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

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.
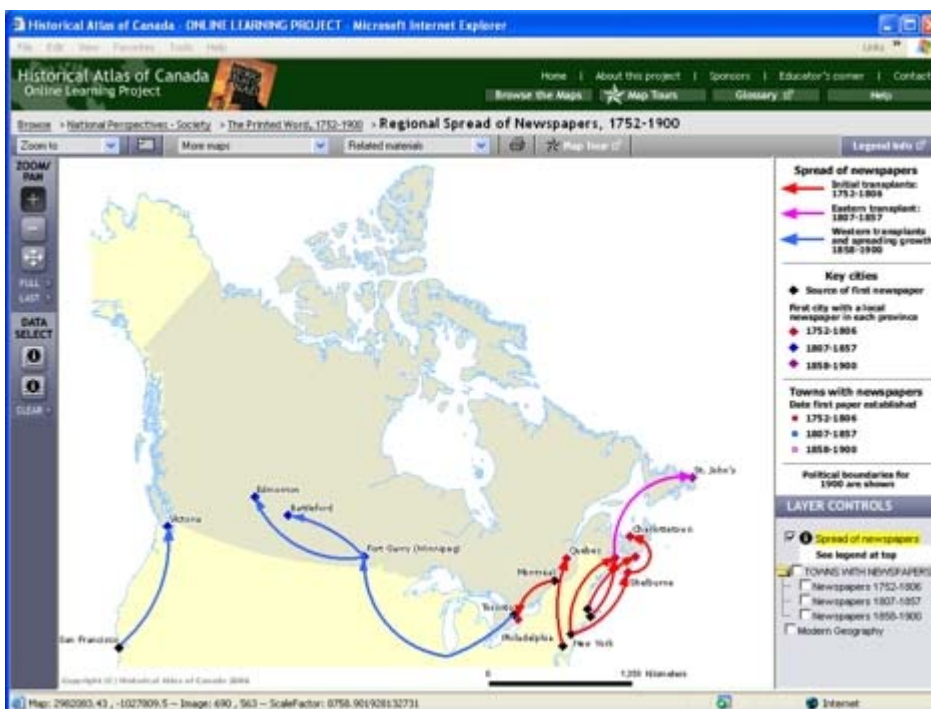

👁 **Notice ...**

- 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."
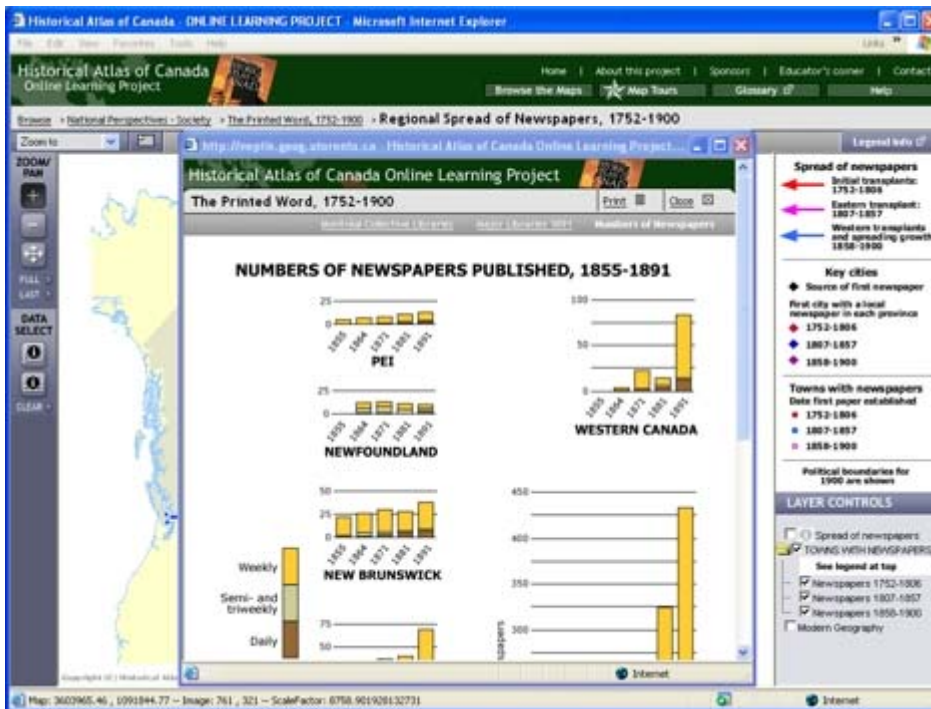

