



Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-008-X
Canadian Social Trends

Article

City of Québec 1608-2008: 400 years of censuses

by Gwenaël Cartier



June 3, 2008



Statistics
Canada

Statistique
Canada

Canada

City of Québec 1608-2008: 400 years of censuses

by Gwenaël Cartier

This article was adapted from "Québec 1608 à 2008 : 400 ans de statistiques démographiques", which will be published in Les cahiers québécois de démographie in August 2008. <http://www.demo.umontreal.ca/adq/cahiers.html>

The founding of Québec City

On April 13, 1608, Samuel de Champlain embarked on his third voyage to New France. Pierre DuGua de Mons had commissioned him to establish a permanent trading post in the lands explored just less than a century earlier by Jacques Cartier.¹ Champlain landed at Québec on July 3, 1608, with a crew of 28 men. Unaccustomed to the very harsh living conditions, only 8 crew members survived the first winter.

So began the history of Québec City, which is now, 400 years later, the oldest francophone city in North America.

The complete history of Québec City's population in its early years was not reported in any official federal government document until the first census of the new Confederation, held in 1871. A revision of the data was published following the 1931 Census. These two censuses, along with some statistics from others, were used to prepare this portrait of Québec City's development from its birth to its 400th anniversary.

Before the founding of Trois-Rivières in 1634 and Montréal in 1642, the population of Québec City was, for all intents and purposes, the population of New France. Immigration, though responsible for most of the city's early growth, was a minor factor until the city fell



Samuel de Champlain
Source: The Canadian Online Atlas
The Royal Canadian Geographical Society

to the Kirke brothers in 1629. After this event, little is known about Québec City's population until Jean Talon arrived and conducted the first census almost 40 years later.

Jean Talon conducts the first census

Although 36 censuses were conducted while the colony belonged to the French regime, only 15 of them provide statistics specific to Québec City. The practice of census-taking began in New France with the arrival

of its first intendant, Jean Talon,² on September 12, 1665. Along with the rest of 17th century New France, Québec City was one of the first places in North America in which a census was taken,³ and it was held at a time when the young colony was just getting organized. Talon conducted it shortly after his arrival, actually going door-to-door in person to collect the information. There was a great deal of territory to cover, and he did not finish until 1666.

Talon's initial results describe a New France dominated by Québec City and the surrounding area (Chart 1).

The data show a substantial imbalance between the sexes. In a population of 547 persons, there were about 50% more men than women in Québec City, a situation that was similar throughout New France. This finding prompted one of Talon's first recommendations to the King, which was to promote immigration by women.

A breakdown of the data by marital status shows that 46.2% of the colony's inhabitants were unmarried and that almost all (over 90%) of these unmarried settlers were men. In fact, until 1617, there were no women in Québec City, and there was little incentive for them to go there. However, as a result of Talon's work, more than 1,000 women, including

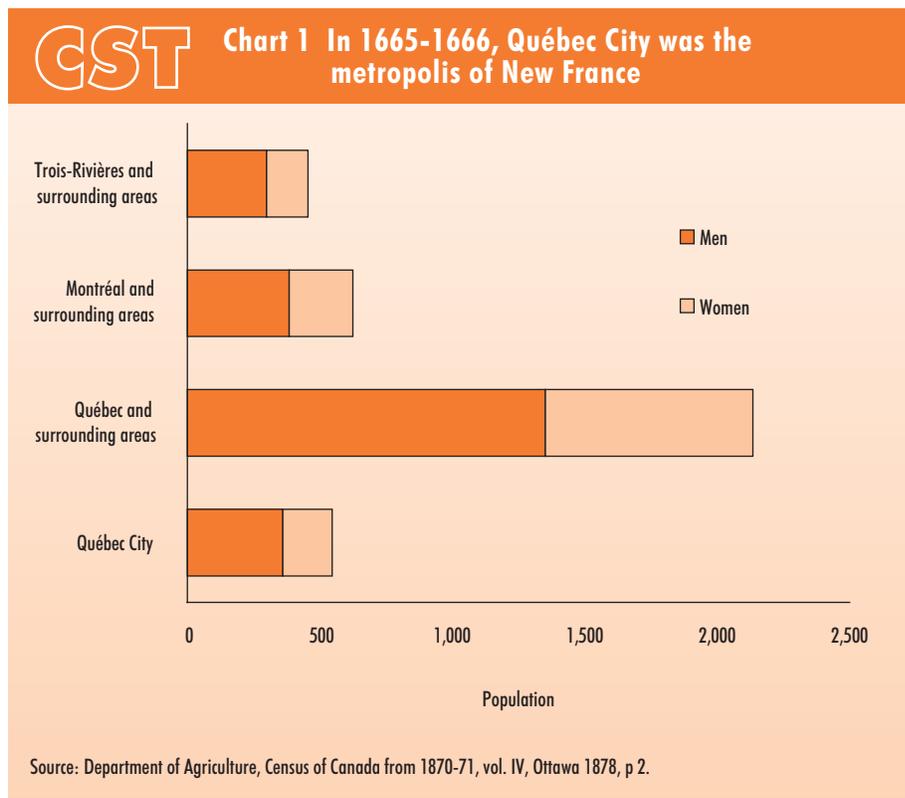
some 900 "King's Daughters",⁴ arrived in New France between 1667 and 1673 to help populate the colony.

