

The Printed Word 1752 - 1900: Canada, a Literate Nation

Canada at the dawn of the 20th century was a literate nation. Practically every town had a newspaper and an editor who freely expressed his political opinions. Secular and religious libraries, private and public, offered information and recreation in both urban and rural settings in this era before broadcasting made learning a more passive experience.

To start this Maptour, navigate to the chapter page for: *The Printed Word 1752 - 1900*
Browse > National Perspectives - Society > The Printed Word 1752 - 1900

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Historical Atlas of Canada Online Learning Project' website. The page title is 'The Printed Word, 1752-1900'. The navigation bar includes links for 'Home', 'About this project', 'Sponsors', 'Educator's corner', and 'Contact'. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Overview:** A paragraph describing Canada as a literate nation at the dawn of the 20th century, mentioning newspapers and libraries.
- Interactive Maps:** A list of interactive maps with a 'Take a map tour' link. The maps include:
 - Regional Spread of Newspapers, 1752-1900
 - Public Libraries, 1779-1895
 - Newspapers, 1898
 - Newspapers by County, 1891
- Notes:** A list of links for 'Overview of', 'Authors and Sources of', 'Text from the printed Atlas of', and 'Essay from the printed Atlas of'.
- More Resources:** A list of links for 'Related resources on this site of' and 'Links to other sites of'.
- Graphs:** A list of links for 'Montreal Collective Libraries, 1655-1900 of', 'Major Libraries, 1891 of', and 'Numbers of newspapers Published, 1812-1891 of'.

The page also features a map of Canada with a legend for 'Newspapers by County', 'Regional Spread of Newspapers', 'Newspapers by Location', and 'Public Libraries'. A timeline at the bottom of the map shows the years 1700 AD and 2000 AD.

Spreading the Word!



Try This:

- Open the interactive map “Regional spread of newspapers 1752-1900.”



Notice ...

- The United States was very influential in the establishment of Canadian newspapers.



Try This:

- Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn off "Spread of Newspapers" checkbox.
- Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn on the checkboxes for "Newspapers 1752-1806," "Newspapers 1807-1857," and "Newspapers 1858-1900," each in turn, and watch the process unfold on your screen.



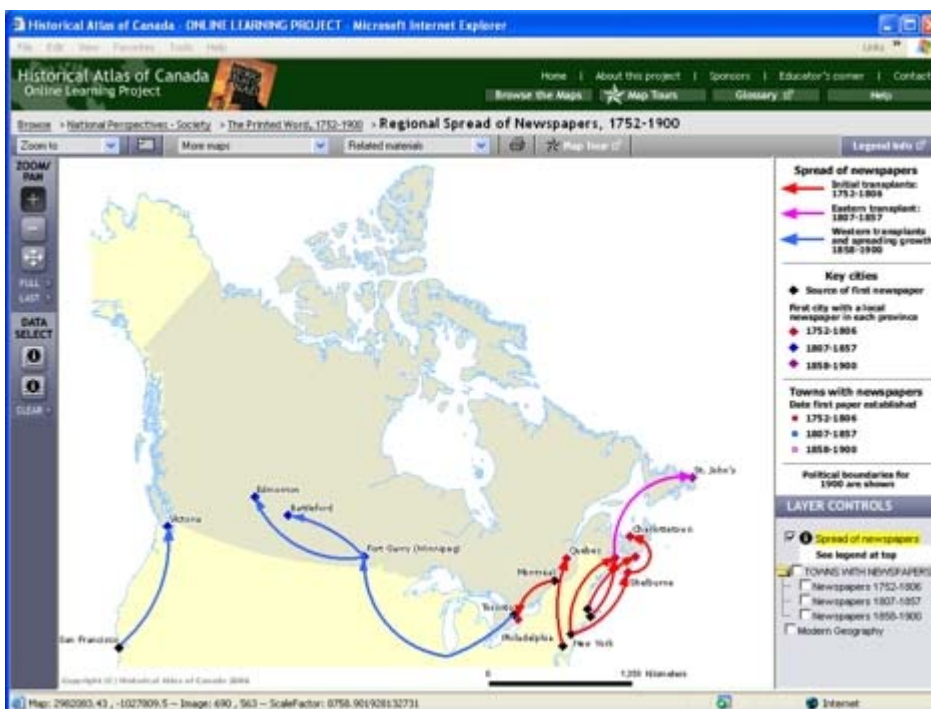
Notice ...

