

Comparative Study of Street Directories and Census Returns for 1871

Social and urban historians are increasingly aware of the need to develop new methods of examining large populations. The literature shows the ingenuity with which these problems are being solved. Municipal, parish and census records, which have previously been ignored because their use was impractical, can now be processed with ease and efficiency. The historian must still select from the available sources the one that is most suitable for his particular purpose.

In a study by this author,<sup>1</sup> city directories were used to compare the occupational status of the Irish, French Canadian and general population of Montreal in the nineteenth century. City directories contain valuable material, but they have certain disadvantages. The census returns were an alternative source. This study compares the city directory and the census returns for 1871 in order to assess their relative usefulness in studying occupations of the Irish in Montreal.

W.S. MacKay compiled his first directory for Montreal in 1842, and new editions appeared in 1843, 1854 and 1855. After 1861 the directory was published annually, and John Lovell took over editorship in 1867. The directories list names, addresses and occupations of heads of households. Decisions on the ethnic origin of subjects have to be made on a subjective basis.

At first glance the census returns offered more information. The first schedule of the returns is available on microfilm for 1825, 1842, 1851, 1861 and 1871. In addition to names, ages and occupations, the returns include ethnic origin and religious affiliation. In the 1842 returns, ethnic origin and religious affiliation are entered by household rather than by individual. The returns for St. Anne's, East, West and Centre wards are missing for 1851. As a high proportion of Irish resided in St. Anne's, any data based on the 1851 returns would be seriously distorted. This source could be used to full advantage only for 1861 and 1871 in a study which extended to the 1890's.

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1. D.S. Cross, "The Irish in Montreal, 1867-1896", unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill, 1969.