Talon's censuses provided a picture of the colony from various perspectives. For example, in 1666, he found that 763 of the 1,378 individuals aged 15 and over were workers employed in 50 different trades and occupations. (Presumably, these figures do not include women and soldiers.)

The Census of 1681

Following the censuses taken by Talon in 1666 and 1667, his replacement Jacques Duchesneau⁵ conducted five more between 1675 and 1681. The colony's population tripled between 1666 and 1681, rising from 3,215 to 9,677. Québec City benefited from this growth, as its population climbed from 547 to 1,345 over the 15-year period. However, it had a slightly slower rate of increase than the rest of the colony as neighbouring areas enjoyed a more rapid growth.

The most obvious impact of Jean Talon's work on daily life in Québec City must be the reduced demographic imbalance between the sexes. Between 1666 and 1681 the sex ratio fell from three men to one woman among the population



aged 15 and over to less than two to one, as the male share of the city's population hovered just above 60% (61.2%). Furthermore, the arrival of the King's Daughters boosted the proportion of the population under age 15 from slightly over 30% to nearly 40%. Consequently, the median age of the population, which was probably about 22.5 years in 1667, also dropped to about 19 years by 1681.

Other censuses of the French regime

Although the French regime conducted 28 more censuses after 1681, none provided as much information as those undertaken by Talon and Duchesneau.

Québec City's population shrank between 1698 and 1706, probably because the population in the surrounding areas increased. The number of settlements in the colony grew steadily, climbing from about 10 as counted in the first census to nearly 100 at the time of the change to British rule in 1763. In the 1765

census, people were enumerated in 113 locations. In sum, from the arrival of Samuel de Champlain and his 28 men in 1608, the population of the city of Québec grew to number 8,001 persons at the time of the last census of the French regime, conducted by Intendant François Bigot in 1754 (Chart 2).