- Ontario established itself as a hotbed of newspaper publishing in the later Victorian era.



Consider!

- Literacy must have been a factor in the intense presence of newspapers in some regions more than in others.
- At another time, take a look at the related chapter, “The Quest for Universal Schooling.”



The Weekly



Try This:

- Keep open the interactive map "Regional spread of newspapers 1752-1900."
- Click on the "Related Materials" drop-down menu and select Graphs - "Number of Newspapers."



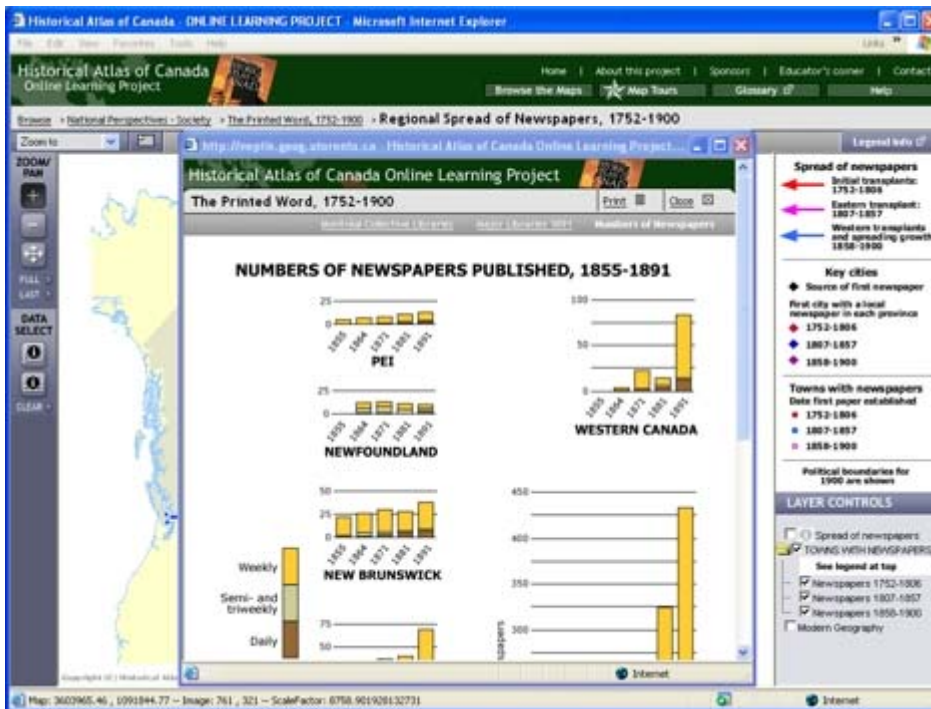
Notice ...

- In the 19th century practically all Canadian newspapers were published once a week.
- Between the 1850s and the 1890s the number of newspapers published in Canada tripled in all regions except Newfoundland and New Brunswick.
- These graphs offer no clues regarding newspaper circulation.



Consider!

- Instantaneous awareness of events worldwide, which is the news reporting capability of the 21st century, was completely beyond the comprehension (and perhaps concern) of newspaper readers in 19th-century Canada.



Literate Canadians



Try This:

- Open the interactive map "Public Libraries, 1779-1891."
- Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn on the checkbox for "Collective Libraries 1779-1830."



Notice ...

- The term "Collective Library" is not defined in the legend box.



Try This:

- Click on the "Related Materials" drop-down menu and select *Notes* - "Text from the Atlas."
- Scroll to the heading "Public Libraries" and read about collective libraries.
- Close the *Notes* pop-up box and return to the map.
- Click on the "Zoom to" drop-down menu and select "Southern Ontario."



Notice ...

- Libraries before 1820 were strictly urban features.
- This map offers no clue as to the language of the library holdings.
- Canada's earliest libraries were private, not public, institutions.



Consider!

- General reading in the early 19th century bears the earmarks of an elitist activity, restricted to those people with disposable income.

