

# Upper Canadians and Their Guns

## An exploration via country store accounts (1808-61)

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Résumé de l'article

L'arme à feu est une des composantes essentielles de l'image que l'on se fait du pionnier et de l'aspect « viril » de la vie des pionniers. On se représente cette famille de pionniers au milieu des forêts, les hommes et les garçons utilisant des fusils pour se protéger des prédateurs, pour s'amuser aussi, pour chasser surtout, les produits de la chasse étant nécessaires pour compenser une production agricole et fermière encore limitée au début des établissements. Cependant, si l'on en croit les documents que nous avons consultés sur les milices du Haut-Canada, ou ceux qui ont trait à la rébellion de 1837, il semble au contraire que beaucoup de Canadiens vivant en milieu rural n'avaient qu'une expérience limitée de l'usage des armes à feu, ou même n'avaient pas en leur possession d'armes utilisables.

Ayant à l'esprit ces images contradictoires de la vie pionnière, nous avons étudié les livres de comptes de plusieurs magasins généraux des comtés de Leed et de Peterborough, et plus particulièrement les comptes de gens dits « ordinaires », fermiers ou artisans, y cherchant les mentions d'achats reliés aux armes à feu et à leur utilisation. D'après les fréquences et montants d'achats, il semble que, après les premières années, ce soit en fait la seconde représentation de la vie pionnière, celle qui émane de l'étude des documents des milices, qui prévaut. Pour beaucoup, peut-être la plupart des habitants des campagnes du Haut-Canada, se servir d'une arme à feu était un fait exceptionnel qui ne faisait pas partie de la routine quotidienne en milieu rural. Parmi les raisons : le manque de temps.

# Upper Canadians and Their Guns: an exploration via country store accounts (1808-61)<sup>1</sup>

by Douglas McCalla

*Amid his comrades who his labours shared;  
Snow-shoes and guns they vigorously prepared;  
Elate that rugged Winter brought again  
The stirring pastimes of the rural train  
The keen pursuit, the rifle's deadly crack,  
The barbecue and forest bivouac.<sup>2</sup>*

Guns are essential to our images of pioneering. We can readily imagine the young man pictured in William Kirby's 1859 poem, quoted here, shooting for sport and enjoyment. In other sources from the period, adult men working in the woods and fields are often depicted with a gun

at hand as protection against danger, for example from the wolves and bears that appear so frequently in narratives of pioneering. Through necessity and practice, men learned to fire quickly and accurately, bringing down large animals at considerable distances with a single shot.<sup>3</sup> Shooting animals whose “dep-

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Economic History Workshop Day, Department of Economics, Queen's University, 16 April 2004; I am grateful for questions, advice, and encouragement from participants. This work is part of the program of a Killam Research Fellowship, awarded by the Canada Council, and draws on research funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canada Research Chair program. It is a pleasure to thank Laura Zink and Annette Fox, who gathered the accounts data, and Erin Stewart, Jeralyne Manweiler, and Beth Yarzab for their excellent work as research assistants; Rae Fleming for wise editorial advice; Zailig Pollock for ideas about the paper and the opportunity to present a preliminary version on Humanities Research Day at Trent University; and Catharine Wilson and Marvin McInnis for their encouragement and advice, not just on this paper. I am, of course, responsible for errors and omissions.

<sup>2</sup> William Kirby, *The U.E.: A Tale of Upper Canada* (Niagara, 1859 [Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions (CIHM) 36153]), 108. This and a number of other references were located thanks to the wonders of the Early Canadiana Online database.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., John Galt, *The Canadas, as they at present commend themselves...* (London, 1832 [CIHM 34101]), 235; and Joseph Hilts, *Among the Forest Trees or How the Bushman Family Got Their Homes* (Toronto, 1888 [CIHM 05620]), 18, 27, 202.

## Abstract

The gun is an essential part of our images of pioneering and pioneer manliness. We picture the pioneer family surrounded by forest, its men and boys using guns for protection from threatening predators, for sport, and for hunting, as the family relied on an abundance of game to supplement its initially limited farm produce. On the other hand, descriptions of Upper Canadian militia musters and of the 1837 Rebellion suggest that many rural Upper Canadians had only limited experience in using guns or did not have usable firearms at all.