👁 **Notice ...**

- 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.

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.
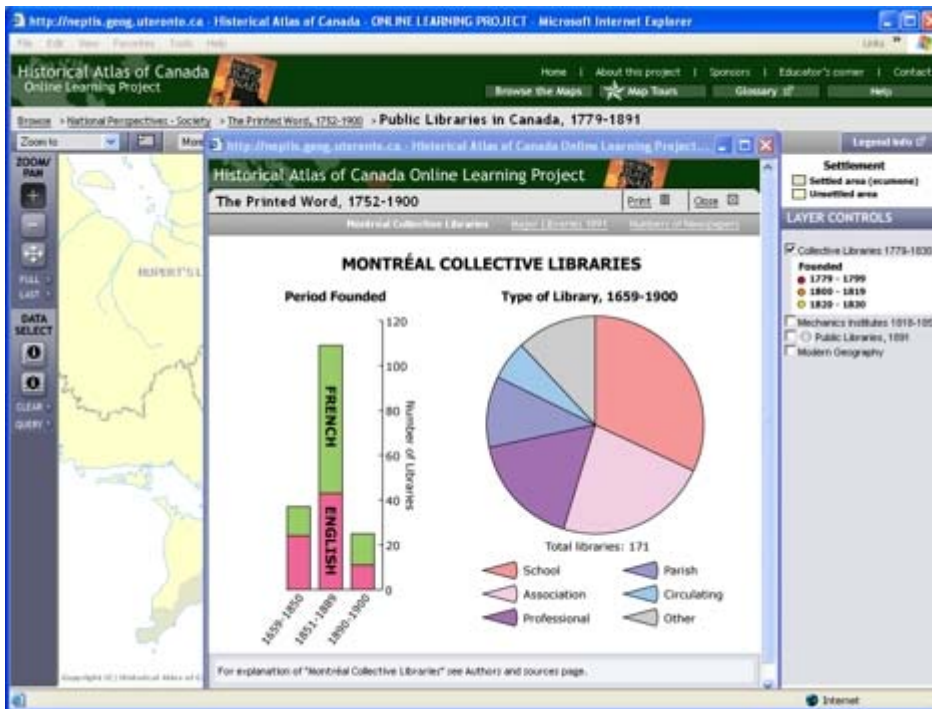
The Mechanical Arts