Historical Atlas of Canada Online Learning Project

The Printed Word, 1752-1900

Text from the printed Atlas

In 18th-century British North America the tasks of daily survival were all-consuming, leaving little time for cultural pursuits. The wretched of the land and the insupportable terrain were formidable impediments to the movement of people, goods, and ideas, and travel was slow. Before 1850 a newspaper sent by steamship from London (England) might reach London (Ontario) in six weeks. But what could it tell its readers about Canada? In the 1750s Halifax brought the country into the information age with the establishment of the first press, the first indigenous newspaper, the first published advertisement, the first post office, and the first bookstore. While ship, canoe, and stagecoach could move newspapers and books between the colonies, rapid duplication of the Halifax experience throughout British North America showed there was no substitute for a local press, a local bookstore, and a reading room or library.

Early colonial newspapers benefited financially but suffered intellectually from their dependence on government or religious patronage. Invariably the most independent newspapers were those based in major urban centres, where there was a large market. As the century advanced, published political and economic opinion became more sophisticated as the relationships between advertising and circulation strengthened. But the partisan preoccupations of 18th-century continued. Printer, publisher, editor, and owner were often united in one person, serving Canadians the printed fare they most loved, the range of contentious debate.

Methodist Book Room

The largest and most powerful publishing operation in Canada in the 19th century was the Methodist Book Room in Toronto, originally established in 1809 to produce a church newspaper, the influential *Christian Guardian*. Separated from the newspaper in 1843, the Book Room broadened its publishing list to include a more eclectic mix of text and trade books. After 1879 its new director, William Briggs, nurtured a stable of well-respected Canadian authors and began an agency to serve several prominent British and American publishers. Among those apprenticed in the Book Room were Thomas Allen, John McClelland, and George Stewart, who would later go on to create their own publishing companies.

Reading in Montréal



Try This:

- Click on the "Related Materials" drop-down menu and select *Graph* - "Montréal Collective Libraries."



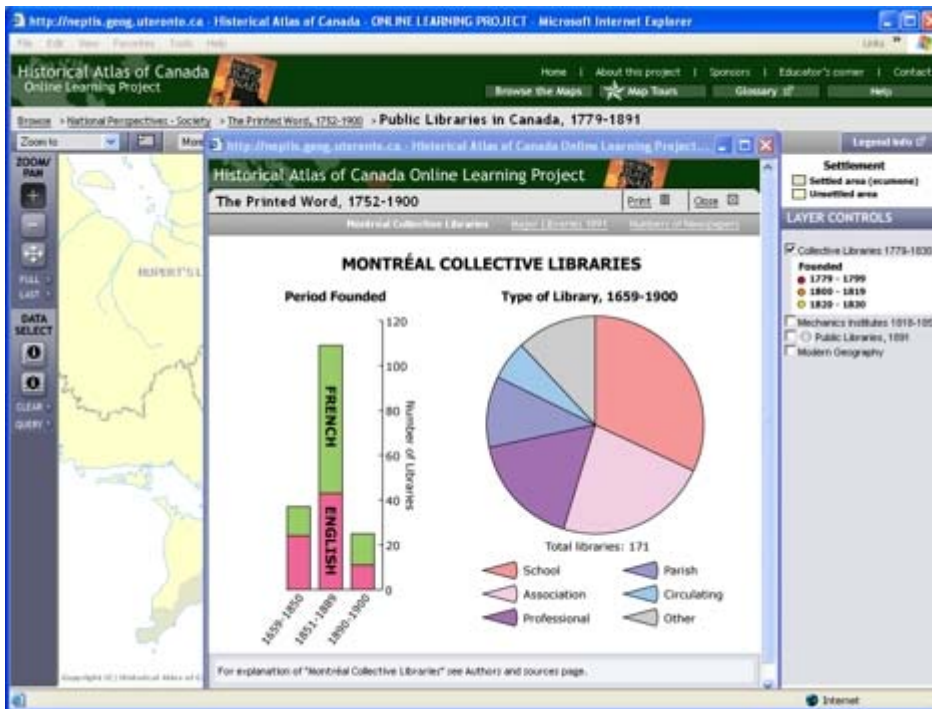
Notice ...

- In Montréal, all libraries before 1900 were classified as being either English or French; none were considered bilingual.
- Up until 1850, English-language libraries in Montréal outnumbered French-language ones.
- Only ten of 171 Montréal libraries up to 1900 explicitly offered borrowing ("circulating") privileges.