Framed by these contrasting images, this paper seeks to read a sample of country store charge accounts of some ordinary Upper Canadian farmers and artisans (in Leeds and Peterborough counties) for indications of gun use. Based on the frequency and scale of purchases of gunpowder and shot, it seems that after the earliest years, the militia-based image is the more likely one. For many, perhaps most, rural Upper Canadians, firing a gun was an occasional more than a routine part of rural life. Among the reasons: a lack of time.

**Résumé:** L'arme à feu est une des composantes essentielles de l'image que l'on se fait du pionnier et de l'aspect 'viril' de la vie pionniers. On se représente cette famille de pionniers au milieu des forêts, les hommes et les garçons utilisant des fusils pour se protéger des prédateurs, pour s'amuser aussi, pour chasser surtout, les produits de la chasse étant nécessaires pour compenser une production agricole et fermière encore limitée au début des établissements. Cependant, si l'on en croit les documents que nous avons consultés sur les milices du Haut-Canada, ou ceux qui ont trait à la rébellion de 1837, il semble au contraire que beaucoup de Canadiens vivant en milieu rural n'avaient qu'une expérience limitée de l'usage des armes à feu, ou même n'avaient pas en leur possession d'armes utilisables.

Ayant à l'esprit ces images contradictoires de la vie pionnière, nous avons étudié les livres de comptes de plusieurs magasins généraux des comtés de Leed et de Peterborough, et plus particulièrement les comptes de gens dits 'ordinaires', fermiers ou artisans, y cherchant les mentions d'achats reliés aux armes à feu et à leur utilisation. D'après les fréquences et montants d'achats, il semble que, après les premières années, ce soit en fait la seconde représentation de la vie pionnière, celle qui émane de l'étude des documents des milices, qui prévaut. Pour beaucoup, peut-être la plupart des habitants des campagnes du Haut-Canada, se servir d'une arme à feu était un fait exceptionnel qui ne faisait pas partie de la routine quotidienne en milieu rural. Parmi les raisons : le manque de temps.

redations” threatened crops or people – bears, raccoons, squirrels, crows, blue jays, and woodpeckers – could itself

also integral to the vision of the past held by many modern Canadian advocates of hunting and of gun culture, such as

be a sport, providing, in the words of Catharine Parr Traill, a “merry and joyous holiday.”<sup>4</sup> And, as Richard Bonnycastle noted, “the universal rifle or fowling-piece” enabled a man to take advantage of the abundance of game to put food on the family’s table.<sup>5</sup> Guns and hunting are thus closely associated with other values we attach to the settlement frontier, self-reliance, close family ties, and a direct (if rather adversarial) relationship with nature.<sup>6</sup> The gun was a man’s way of protecting and feeding his family. And training his sons to hunt and shoot was an important rite, transmitting essential knowledge (both values and skills) to the next generation. Such historical images and ideas are

<sup>4</sup> See *The Canadian Settlers' Guide*, 10th ed. (London, 1860 [CIHM 22860]), 186. For the threat of bears, see her *Ajar in the Forest; or Pictures of Life and Scenery in the Wilds of Canada* (London, 1869 [CIHM 37483]), 147-9.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Richard Henry Bonnycastle, *Canada and the Canadians*, new ed., vol. 1 (London, 1849 [CIHM 32649]), 68. For game, fowl, and fish as food, see e.g. Catharine Parr Traill, *The Canadian Settler's Guide* (Toronto, 1855 [CIHM 37099]), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Note, e.g., the centrality of the gun and hearth in “Scenes from the ‘New England Kitchen’” *Harper's Illustrated Weekly*, 15 July 1876, reproduced in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 28. On the other hand, there are contemporary images of Canadian hearths without visible guns in, e.g., Jean-Pierre Hardy, *La vie quotidienne dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent (1790-1835)* (Sillery: Septentrion, 2001), 25, 31, 58,

the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, which has represented itself as defending “traditionally rural pastimes,” and the National Firearms Association, which situates itself in relation to “Canada’s proud history of firearms ownership...”<sup>7</sup>