🖐 **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.
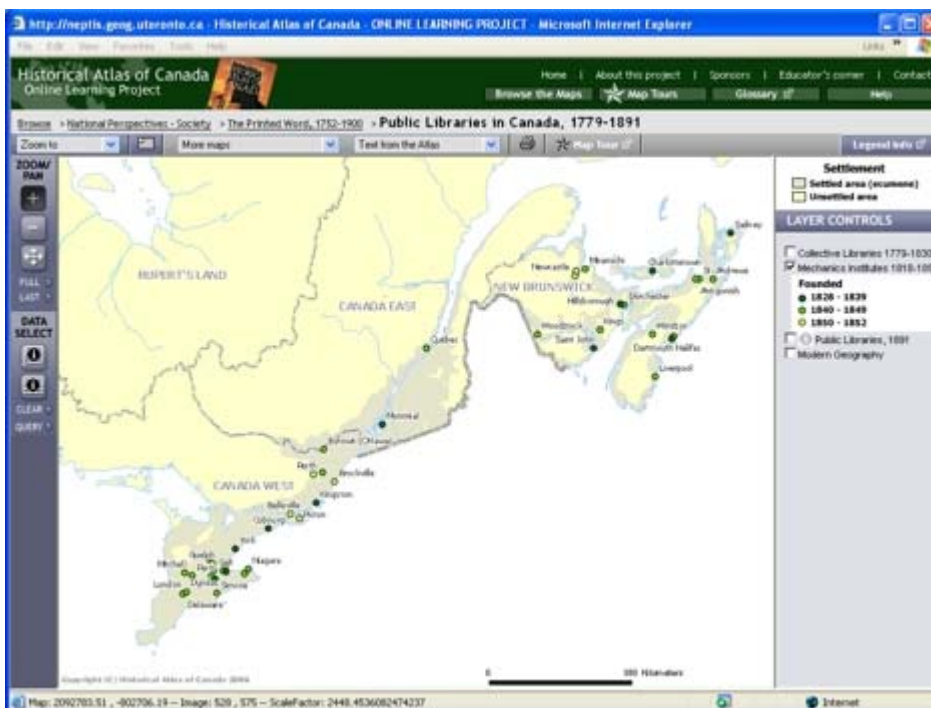
The Political Press

✋ **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.
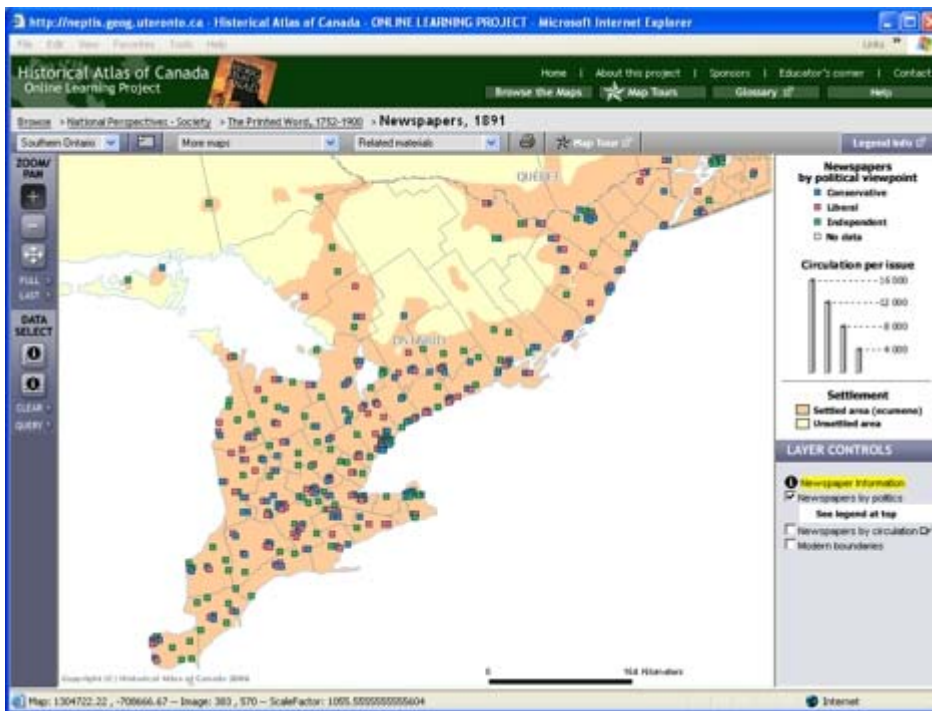
Newspaper Details