Consider!

- Probably few Canadians before 1900 were capable of reading both French and English.
- The concept of "borrowing a book from the library" was virtually unknown in Montréal before 1900.



The Mechanical Arts



Try This:

- Keep open the map "Public Libraries, 1779-1891."
- Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn on the checkbox for "Mechanics' Institutes 1828-1852."



Notice ...

- The term "Mechanics' Institute" is not defined in the legend box.



Try This:

- Click on the "Related Materials" drop-down menu and select *Notes* - "Text from the Atlas."
- Scroll to the heading "Public Libraries" and read about Mechanics' Institutes.
- Close the *Notes* pop-up box and return to the map.



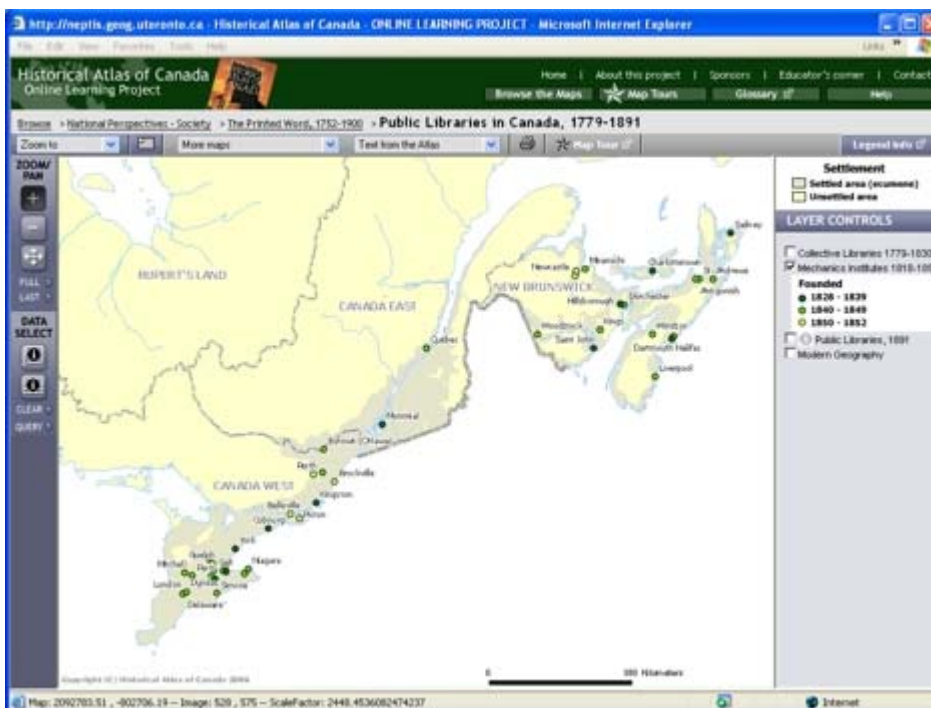
Notice ...

- The extent of the settled area without libraries in Québec ("Canada East") demonstrates that the development of libraries there lagged far behind that of Ontario ("Canada West").



Consider!

- The tradition of spoken communication may be stronger among French-speaking Canadians; written communication may be stronger among English-speaking Canadians.
- The sequence of "Collective Libraries 1779-1830," "Mechanics' Institutes 1828-1852," and "Public Libraries 1891" demonstrates the continuing quest among Canadians for enhanced communication and record-keeping.



The Political Press



Try This:

- Open the interactive map "Newspapers, 1891"
- Click on the "Zoom to" drop-down menu and select "Southern Ontario."