Another literature on the settlement era, derived from political and military history, offers a different sense of guns in pioneer society. For example, many of the men from the countryside north of Toronto who assembled to support William Lyon Mackenzie’s attempt to overthrow the government of Upper Canada did not bring guns.<sup>8</sup> Critics of the colonial militia focused often on training, discipline, and organization, and sometimes on loyalty; they also make it clear that despite the requirements of the Militia Act, not all the men who appeared at annual musters or other militia call-outs had guns; that some had guns that were too old or poorly maintained to be of use; and that some had limited familiarity with firearms. Later mythol-

ogy stressed the importance of the militia of Upper Canada during the War of 1812, but it was British regular soldiers, native warriors, and specially trained local volunteer companies that were the core of the province’s defence; and the guns they used were imported, supplied, and maintained by the army.<sup>9</sup>

Such contrasting, possibly contradictory, images of the place of guns in colonial society prompt this paper, which uses selected country store charge accounts to investigate the extent of gun usage by some ordinary Upper Canadians. Based on this evidence, there was a heritage of firearms in rural society from pioneer days, but it was not universal and it was markedly diminishing at mid-century.

I have discussed the creation of the dataset used here, which records the purchases of sample customers at some Upper Canadian country stores, in previous work and offer only a brief summary here.<sup>10</sup> Store accounts document aspects of the everyday lives of people who left

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81 (and colour reproductions of three of these between 96-7); and Peter A. Baskerville, *Ontario: Image, Identity, and Power* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81, 82, and (facing) 90.

<sup>7</sup> Quotes from <http://www.ofah.org/About.cfm?Section=History> and <http://www.nfa.ca>, both accessed 13 November 2004.

<sup>8</sup> *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada: A Collection of Documents*, Colin Read and Ronald Stagg, eds. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1985), xlii-xliv, 115-16, 121. For the 1837 rising in Lower Canada, see Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 301, 303-4, 307-8, 327; and John Dickinson and Brian Young, *A Short History of Quebec*, 3rd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 166.

<sup>9</sup> See Carl Benn, *The Iroquois in the War of 1812* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 68-75; J. L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging the War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 3-23; and George F.G. Stanley, *Canada’s Soldiers 1604-1954: The Military History of an Unmilitary People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1954), 148-9, 179, 209-10.

<sup>10</sup> A summary of the approach can be found in my “Textile Purchases by Some Ordinary Upper Canadians, 1808-1861”, *Material History Review*, 53 (spring-summer 2001), 4-27. A comprehensive review of data sets has produced some very minor changes in detail from the numbers reported there

Table 1

## The Samples

	Yonge Mills	Yonge Mills	Tett	Choate	Choate
year	1808-09	1828-29	1842	1851	1861
abbreviation	<b>YM08</b>	<b>YM28</b>	<b>T42</b>	<b>C51</b>	<b>C61</b>
proprietor	Charles Jones	same	Benjamin Tett	Thomas Choate	same
location	Yonge Mills		Newboro	Warsaw	
townships	Front of Yonge		South Crosby	Dummer	
			North Crosby	Douro	
county	Leeds		Leeds	Peterborough	
waterway	near St. Lawrence		Rideau Canal	Indian River	
Customers	201	218	456	235	344
linked	139	143	178	157	226
linked %	69%	66%	39%	67%	66%
<b>sample households</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>70</b>
farm	29	36	30	33	40
other	18	14	28	19	30
unlinked	23	27	56	23	0
total sales to sample	\$2,436	\$899	\$1,716	\$944	\$1,394

## Notes

For Yonge Mills and some Tett customers, farmers are defined as those having five or more acres in cultivation.

Unlinked (included in all but three samples) include some not linked because of duplication of names; for Choate 1861, duplicates are both farmers.

Members of one household are combined in the samples.

All sales for twelve-month periods except Choate 1851 data lacking for July sales and Fowlds 1861 data lacking for January sales.

Except for Choate, Fowlds, and Sherin in 1861, all values converted from Halifax currency (\$1.00 = 5/-).

## Sources

Archives of Ontario, Charles Jones Fonds F180, Yonge Mills Records, Daybook No. 3, 1808-9, MU 3165; Daybooks 1828, 1828-9, MU 3171-2.

Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Tett Papers (#2247), vols. 27-8, Daybooks, 1841-2, 1842-4;

few written records of their own and can be read alongside such other sources of information on colonial life as the descriptions by outsiders that have tended to be our main source of information. The latter – which include travelers' accounts, guides and other writings by relatively highly placed figures in colonial society, and later tributes to the pioneers – are important, but often they prove to say more about the conventions of

their genre and the preconceptions of their authors than about the world they purport to describe.

My data come from accounts at seven stores in two counties in the eastern half of the province, Peterborough and Leeds. All the stores were in communities located on rivers or lakes, in areas with substantial forests (and active lumbering) long after the mid-nineteenth century. The Yonge Mills and Darling

and in my earlier publications for Yonge Mills in 1808.

Table 1

(continued)

	Fowlds 1854	Fowlds 1861	Sherin 1861	Scovil 1861	Darling 1861
year	1854	1861	1861	1861	1861
abbreviation	<b>F54</b>	<b>F61</b>	<b>Sh61</b>	<b>Sc61</b>	<b>D61</b>
proprietor	Henry Fowlds	same	John Sherin	S.S. Scovil	Thos Darling
location	Hastings		Lakefield	Portland	Darlingside
townships	Asphodel Percy		Douro Smith	Bastard	Fronts of Escott & Leeds & Lansdowne
county	Peterborough, Northumberland		Peterborough	Leeds	Leeds
waterway	Rice Lake, Trent River		Otonabee River	Rideau Canal	St. Lawrence
Customers	361	714	206	491	166
linked	187	424	138	351	124
linked %	52%	59%	67%	71%	75%
<b>sample households</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>56</b>
farm	30	28	24	44	27
other	34	45	35	36	19
unlinked	4	0	0	22	10
total sales to sample	\$3,328	\$2,852	\$2,258	\$1,873	\$1,856

Darling Family Papers (#2303.28), Daybooks, vols 4-5, 1857-61, 1861-4;

Scovil General Store Accounts (A.Arch 2217), series I, vols 21-2, Daybooks, 1861-2.

Trent University Archives, Peterborough, Choate Family Papers, B-77-026/1, Daybooks 1-3, 1850-52, 1861;

Sherin Papers, B-71-002, Daybooks 1-2, 1860-62;

Fowlds Papers, B-72-001, Accounts, vol. 3, Ledger, 1853-5; vol. 6, Daybook, 1861.

Linkage is to manuscript census of same year, except as follows.

Yonge Mills to 1808 and 1809, 1828 and 1829 assessments and list of households for Elizabethtown and Yonge (AO Ms 262).

Tett: manuscripts unavailable for adjacent Frontenac County. Census for 1842 lists household heads only.

Fowlds 1854 linked to 1851 manuscript census.

stores were in the countryside, near or on the St Lawrence River; Tett's and Scovil's were on the Rideau Canal system, at Newboro and Portland respectively; Fowlds' and Sherin's were on the Trent River system, at Hastings and Lakefield respectively; and Choate's was at Warsaw, on the Indian River, a tributary of the Trent system. The largest of these communities was Hastings, at the east end of Rice Lake, which had a population of about 500 in 1861. Using the manuscript census (and analogous documents before

1842) for information about the families who used each store, I created ten structured samples, five providing a base line in 1861, the other five in selected years from 1808-9 to 1854 (see Table 1 for information on the samples). Farm families predominated among customers who could be identified in the census manuscripts. Even in 1861, few of the farmers in the samples occupied farms on which as much as half the land had been cleared.