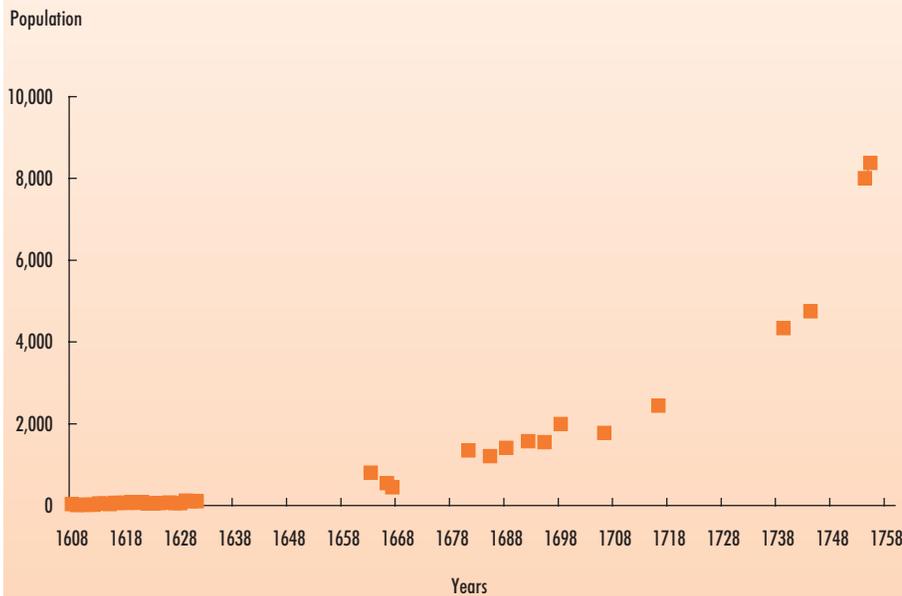
Québec City under the British Empire

The frequency of census-taking slowed when New France became part of the British Empire. Only three censuses were held in the second half of the 18th century – in 1765, 1784 and 1790. Instead, the tradition of having regular censuses, started by Jean Talon a century earlier, became more a tradition of having surveys.⁶ These surveys were targeted to settlements or to very specific topics. They were also conducted on an ad hoc basis. For example, in 1763, only families were counted in the survey; the results showed that there were 4,727 families in Québec City and 5,302 in Montréal. In the same



Source: Jean Talon by Théophile Hamel
Museum of Civilization, collection of
Séminaire de Québec
No. 1993.16425

Chart 2 Under the French regime, the population of Québec experienced rapid growth after 1716



Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, from 1608 to 1663. Department of Agriculture, from 1666 to 1754. 1739 and 1755 estimated by Gwenaël Cartier, demographer at Statistics Canada.

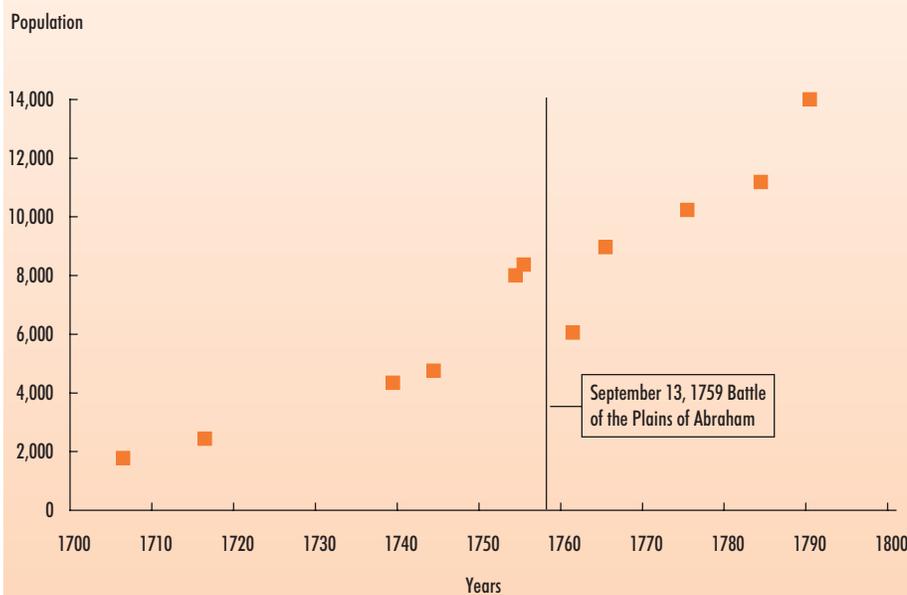
way, in 1764, heads of Protestant families were enumerated and found to number 144 in Québec City and 56 in Montréal.

Under the new administration, the post of Intendant was abolished, and its functions were assigned to the governor. Québec City also lost its status as the regional metropolis. By the end of the 18th century, it was smaller than Montréal, which became the new metropolis with a population of 18,000 in 1790. Nevertheless, Québec City, with its 14,000 inhabitants, remained the province’s seat of government and its second-largest city. (The 1754 Census was the last to provide complete information about Québec City and Montréal until the census of 1825. The data presented here for the years at the end of the 18th century are estimates.⁷)

The population of Québec City fluctuated throughout the 18th century, However, it is apparent that the growth of the city resumed despite the change in governing power (Chart 3).

It is also worth noting some specific points about Québec City’s population in the late 18th century. According to the 1784 Census, 88 slaves lived in the region of Québec City. This particular aspect of life in the province was never described in the censuses of New France.⁸

Chart 3 After the Conquest of 1763, population growth in Québec City resumed



Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1716, 1744. Department of Agriculture, 1706, 1754, 1765 and 1790. Data points for the other years have been estimated by Gwenaël Cartier, demographer at Statistics Canada.

