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Kia ora Lance

Official Information Act request: Historical Census records

Thank you for your Official Information Act request of 30 September 2021. You have asked about the availability of individual data obtained from historical censuses, particularly:

Does the law (Privacy act and any other relevant legislation) allow Stats NZ to publish individual census records after a certain period of time? Such as the Census from 1874 to 1916.

Does Stats NZ retain the individual household returns from these periods? If yes, how is this information held? (i.e. is it in paper form in boxes, is it scanned, but not transcribed, or is it fully transcribed in a usable database?) Under what circumstances is Statistics NZ allowed to make this data publicly accessible?

The population of New Zealand has been enumerated from 1858 to the present. Up to 1966, Stats NZ ensured that name-identified census data would remain absolutely confidential by routinely destroying returned individual census forms. Accordingly, returned individual forms from censuses between 1858 and 1966 no longer exist for the general population but some do survive for the Māori population.

After 1966, Stats NZ kept returned individual forms for every 10th year. This timeframe was chosen to reduce storage requirements for the paper forms. Stats NZ has retained individual forms for the 1966, 1976, and 1986 censuses, parts of the 2001 census, and every census from 2006 onwards. These are stored in a variety of media, however the hard copies were destroyed in the demolition of Statistics House following the Kaikoura earthquake. The Statistics Act 1976 requires that the forms be retained for 100 years before they are publicly released, so material will not start becoming available before 2066.

While access to the material prior to 2066 is unlikely to be granted for genealogical purposes, it may be possible to get access to it to conduct public good statistical research. The process for obtaining access to microdata is outlined at www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/apply-to-use-microdata-for-research/.

Since most returned census forms either no longer exist or are not publicly available, genealogical researchers use substitutes such as [immigration records](#), [almanacs and directories](#), [electoral rolls](#), [lists of property owners and occupants](#), [juror lists](#), [New Zealand Electoral Rolls](#), and [school records](#).

Details of the census records that are held by Stats NZ are provided below:

Individualised information from 1800s

The only document in our historic publications that contains person-level census-type information is [Fenton and Wilson's 1859 Observations on the state of the aboriginal inhabitants of New Zealand](#), which lists names of members of Māori tribes.

You may also be interested in tribal registers from the 1800s as these contain individual details of Māori, for example, [East Coast District Tribal Register Includes Index \(natlib.govt.nz\)](#). These are not held by Stats NZ but are available from Archives New Zealand (www.archives.govt.nz).

Compiled (non-individualised) information from 1800s and 1900s

There is compiled information available on the Stats NZ website from the [19th-century statistical publications](#) list, from the [Digitised 1878 Census](#) and results of the [1911 Census](#).

Published Census reports can be found in [Stats Store House](#), and include the [Census of Population and Dwellings 1871 - 1956](#). This is a selection of published reports, and includes:

- [Section XV - Māori Census](#) (part of the 1916 Census)
- [1921 Census](#) Appendices A – Māori Census
- [1936 Census](#)
- [1951 Census](#)
- [1956 Census](#)

The Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives 1 January 1878 - [Papers relating to the 1878 Census of the Māori population](#) - contain counts of Māori by tribe, hapū and residence.

I trust this information is useful to you.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

It is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. This letter, with your personal details removed, will be published on the Stats NZ website. Publishing responses creates greater openness and transparency of government decision-making, and helps better inform public understanding of the reasons for decisions.

Ngā mihi nui



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Stats NZ