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

![hand] **Try This:**

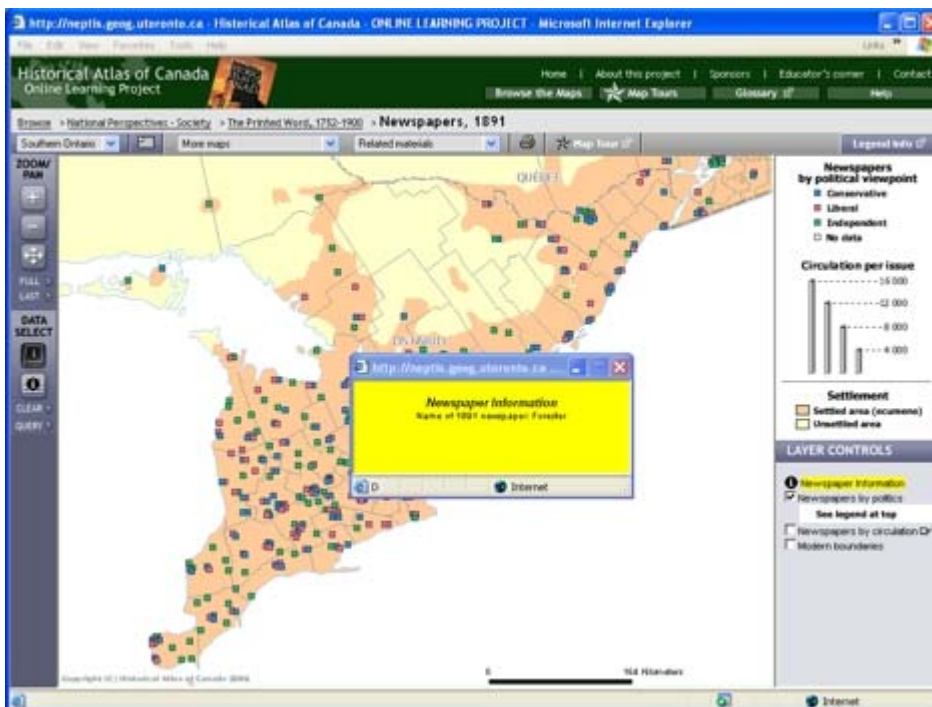- **Keep open** the map "Newspapers, 1891"
- Under LAYER CONTROLS, **turn on** the checkbox for "Newspapers by circulation."

![eye] **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.

![hand] **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.**

![eye] **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.

![lightbulb] **Consider!**

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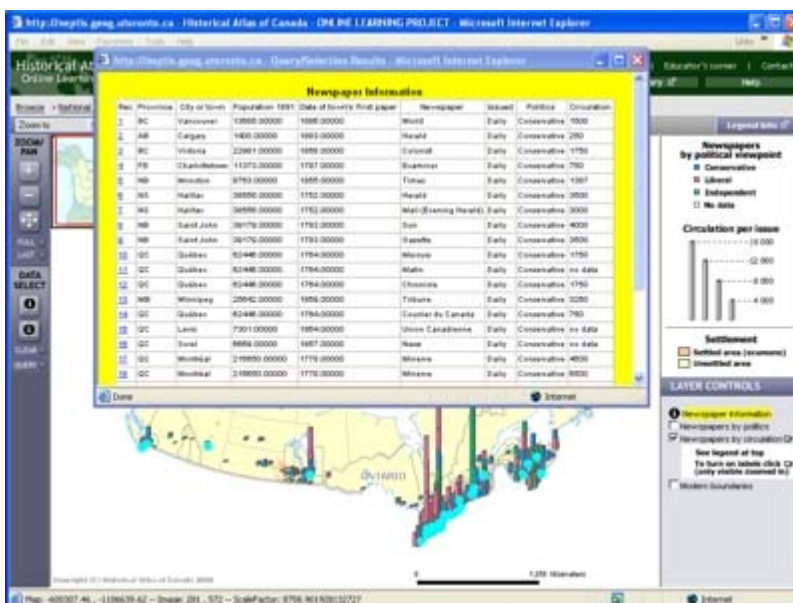
Literacy in Canada

✋ **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.