Québec City, capital of Lower Canada

A decree signed by King George III of England (*Constitutional Act of Canada*, June 10, 1791) created the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada and made Québec City the capital of Lower Canada. However, there is no information about Québec City’s population until the first census of Lower Canada in 1825.

The first censuses in the 19th century

In 1825, the census tells us that the population of Québec City passed the 20,000 mark, with a total count of 22,101. After this date, population

The vocabulary used by the census to describe particular places or persons has transformed itself over time, leading to possible confusion about the terms. In the case of the word “district,” beginning with the British regime, this term designated a large region named after the largest city within its boundaries. All districts together encompassed the entire territory.

The best example to illustrate the representation as well as the composition of districts is provided by Table I¹ in the 1827 Census of Lower Canada. It contains population data for each district (Québec, Montréal, Trois-Rivières and Gaspé) as well as data for the counties in the districts.

The term district was used for the first time in the Census of 1784.² The districts replaced the areas defined by the term *gouvernement* during the French regime.

Beginning in 1871, the mandate of the census included determining electoral representation, and this new purpose altered the use of the district as a geographic concept. This is shown by the first map of the new districts comprising the province of Quebec,³ where the number of districts in the province increase from 4 to 83; at the same time, the city of Quebec no longer forms part of the district of that name, but instead is composed of three districts numbered 145, 146 and 147.

In the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, districts and counties are often confused.⁴ Even the organizers of the Census of 1891 struggled with the concept, as county commissioners and district enumerators reported to the chief census officers. Table VI⁵ of the Census of 1891 offers the first comparison of electoral districts and census districts.

In the next census in 1901, population data were presented for census districts for the first time,⁶ but in 1911, the distinction between the two types of districts was less clear. By the time of the 1921 Census, the concept of federal electoral ridings associated with districts and sub-districts⁷ makes its first appearance, as does the replacement of census districts with census divisions.⁸

1. Minister of Agriculture. (1878). *Census of Canada, 1870-71*. Vol. IV. Ottawa.
2. Minister of Agriculture. (1878).
3. Minister of Agriculture. (1873). *Census of Canada, 1870-71*. Vol. I. Ottawa.
4. Minister of Agriculture. (1893). *Census of Canada, 1890-91*. Vol. I.
5. Minister of Agriculture. (1893), Table VI.
6. Minister of Agriculture. (1903). *Census of Canada, 1901*. Vol. I. Ottawa, Table 11.
7. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. (1924). *Census of Canada, 1921*. Vol. I. Ottawa.
8. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. (1924), Table 16.

data are not available for Québec City proper until the 1851 Census, as intervening censuses provided data for the district of Québec only.

The first census of industries was taken in 1827. Thus, we learn that the largest of the 14 types of industries in terms of establishments was sawmills. More of these mills were located in Québec City (288) than Montréal (200); however, Montréal surpassed it in terms of total number of industrial establishments, at 899 compared with 479. Talon started this trend, in a sense, by identifying occupations in 1666.

In 1831, the population was classified by religion for the first time. Previously, it was churches that had been enumerated in certain censuses. The census shows about 75% of the

population of Lower Canada was Catholic and this proportion was reflected in the districts of Québec and Montréal. However, Anglicans were relatively more numerous in the region of Québec (15.4%) than that of Montréal (13.5%), while the reverse was true of the population self-identifying as members of the Church of Scotland (6.0% and 8.3%, respectively).

Many other variables, in addition to religion and industry, made their first appearance in the Census of 1844: place of birth, education, health, occupation, and so on. Also in 1844, Québec City was experiencing another large wave of immigration;⁹ 25% to 30% of the population were born outside the country, many of them in Ireland. The large presence

of the Irish was due to the events of the 19th century, especially after 1815, when a growing population and deteriorating economic situation drove more and more people to leave their home country. This mass migration peaked following the terrible potato famine of the late 1840s.¹⁰

According to the data available for Lower Canada as well as for the districts of Québec and Montréal (which include the cities and their surrounding areas), we can reasonably deduce that in 1844, francophones probably accounted for less than half the populations of the cities of Québec and Montréal. In fact, in 1844, 75% of the population of Lower Canada was francophone, compared with 60.5% in the district

of Québec and 52.2% in the district of Montréal.