One early finding from these data

Table 2

Sales of Gun Related Products, 10 Upper Canadian Stores, 1808-61

		transactions		powder		shot	balls	flints	caps	other products
		total	lbs	canisters	lbs	lbs	N	box		
<b>Yonge Mills</b>	<b>1808-9</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>19.88</b>		<b>54.8</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>53</b>			<b>lead</b>
Yonge Mills	1828-9	17	4.25	1	8.0		1			lead, gun lock
<b>Tett</b>	<b>1842</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>14.75</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>35.0</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>lead</b>
<b>Choate</b>	<b>1851</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>8.50</b>		<b>19.0</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>gun</b>
Fowlds	1854	13	5.50		3.0			8		
Choate	1861	17	2.25	1	12.0			5		guns, lead
Fowlds	1861	8	1.25		10.3			5		
Sherin	1861	12	4.50	1	5.3			6		powder flask
Scovil	1861	11	2.75		4.0			6		
<b>Darling</b>	<b>1861</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>9.00</b>		<b>19.5</b>			<b>8</b>		<b>gun</b>
<b>Total, 4 main stores</b>		<b>166</b>	<b>52.13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>128.3</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>13</b>		
Total, 6 other stores		<u>78</u>	<u>20.50</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>42.6</u>		<u>1</u>	<u>30</u>		
Total, all stores		244	72.63	4	170.9	11.8	85	43		

**Notes**

Some volumes estimated on basis of values.

Purchases of more than one product by a customer on one day counted as 1 transaction.

Sales to sample customers only.

Boldface entries signify principal stores for gun-related sales; see text.

needs to be re-emphasized. Although it has been common to speak of the isolation of rural dwellers, the difficulty of travel in Upper Canada, and the power of local merchants to monopolize and exploit their customers, very few families in my ten samples likely did all their buying at one store. Thus, the data represent only an unknown fraction of their consumption over the year for which data were collected. It can at least be said that there were no obvious disincentives to buying relatively undifferentiated products like gunpowder and shot from the most convenient store. Powder could also deteriorate, which encouraged buy-

ing it more-or-less as needed rather than occasionally in large quantities.

In all the samples, only four guns were purchased: one at Choate's store in 1851 (for \$4.50), two at the same store in 1861 (a double gun for \$18 and a single for \$7.50), and one at Darling's store in 1861 (for \$6.50).<sup>11</sup> It is not clear what the usual distribution channels were for guns, but as durable, comparatively costly products involving craftsmanship, new guns may well have been purchased in larger urban centres, perhaps from a gunsmith. Of the communities in which these stores were located, Warsaw had

<sup>11</sup> One customer at Yonge Mills in 1828 bought a gunlock, for \$1.50. In 1808, shipments from Montreal to Charles Jones' store at Elizabethtown (now Brockville) included two guns, worth \$7.50

July 12	George Boulton	1/2 lb	gun powder	20	Box Caps	13
14	"	1 lb	Shot	15		

George Boulton [sic] purchased 1/2 lb of "gun Powder", one box of caps, and 1 lb of shot at a total cost of 46¢ at Sherin's Store, Lakefield, 12 July 1861. Bolton, a teamster, was a leading customer of this store, with transactions on 132 different days in 1861. He also purchased 1/2 lb of powder and a box of caps on 23 October. By our estimating procedure, his powder purchases would have allowed firing seventy-two rounds. Source: Trent University Archives, Sherin Papers, B71-002, Daybook 1 (1860-1).

a gunsmith, Stephen Payne, in the late 1850s and early 1860s; later, Lakefield and Newboro are known to have had resident gunsmiths, but not for long.<sup>12</sup>

All the stores sold the other main products needed for shooting: gunpowder, shot (including lead and balls), and flints or percussion caps.<sup>13</sup> About twenty pounds of gunpowder, sixty-seven pounds of shot and balls, and five pounds of lead were purchased by members of my sample at Yonge Mills in 1808-9; the next highest volumes were the more than sixteen pounds of powder and the thirty-five pounds of shot purchased at the Tett store in 1842, the

more than eight pounds of powder and nineteen of shot at Choate's in 1851, and the nine pounds of powder and almost twenty of shot at Darling's in 1861 (Table 2).<sup>14</sup> These four stores are highlighted in the tables because they were at the higher end of the range for volume and frequency of gun-related sales. In 1861, for example, there were thirty-one such transactions at Darling's store, as many as at the Fowlds, Sherin, and Scovil stores combined.

After the first sample, there were no purchases of balls, and in all the samples only a few sales of lead in a context that suggests it was for the making of shot

each. AO, Charles Jones Fonds, F180, Yonge Mills Records, E1, MU3184, Invoice Book, 1802-8, invoice from Hoyle, Henderson & Gibb, 10 Oct. 1808.

