



(McLintock, A.
H., 2009c)

Browse Te Ara

1858



POPULATION

THE CENSUS

The General Census

By 1851 the rapid growth and development of the colony had shown the need for regular, authentic population data on a uniform basis for the whole country. When the first general census was taken in 1851, the enumeration was left to the governments of New Ulster and New Munster, the two provinces into which the country was then divided, but identical census schedules were used throughout the colony. The census, which was confined to Europeans, revealed a population of 26,707.

The second general census should have been taken in 1854, but the sequence was upset by the intervention of the Imperial Act of 1852 which granted representative government to the colony, abolished the short-lived provinces of New Ulster and New Munster, and in their place constituted the six new provinces of Auckland, New Plymouth, Wellington, Nelson, Canterbury, and Otago. The individual provinces were to be responsible for the enumeration of their own inhabitants, but the results proved unsatisfactory and a new Census Act was passed in 1858. This Act instituted three-yearly censuses, of which the first was taken in December 1858 and the last in March 1874. In 1877 a new Census Act made provision for censuses in 1878 and 1881 and in every fifth year thereafter. This quinquennial sequence has been maintained to the present time, with two exceptions. The census due in 1931 was postponed owing to the economic depression; that due in 1941 was postponed until 1945 owing to wartime conditions. The sequence of five-yearly censuses was resumed in 1951.

The Maori Census

The first census of the Maori population was taken between September 1857 and September 1858. The total Maori population was given as 56,049, of whom 38,269 lived in the province of Auckland, but the published tables included the precautionary phrase, "as far as can be ascertained". Warfare between Maoris and Europeans, which continued intermittently in certain areas of the North Island from 1860 until 1874, prevented any further general censuses of Maoris until 1874.

The Maori censuses of 1874 and 1878 simply covered the numbers in each subtribe, the sex, and age – whether over or under 15 years. The Maori census of 1881 showed an apparent increase in Maori numbers – from 45,542 in 1878 to 46,141 in 1881 – but this was viewed with scepticism by

3rd

Native Department officers, who found it conflicting with their experience. It seems probable that the increase was due to an improved enumeration, and that the long decline in Maori numbers continued. At the census of 1886 a more precise and detailed enumeration was attempted, to include exact ages and details of stock and cultivated land. Many Maoris proved deeply suspicious of the Government's motives, especially when it came to the enumeration of stock and cultivations. When taking these early Maori censuses, the census officers did not visit every dwelling. Much of the information was obtained from the wise men and elders of the tribes. Accustomed as they were to the oral transmission of tribal history, legends, and information of all kinds, they were well acquainted with the details required.

In 1916 it was decided that, as the small minority of Maoris in the South Island did not justify the expense of a separate census, they should be enumerated in conjunction with the Europeans. The system proved satisfactory, and was used again in 1921. In 1926 the Maori census was taken on a specific night instead of following former procedure, and for the first time there was no separate organisation to deal with the Maori people. Instead, in districts with large Maori populations, special sub-enumerators were employed who were acquainted with Maori conditions and who either spoke Maori or were accompanied by interpreters. The Maori population was recorded in small divisions instead of, as previously, in total numbers for each county. For the first time, the North Island Maoris – the great bulk of the Maori population – were enumerated by means of schedules which were filled in by individual Maori householders. A special Maori schedule was produced, of simplified scope and character, and with the headings and questions printed both in English and in Maori. Some 83 per cent of North Island Maoris used this form; the remainder used the normal European schedule.

The Maori Census of 1926 proved successful, and the same methods were used in 1936 and 1945. For more recent censuses, no special Maori schedules have been provided. Maoris and Europeans alike are now required to complete the same types of schedules.

The Scope of the Modern Census

Population censuses in New Zealand are now taken under the authority of the Statistics Act of 1955, which continued the provision for a quinquennial census. While some countries such as Great Britain and the United States of America have a ten-yearly census, a five-yearly census is considered more suitable for those recently developed countries which have relatively rapid changes in population.

The potential field of census inquiry is enormous, but a variety of factors limit the actual inquiries made. These include:

1. The character and education of the people. This is a severely limiting factor in countries with a low standard of literacy or having a variety of races and languages. In New Zealand the standard of education is high and no great difficulties are experienced provided the questions are clearly expressed.
2. The attitude of public opinion. Complete and accurate information depends on the good will and cooperation of the people. It is important that the public should realise both the usefulness of the information obtained and the fact that individual returns are absolutely confidential.
3. The danger of overloading the census schedule.
4. The existence of other methods of obtaining the information required.
5. The question of expense.

The scope of the present-day New Zealand census is clearly indicated by the titles of the 10 volumes

in which the results of the 1961 census have been published. They are: Increase and Location of Population; Ages and Marital Status; Religious Professions; Industries and Occupations; Incomes; Birthplaces and Duration of Residence of Overseas-born; Race; Maori Population and Dwellings; Dwellings and Households; and the General Report, which includes details of war service, dependent children, and usual places of residence. Two separate appendices contain life tables based on census and mortality statistics, and a census of poultry.

The types of schedules used have changed considerably over the years. In the early censuses a single large schedule was used for each household. Personal schedules were originally produced for use on shipboard and in hotels, camps, etc., but the privacy and convenience they offered led to a great extension of their use. For recent censuses two schedules have been used – a dwelling schedule, giving details of the dwelling, and a personal schedule for each person in the household.

How to cite this page: . 'THE CENSUS', from An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, edited by A. H. McLintock, originally published in 1966.

Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 22-Apr-09

URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/population/2>