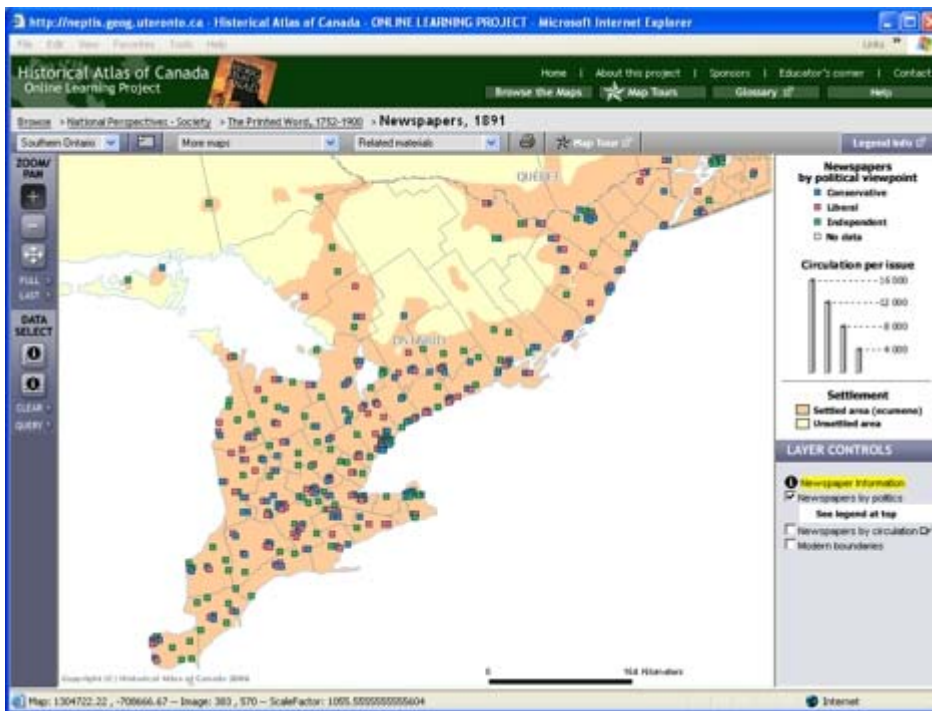
Notice ...

- A large proportion of Ontario newspapers were voices not tied to the two main political parties.



Consider!

- Newspaper editors were influential members of Ontario communities.



Newspaper Details



Try This:

- Keep open the map “Newspapers, 1891.”
- On the **DATA SELECT** toolbar, click on the **Identify** tool and then click on any isolated square symbol on the map.



Notice ...

- A pop-up box opens, giving the name of the newspaper published in that town in 1891.



Try This:

- Now, click on the **Table** tool and then drag a rectangle around a cluster of squares on the map to select them.



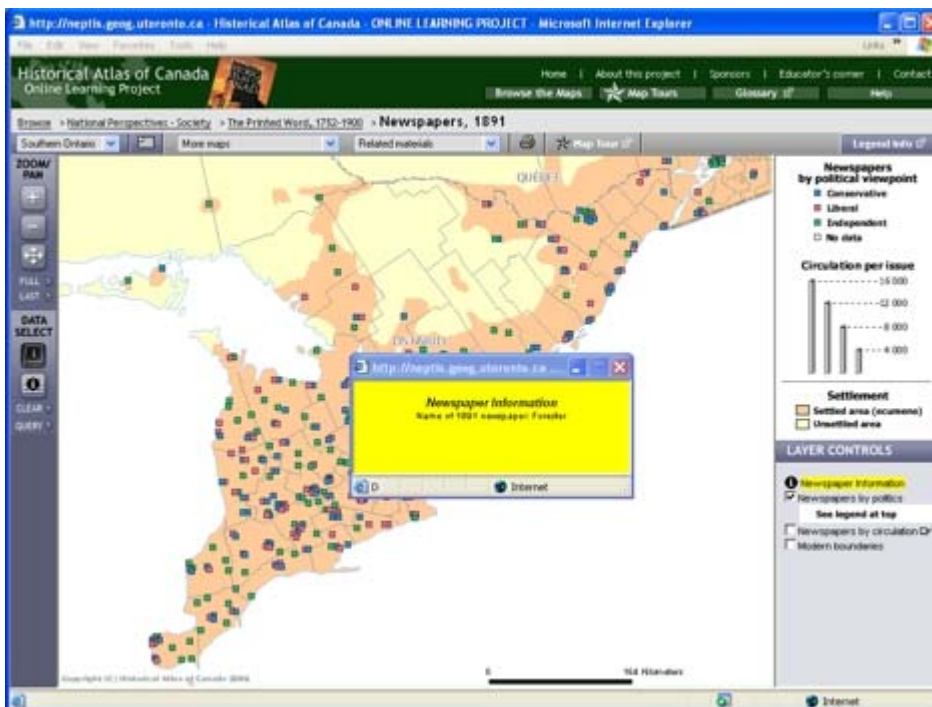
Notice ...