<sup>12</sup> *Directory of the United Counties of Peterborough and Victoria* (Peterborough: T. & R. White, 1858 [CIHM A00072]), 30; *Fuller's Counties of Peterborough and Victoria Directory* (Toronto: Fuller, 1865-6 [CIHM A00836]), 98; S. James Gooding, *The Canadian Gunsmiths 1608 to 1900* (West Hill, Ont: Museum Restoration Service, 1962), 83, 147. Payne also advertised as a carpenter and builder, and Lakefield's John Cosley advertised himself in 1871 as also a barber.

<sup>13</sup> Gun maintenance required oil, and shooting required paper or cloth to make cartridges; but it is not possible to identify any specifically gun-related materials among sales of these products.

<sup>14</sup> Although it is obviously difficult to compare directly, given the differences in circumstances, the volume of sales to my sample at Yonge Mills in 1808-9 can be related to sales at three western Hudson's Bay Company posts in 1810-14. At each post, powder sales ranged from 150 to almost 900 pounds per year, and shot from 240 to 850. Such volumes vastly exceeded the sales to my samples, but



or cartridges. Shot was sold by weight; given the variety of guns and game, it evidently varied in size.<sup>15</sup> Flints were purchased in substantial quantities in 1808-9 and in 1842; after that only two more were purchased, both in 1851. By then, percussion caps were becoming the standard means of firing a gun. This technology required either purchase of a new gun or conversion of a flintlock by installing a new firing mechanism. Clearly Upper Canadians were adopting the new

system in the 1840s, exactly when it was being adopted elsewhere, for example in the British army.<sup>16</sup> To avoid underestimating gun use, the calculations of use below include all gunpowder; but it is essential to note that gunpowder was also the principal general explosive. Almost certainly some powder was purchased for blasting.<sup>17</sup> In fact, of the eleven largest powder purchases (those involving two or more pounds at one time) six were made by someone who made no other

### Table 3

Prices of Gun Related Products, 1808-1861

(all figures in cents)

		powder per lb	canister	shot per lb	flints each	caps per box	lead per lb	notes
Yonge Mills	1808-9	70, 80, 93.4		20	1.67		20	most powder 80
Yonge Mills	1828-9	40	75	12.5				lead = 40 per sheet
Tett	1842	30, 33.3	60	12.5	0.83		10	some shot 11.7, 15
Choate	1851	30, 33.3, 40		10, 12.5		10, 25		
Fowlds	1854	30, 40		12.5		12.5		most powder 40
Choate	1861	40, 50	50	12.5		12.5	10	
Fowlds	1861	40		12.5		12.5		
Sherin	1861	30, 40	70	12.5, 13.0		13, 20, 25		
Scovil	1861	40		12.5		12.5		
Darling	1861	30		12.5		10, 12.5		

Notes:

Pre-1861 prices converted from Halifax cy (1 shilling = 20 cents).

Ball (sold only at YM08) had same price as shot.

when expressed as a rate per family, they are rather more modest (about one pound of powder per year at Brandon, one-half pound at Carlton, and six pounds at Cumberland). Cumberland, unlike the other two, was a woodland post, whose clientele did far more hunting. A.J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 149-53, 163n24.

<sup>15</sup> See T.M. Hamilton, *Firearms on the Frontier: Guns at Fort Michilimackinac 1715-1781*, Reports in Mackinac History and Archaeology #5 (Mackinac Island: State Park Commission, 1976), 35 for various sizes of shot.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., *The Military Arms of Canada*, The Upper Canada Historical Arms Society Historical Arms Series No. 1 (West Hill: Museum Restoration Service, 1963), 18-19, 24-5.

<sup>17</sup> For this use of gunpowder, see, e.g., Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush*, NCL edition (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962), 195. Flints also could be used for fire-lighting; eight buyers in the

*James Clysdale's account was charged for these purchases by his son Iain and T. Row at Choate's Store, Warsaw, on 19 October 1861: 2 lbs of "Shot", a can of powder, and a box of caps. The value of the shot can be reliably estimated at 25¢, based on other 1861 purchases of shot from this store, which were all at 12½ ¢ per pound. By our estimating procedure, a can of powder was at least 2 lbs, which would have allowed firing 144 rounds. On 4 July, Clysdale had purchased a double gun for \$18.00 and 1 lb of shot. Source: Trent University Archives, Choate Papers, B77-026, Daybook 3 (1861).*

gun-related purchase during the year.