Decennial censuses

A firm believer in the importance of censuses, James Bruce, Lord Elgin and governor-general of Canada approved the establishment of the Board of Registration and Statistics in 1847. Under the *Census Act of the United Provinces*, a census was to be conducted in February and March of 1848 and again in the same months two years later.¹¹ On August 30, 1851, royal assent was given to a new law requiring that regular censuses be conducted starting in 1851 and continuing in 1861 and every tenth year thereafter. Thus, we can say that the year 1851 marked the beginning of Canada's decennial census. These innovations in census-taking would provide more reliable and regular statistics than had been available in the previous 100 years.

The 1851 and 1861 censuses

The 1851 and 1861 censuses are the only two decennial censuses conducted in Lower Canada. The population of Québec City stood at 42,052 in 1851, almost double its size in 1825. It continued to grow thereafter, reaching 51,109 persons in 1861. The large increase in population during the 19th century was the combined result of a relative decline in mortality and an increase in the birth rate.¹² And despite sustained immigration, the effect of this dynamic growth was also to increase the share of the population born in Canada from less than 70% in 1825 to almost 80% in 1861.

Confederation

The rebellions of 1837 and the widespread popular demand for an elected government based on representation by population led to the passage of the *Constitution Act*, 1867. Under Sections 8 and 51 of the Act, the census was to provide population figures that would be used to establish the number of representatives each province would

elect to the House of Commons. The key impact lay in the fact that it influenced the decision to standardize the *de jure* method and to conduct a census for specific geographic regions on a set date every 10 years. Thus, the first census taken under the Act was in 1871. Joseph Charles Taché played a key role in census-taking during the period from Confederation to the appointment of the first Dominion Statistician and the establishment of a permanent bureau of census and statistics.¹³

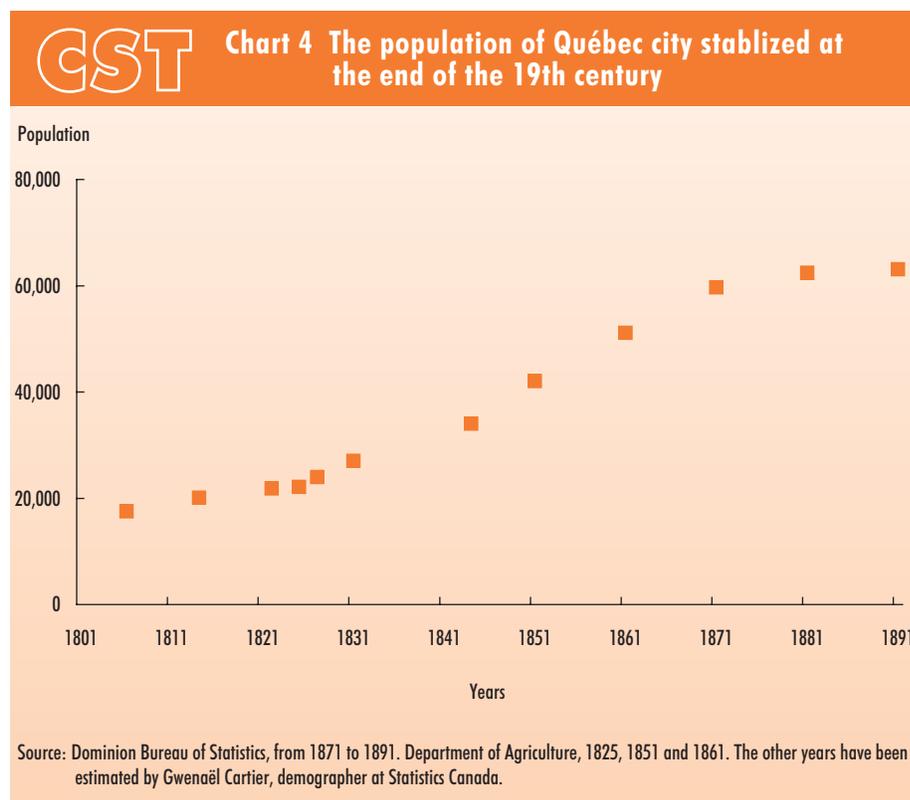
More detailed geographies provided better data for analyzing the demographic characteristics of the expanding urban population. The census of 1871 marks a turning point for the dissemination of new population statistics for Québec City. Data for neighbourhoods allows us to better appreciate the demographic changes occurring at the end of the 19th century. For example, in the context of the transition from a commercial to industrial economy, we can see the growth

