

Special Projects

Historical Topographic Maps Digitization Project

The Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) Historical Topographic Map Digitization Project was a province-wide collaboration to inventory, digitize, georeference, and provide broad access to early topographic maps of Ontario. The collection provides open access to georeferenced topographic maps at the 1:25,000 and 1:63,360 (one inch to one mile) scales, covering towns, cities, and rural areas in Ontario over the period of 1906 to 1977. The project adds over 1000 maps to our collective digital holdings in the Scholars GeoPortal.

The project traces its beginnings back to 2011, when the idea for digitizing historic topographic maps had been identified as a strategic goal by the OCUL Map Group. A major impetus for the digitization of historical topographic maps came in 2012 when members of the group became aware that the Maps Depository Program run by Natural Resources Canada was ending. In response, an inventory of historic Canadian federal topographic map series was created to determine what was collectively held in Ontario Universities. A small digitization working group was also struck to begin moving the project forward, and this group continued preliminary work on the project throughout 2013. From the outset of the funded project in 2014, Ontario universities contributed their support by supplying and scanning maps, georeferencing the digital images, creating metadata for the records, and developing the online geographical display of the maps for the public to access.

Topographic maps at these scales are heavily used by researchers interested in examining changes over time, such as urban sprawl, transportation patterns, diminishing woodlots, or shoreline erosion.

For more information on this project or to browse the complete collection, please visit the [Project Website](#).

Maps are also available through an interactive online index display in the GeoPortal. To access the map indexes for different map scales, go directly to the Scholars GeoPortal:

- [1:63 360 Index Navigation](#)
- [1:25 000 Index Navigation](#)

D-Day, other WWII Military Maps

In commemoration of the 74th anniversary of the D-day landings, the OCUL Geo Community, Wilfrid Laurier University's Centre for Military, Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS), the University of Waterloo, and McMaster University, collaborated to release a historically significant collection of 87 military maps to the public. The project aimed to improve access to these maps by making them freely available online and offering visual exploration and download through the Scholars GeoPortal platform.

These 87 maps of various scales were originally part of a collection created by the Allied powers in advance of the D-Day landings on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944. The collection includes various materials such as defence overprints, tank "going" maps, and flooding overprints. It primarily concentrates on those areas of Western Europe that were the focus of Allied forces in the initial months following the D-Day landings.

The maps were acquired by the [Laurier Centre for Military, Strategic and Disarmament Studies \(LCMSDS\)](#) in 1991 from the Department of Defence, Canada, and were recently digitized and georeferenced at the [University of Waterloo Geospatial Centre](#). Sheet-level description was done with help from the University of Waterloo Geospatial Centre, [McMaster University's Lloyd Reeds Map Collection](#), as well as the expertise of many others in the OCUL Geo Community. Digital scans of these maps, along with other historical military maps are available from the [McMaster University Library](#).

The digital collection can be accessed through the [Scholars GeoPortal](#) by clicking on the **Military and Intelligence** subject category, or by searching for "[S econd World War](#)."

Historical Census Boundary Files

Overview

The Census of Canada program provides a statistical portrait of the country every five years. The last census was conducted in May 2016 and consisted of the Census of Agriculture and the Census of Population. There have been mandated national Censuses dating back to 1871, with some earlier censuses recorded regionally.

Today, census boundaries are produced by Statistics Canada to enable the enumeration and dissemination of data, for the Census of Canada. Over the years, boundaries have changed significantly, often redrawn based on population and other methodological changes to the census over time. The use of census boundaries by researchers today varies and the research applications can be diverse, however most geographic research and mapping of census data requires accurate, reliable, and stable census boundaries (polygons) for analysis purposes. Researchers often require geospatial (GIS) boundaries in order map census data geographically.

Before the advent of modern GIS, boundaries were drawn and produced in paper format. With GIS, boundaries are produced, updated, and maintained digitally, and paper maps are only distributed today for research and reference purposes. Many libraries have census boundary map collections for use by library patrons, mostly for the purposes of personal and academic research. There are two types of digital spatial boundary files that are produced for newer censuses (1971-today): cartographic and digital. Cartographic boundary files portray the geographic areas using only the major land mass of Canada and its coastal islands. Digital boundary files portray the full extent of the geographic areas, including the coastal water area. There are French and English boundary files from 1996 to 2011. These represent the same geographies, but have language specific fields in the attribute tables.

Access to these boundary files in digital GIS-ready format (including shape file format) is incomplete across Canada, with little to no access online for older censuses. The coverage of the census boundaries available or produced varies significantly from Census to Census. In some cases, efforts to improve access to accurate digital geospatial boundaries for early censuses has produced rich data and results for reuse by others. The Canadian Century Research Infrastructure project (CCRI), which handled the digitization of [census boundaries for 1911 - 1951](#), is a great example of a historical GIS initiative to improve access to data in Canada.

Other census boundary digitization projects have occurred in university libraries as a result of the demands for them by researchers. Often libraries have contributed to the digitization of historical census boundaries including the University of Toronto, Map and Data Library, the University of British Columbia, University of Alberta, University of Waterloo, Queen's University, and Western University.

The purpose of this project is to begin a collaboration around gathering and digitizing these historical census collections within Canada, to identify gaps and areas where further data migration and boundary digitization is required. In addition, there is a need to improve access to these collections online, to provide quality digital data and boundaries for use in GIS research openly across Canada and beyond.

[Inventory](#) (PDF) (compiled and has been reconfigured under the [Census of Canada Discovery Partnership](#))