Between 1808 and 1828, the dates of the first and second samples, prices of the principal requirements for shooting fell by around fifty per cent, a trend that paralleled many other imported goods. Thus, gunpowder fell from 70, 80, or 90¢ per pound to 40¢ and shot from 20 to 12.5¢ per pound. Prices were generally consistent from store to store. There are exceptions, but most boxes of caps in 1861 cost 12.5¢.<sup>18</sup> The range of prices at individual stores, shown in Table 3, evidently represented differences in the quality or character of the product, a choice visible to the customer but not captured in a one-word entry in the accounts. That people occasionally bought powder or shot at two prices in the same transaction tends to confirm this point.<sup>19</sup>

On 1 September 1808, the first day of transactions in the first sample year, three of the seventy sample members purchased powder and shot: Derick Hogeboom, a half-pound of powder and one of shot, with a total value of three shillings (60¢); Nathaniel Powers, a quarter-pound of powder and one pound of ball, worth two shillings (40¢); and Elias Tryan, one pound of powder and two each of ball and shot, worth in total eight shillings (\$1.60).<sup>20</sup> Hogeboom returned on 16 September to buy two flints (1d, or 1.67¢, each). But although he visited eighteen more times from then until late April, he bought nothing else that was gun-related. Powers visited another twelve times between December and August without making further gun-related purchases. Tryan made four

four samples from 1808 to 1851 bought flints but not powder and/or shot.

<sup>18</sup> At Darling's store in 1861, two boxes of caps were sold at 12.5¢ and five boxes at 10¢. At Sherin's in 1861, there were three boxes purchased at 13¢, two at 20¢, and one at 25¢. For powder sold in canisters, I estimated the volume on the basis of price relative to price per pound.

<sup>19</sup> See Carl P. Russell, *Firearms, Traps, & Tools of the Mountain Men* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 48, for four standard grades of powder.

<sup>20</sup> For purposes of comparison, it might be noted that these purchases by Tryan were roughly equal to the cost of a pound of tea, one of the most widely purchased commodities at the store.

further visits, on two of which he bought additional products: a quarter-pound of powder, two pounds of lead, and four flints on 26 December, and a half-pound of powder on 1 May 1809.

The transactions on 1 September were the first of a total of sixty-nine involving something gun-related between then and 31 August 1809; these were made by thirty-four sample members, including fifteen of the twenty largest accounts (Hogeboom, Powers, and Tryan, as it happens, fell just below this level). About one-quarter of buyers were like Hogeboom and Powers, whose purchases of shot would have allowed them to fire about thirty-two rounds (Table 5). Hogeboom was a relatively established farmer in Yonge Township, who owned 130 acres of land, of which twenty-five were under cultivation, and a round log house; his property was assessed at £85 (\$340), slightly above the median of those for which the valuation is legible in

the assessment rolls. Powers, by contrast, had one of the lowest assessments; his sixty uncultivated acres in Yonge without a house on the property were assessed at just £6 (\$24). Tryan, who was the leading buyer of gun-related products in this sample, could not be found in the household lists or assessments for the area. Something of his activities can be suggested, however, from his purchase of two potash kettles, and from credits to his account of a hog, some butter, and venison worth 50¢ (in January 1809). The proportion of the clientele making gun-related purchases confirms that in this Loyalist community along the American border, gun ownership was common, and guns were used. This is what we might expect from literature on guns in colonial America, which suggests the importance of hunting for food in the earliest phases of settlement and the normalcy of rural gun ownership thereafter.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, variations in the scale and frequen-

✓  
Isaac Snelgrove 23 Sept  
1 Gun £1-2-6 1/2 Powder 9  
1/2 Shot 3-1/2 Hat 1/4  
383

One of a handful of gun purchases in all the samples, Isaac Snelgrove's gun, bought from Choate's store in Warsaw on 23 September 1851, cost £1 - 2 - 6 (\$4.50); he also bought a half-pound of powder for 9d (15¢), a half-pound of shot for 3d (5¢), and a hat for 1/7 (c. 32¢). This was Snelgrove's first visit to the store since February, and one of only five visits in the entire year. By our estimating procedure, this powder would have allowed him to fire thirty-two rounds. Source: Trent University Archives, Choate Papers, B77-026, Daybook 2 (1851-2).