in population in neighbourhoods like St-Roch, Jacques-Cartier, St-Saveur and St-Vallier in the eastern quarter of the city. The population there jumped from 28,305 in 1871 to 36,200 in 1891, while it declined in other neighbourhoods. In the late 19th century, the growth of Québec City slowed dramatically (Chart 4).

The 20th century

The pattern of decennial censuses that began in the latter half of the 19th century continued into the following century, providing valuable demographic information about Québec City. In addition, quinquennial censuses were instituted in 1956.

Early in the 20th century, Québec City enjoyed a population boom. Indeed, the city's third century can be divided into two distinct periods of growth. First, its population expanded from 68,840 in 1901 to 171,979 in 1961, following a pattern of almost continuous growth at a pace that did not begin to slow until after 1931. Subsequently, despite an increase in



1971, the population remained stable until 2001 (Chart 5).

The 21st century

On the basis of the results of the 2001 Census, the 21st century started out like the previous one. The population of Québec City on May 15, 2001, was 169,076, up slightly from the 1996 Census but still below the peak of 171,979 enumerated in 1961. The pattern of ongoing stability continued into the early part of the 21st century.

The municipal mergers of 2002

On January 1, 2002, there was a major change. Thirteen municipalities were amalgamated together to form a new Québec City. Overnight, this merger made the city's population balloon to 507,991.¹⁴ Four years later, another significant development took place. On January 1, 2006, two municipalities broke away from the new Québec City. As a result, the city "lost" 31,661 residents,¹⁵ and its population dropped below the half-million mark.

The 2006 Census

Thanks to the municipal mergers, the population of Québec City jumped from 169,076 in 2001 to 491,142 on May 16, 2006, the date of the most recent census. This made Québec City the province's second-largest city once again.¹⁶

At the time of writing, not all results are available from the 2006 Census, but we can state that the population of Québec City continues to age. In fact, persons aged 65 and older represent more than 16% of the total population, a historic high. In this context, another statistic needs to be emphasized: 53% of the population aged 15 and over was living in a couple (married or common law), a proportion which has not been seen since 1825.

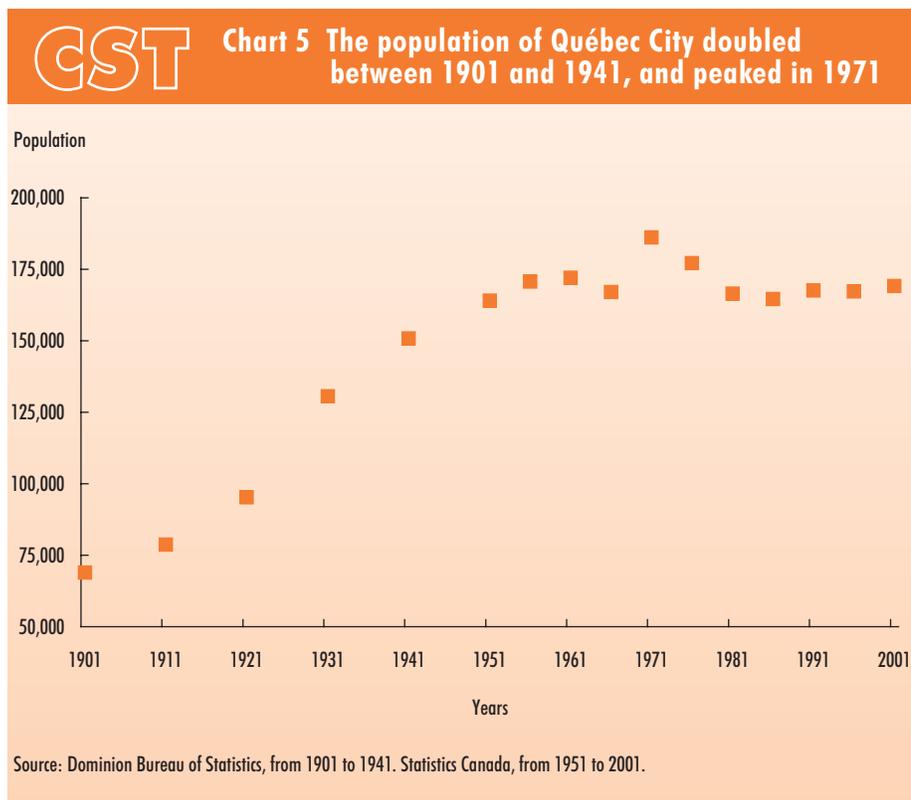
In 2006, Québec City was a very francophone city, with almost 95% of residents affirming that French was their only mother tongue. On the other hand, persons born abroad accounted for about 5% of the population, exceeding the previous high of 4.5% recorded in 1891.