- A table box opens, giving details of the newspapers published in the selected (and named) towns.



Consider!

- Circulation seems tiny by standards of the 21st century.
- Many opportunities exist for analysing the press in the Victorian era.



Questioning the Press



Try This:

- Keep open the map "Newspapers, 1891"
- Under LAYER CONTROLS, turn on the checkbox for "Newspapers by circulation."



Notice ...

- The square symbols change to vertical bars, scaled according to circulation per issue. As one might expect, the highest circulation papers are in urban areas.



Try This:

- Click on the "Legend Info" button at the top of the Legend area. In the pop-up box, scroll down to "Legend Description" for more details about the symbols.
- Close the Legend Info pop-up box to return to the map.
- On the DATA SELECT toolbar, click on the Query button to open the Query box.
- For this exercise, accept the default entries "Conservative" and "Daily" and Submit Query.



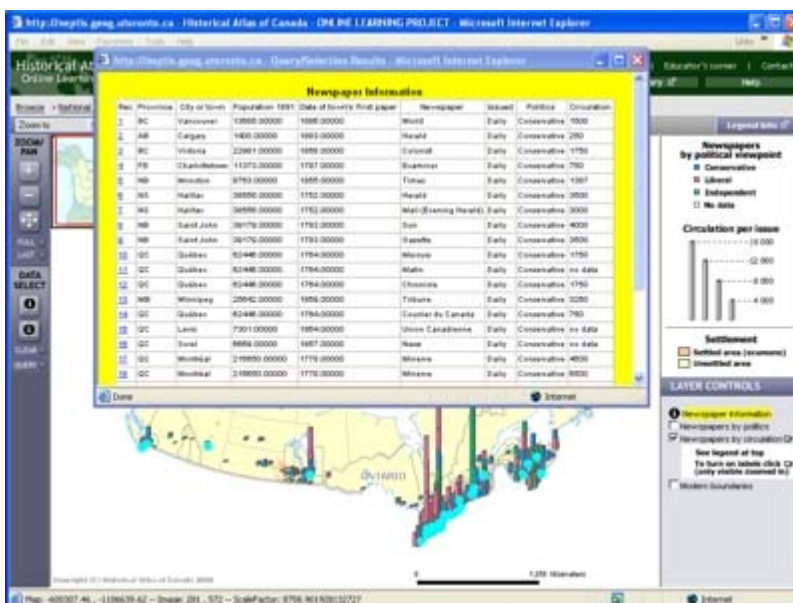
Notice ...

- A table box opens, listing 25 Conservative daily newspapers published in Canada in 1891. (Click on "More Records" to get the full list of 37.)
- Highlighted dots on the map identify the locations of the selected newspapers.
- Québec has far fewer Conservative newspapers, and smaller circulation, than does Ontario, in 1891.



Consider!

- Extensive detail is available about Canadian newspapers in 1891.
- Québec and Ontario politics are quite polarized, if newspapers are the measure.



Literacy in Canada



Try This:

- Open the interactive map “Newspapers by County, 1891.”
- Minimize your browser window, and resize it so it fits a quarter of your screen.
- On the ZOOM/PAN toolbar, click on the Zoom in button and use it on the map to zoom in to southern Ontario, Québec and the Maritimes.
- Open a new browser window, and then open the map “Public Libraries, 1779-1891.”
- Repeat the steps, above, for the Public Libraries map. Compare the two maps side by side.



Notice ...

- Montréal and Toronto were major centres of independent political thought in Victorian Canada.
- Québec (province) newspapers beyond Montréal reflected traditional two-party politics.
- Virtually everyone within Canada’s settled area in 1891 had access to a newspaper.
- There is a strong visual correspondence between the presence of newspapers and of public libraries.



Consider!

- Freedom of the press flourished in Victorian Canada.
- One can imagine that it was common practice to read the newspaper at the public library.

These are just a few of the questions that these maps and data can address. If you have ideas for other questions, please use our Feedback page to send them in, and they may be posted on the website in the future.

