examination, although all of the results are published. All subsequent census records still remain under the control of Statistics Canada and are available for public consultation except in their published formats. In spite of such restrictions, however, the information made available to the scholarly community by these censuses is valuable and informative. It enables us to draw firm conclusions in a variety of areas, about the nature and extent of our country, its resources, its people, and its development.

Of all the census records available for study and examination, the most intriguing is the 1871 census. Because all of its nine schedules are extant, and there are no restrictions on its use, one can draw from it a more complete and, because its raw data are available for interpretation, a more unbiased view of our country at the time of Confederation than is possible from any other available source. As a fount of information about more obscure aspects of our national heritage, however, this particular census still remains largely untouched. For students of social, labour, and economic history in particular, schedule six of the 1871 census, the return of industrial establishments, is most important, since it contains fields describing the

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1 Public Archives of Canada, Statistics Canada, RG 31, Inventory of the Records of Statistics Canada, Part II, Records of Statistics Canada, C: Census Fields, 1825-1881.

owner of the establishment, the fixed capital invested, the floating capital invested, the number of employees, the average aggregate yearly wages, the annual cost of raw materials, and the annual value of products produced. The nature of industrialization, the extent of employment and wages paid, and the nature of capitalism in the nineteenth century are subjects which can be pursued by an analysis of this schedule.

As an example of the use of census schedules to conduct research in unusual areas of our cultural heritage, one can for instance examine photographic galleries in Saint John, New Brunswick, through the industrial schedule of the 1871 census. Saint John had already by 1871 a long history in the field of photographic studios — the first photographer to operate in the Maritimes had advertized in Saint John in November 1841, only two years after photography had been perfected and revealed as a method of “capturing the shadow ere the substance fades.” Through newspaper surveys, city and province directory listings, provincial exhibition reports, and old photograph collections, the history of the development of photography in Saint John can be traced up to Confederation. In 1844, there was one studio; by 1857, there were five; and in 1863, twelve were in operation including Flood’s Photography and Ambrotype Gallery, the Imperial Gallery of James Woodburn, and George P. Robert’s Prince of Wales Photographic Studio. The grandiose nature of their self-promoting advertizements and of the laudatory comments passed upon local photographers are not, however, fair assessments of the size or the nature of these studios, or of the men who ran them, and the New Brunswick provincial census of 1861 gives insufficient data to enable a researcher to build a more vivid picture. Only with the 1871 national census can such a picture be drawn.

Yet in using the census records, one must always be aware of potential problems, gaps, misidentifications, and errors in compilation. Thus, the Census Abstract for 1871<sup>2</sup> lists fourteen photographers operating in the city of Saint John, as well as twenty-one litterateurs and artists, of whom two were known to work in photographic studios. However, an examination of Schedule 1, Nominal Return of the Living, reveals that sixteen men (no women) were identified as photographers, or photographer-artists, while a seventeenth, George P. Roberts, had listed no occupation. In contrast to this, Lovell’s *New Brunswick Directory* for 1871<sup>3</sup> had listed twelve photographers in operation, at least three of whose names could not subsequently be found in Schedule 1, because census records for two wards had been destroyed by fire. This schedule, however, does reveal much about the individuals engaged in the business: age, place of birth, years resident in the province, religion, ethnicity, and marital circumstances. The anonymous advertizements and directory listings become living, breathing men, about whose lives much more is known. Schedule 6 elaborates on the information to be found in the Schedule 1. Although the Census Abstract lists seven photographic studios among its industrial establishments<sup>4</sup> (based on the number of persons employed), only five can be found in the schedule 6, again due to the absence of census records for two wards. In the five entries, however, a wealth of information is found. The five studios for which the entries were located include Roberts’ Prince of Wales Gallery, as well as the establishment of John S. Climo (which survived until the 1960s after being operated

2 *Census Returns for 1870-1871* (Ottawa, 1873), vol. II, p. 275.

3 *Lovell’s New Brunswick Provincial Directory for 1871* (Saint John, N.B., 1871)

4 *Census Returns for 1870-1871*, vol. III, p. 388.

by three generations of Climo photographers),<sup>5</sup> J.D. Masters, James Hinch, and Woodburn & McClure. None of the studios employed more than three employees each. There were a total of fourteen employees listed, including eight males over sixteen; three males under sixteen; two females over sixteen; and one under sixteen. Presumably the female staff were clerical employees, since no female photographers were listed in Schedule 1. Climo's studio was the least well-established: with only \$300 in fixed capital and no floating capital invested, it spent only \$100 on raw material, while producing \$1000 in products annually. By contrast, Roberts had \$1150 in fixed, and \$1000 in floating capital invested, used \$1500 in raw material annually, and produced products to the value of \$3500. By utilizing such figures, a better picture can be built up of each studio, adding to the facts already gathered from other sources. When the figures for each city, or province, are compiled, they can additionally be utilized to compare and contrast relative rates of industrial development, wages, capital investment, overhead, and production in each area or region. While the examples cited here are photographic studios, all manner of industrial activity in post-Confederation Canada can be studied and analysed.<sup>6</sup>

The two schedules of the 1871 Canadian census — of Nominal Return of the Living (No. 1) and the Return of Industrial Establishments (No. 6) — are fascinating tools for the study of Canadian history. Even as they add to and build up a clearer portrait of particular persons and companies across the country just after Confederation, they are also useful in constructing continuing analyses of industrial growth in conjunction with the published data of successive censuses.

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5 Public Archives of Canada, National Photography Collection, Photographer's Files — Climo.

6 One other often-neglected source for the study of the nature of industrial establishments in nineteenth-century Canada should also be mentioned, as an aside to the census schedules of 1871. Researchers should be made aware that Dun & Bradstreet, the great American credit firm, has deposited its nineteenth-century credit ledgers with the Manuscript Division of the Baker Library, Harvard University. Permission of the company is required before any information found in these ledgers can be published, but there is ready access to the material, which constitutes a fascinating record of Nroth American businesses, their credit ratings, and their activities. Numerous Canadian firms, including those of Saint John photographers Carson Flood and John S. Climo, are listed in these ledgers, with many piquant and personal observations about the owners of these establishments, as well as notations about their actual worth and trustworthiness.