Québec City on its 400th anniversary

On July 3, 2008, Québec City will celebrate its 400th birthday. What will its population be on that day? According to municipal population estimates published by the Institut de la Statistique du Québec, its population was 502,119 in 2007.¹⁷ So we can say that Québec City will have a population of more than half a million as it celebrates its 400th anniversary. What a tribute to Samuel de Champlain and his crew, who founded the City of Québec under such harsh conditions.



Gwenaël Cartier is a Regional Account Manager, Eastern Region (Montréal), Statistics Canada.



1. Statistics Canada. (1984). *In the footsteps of Jacques Cartier*, Catalogue No. 11-X-524E. Ottawa; Minister of Industry. p. 52.
2. Jean Talon was Intendant of Justice, Police and Finance of New France for two terms, 1665-1668 and 1670-1672. Louis Robert de Fortel was originally selected as New France's first Intendant, but he never held the office. Talon conducted three censuses (1666, 1667 and 1671).
3. Statistics Canada. (2002). *2001 Census Handbook*. Catalogue No. 92-379-XPB. Ottawa; Minister of Industry. p. 1.
4. Statistics Canada, ESTAT, Jean Talon, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/98-187-XIE/jt.htm>.
5. Jacques Duchesneau conducted the 1675, 1676, 1679 and 1681 censuses. Duchesneau did not take Talon's place until 1675, as Frontenac governed New France without an intendant between 1672 and 1675.
6. Statistics Canada. (2002). *2001 Census Handbook*, p.2.
7. Regarding the size of the population of Québec City at the time of the 1765 census, a note written during the 1871 census indicates the use of an "estimate calculated as a proportion of previous censuses" for both Québec City and Montréal. In the 1784 census, the data collected tell us only about the demographic situation for the districts of Québec, Montréal and Trois-Rivières; the writer calculated an estimate based equally on those of Bouchette as well

- as information from other censuses. As regards the population of Québec City at the time of the 1790 census, a note indicates it is approximately the same as in the census of 1765.
8. Mathieu de Costa worked for Pierre DuGua de Mons and also apparently served as Champlain's interpreter in his contacts with the Aboriginal peoples. Intendant Raudot legalized slavery in New France on April 13, 1709 [Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online. <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/index.html>]
 9. In 1844, there were 87,178 immigrants in Lower Canada, which had a total population of 697,084.
 10. Canadian Encyclopedia Historica. Accessed on April 3, 2008. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=f1SEC852191>
 11. Statistics Canada. (2002). *2001 Census Handbook*, p.2.
 12. Vital statistics for Québec City for the period 1771 to 1870 are available in Volume V of the Census of 1871.
 13. Statistics Canada. (1993). *75 Years and Counting: A History of Statistics Canada*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry, p 6.
 14. The population of Québec City on May 15, 2001, based on January 1, 2002, geography. Statistics Canada SGC 2006, Volume 1, Catalogue no. 12-517-XWE. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.
 15. Statistics Canada (2006).
 16. In the 2001 Census, the city of Laval came second with a population of 343,005. Five years later, it ranked third with a population of 368,709.
 17. This estimate is available on the Web site of the Ministère des Affaires municipales et Régions du Québec in connection with the population decree. http://www.mamr.gouv.qc.ca/organisation/orga_donn_popu.asp