<sup>21</sup> See Henry M. Miller, "An Archaeological Perspective on the Evolution of Diet in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1620-1745" in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for The Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1988), 176-199; and Gloria L. Main, "Many Things Forgotten: The Use of Probate Records in Arming America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser, 59 (2002), 213-14.

Table 4

Buyers of gun-related products, ten samples

store	year	full sample	men only	buyers all	men only	proportion of men buying	buyers in 20 largest accounts
<b>Yonge Mills</b>	<b>1808-09</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>15</b>
Yonge Mills	1828-29	77	72	15	15	21%	5
<b>Tett</b>	<b>1842</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Choate</b>	<b>1851</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>8</b>
Fowlds	1854	88	84	11	11	13%	6
Choate	1861	70	64	11	11	17%	5
Fowlds	1861	73	67	7	6	9%	4
Sherin	1861	59	49	8	8	16%	3
Scovil	1861	102	88	9	9	10%	7
<b>Darling</b>	<b>1861</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>11</b>
total		784	692	151	147	21%	76
subtotals	<b>4 main</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>46</b>
	6 others	469	424	61	60	14%	30

## Notes

None of the four accounts of women buyers were among the twenty largest. Some women made purchases on accounts in men's names. Boldface entries signify principal stores for gun-related sales; see text.

cy of purchases suggest the possibility of variation in actual gun usage.

In no later sample were gun-related purchases as common. There were 117 buyers in the other nine samples, making a total of 151 from among the 784 households in all ten samples (Table 4). Because only four of these involved the accounts of women, a better comparison group may be just the 692 men in the samples. In either case, about one household in five purchased something that suggested it used a gun. Many sample accounts were small, however, and it seems unlikely that these stores were the customer's main supplier. Hence, in Table 4, evidence is presented also just for the twenty largest sample accounts

at each store; because most included a comparatively wide variety of purchases made on a number of days, they are the more likely to reveal ownership of a gun. In this group of 200 accounts, seventy-six (almost two in five) included something gun-related. After the initial sample, the next highest proportion of purchasers among the largest accounts was at the other three highlighted stores (Tett's, Choate's in 1851, and Darling's). Between forty and sixty per cent of the leading buyers at each of these stores bought some sort of gun-related product, suggesting that gun use was relatively common in at least some places and across the whole period.

In the other six samples, including

four from 1861, only one-quarter (30 of 120) of the largest accounts bought anything gun-related (Table 4). At Fowlds' store, for example, of the twenty largest accounts, six in 1854 included such products and only four did so in 1861. In the latter year, the purchases of all Fowlds sample members combined amounted to about one pound of gunpowder, ten pounds of shot, and five boxes of caps. If shooting was a mainly rural activity it may be significant that Hastings was the largest place from which samples were drawn, whereas the location showing

most active gun use in 1861, Darling's store, was in the countryside. Yet there were equal numbers of farmers in each of these samples. Another possible explanation for the contrast is that the soil in the Darlingside area was comparatively poor; that may have made for a different mix of activities in farm families' annual routines from what prevailed where soil was rich and yields were higher.<sup>22</sup>

In all the transactions, there were just twenty-five occasions when someone bought one or more pounds of gun-

**Table 5**

Estimated rounds fired

Number of customers in each range

	unknown	1 @ 24	25 @ 47	48 @ 71	72 or more	total
<b>Yonge Mills 1808-09</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>34</b>
Yonge Mills 18282-9	1	3	7	3	1	15*
<b>Tett 1842</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22*</b>
<b>Choate 1851</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>
Fowlds 1854	3	3	1	3	1	11*
Choate 1861	1	2	5	1	2	11
Fowlds 1861	1	0	4	0	2	7
Sherin 1861	2	0	2	1	3	8*
Scovil 1861	3	0	5	1	0	9
<b>Darling 1861</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>
totals	22	13	54	28	34	151
<b>total, 4 main stores</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>90</b>
total, 6 other stores	11	8	24	9	9	61

Notes

\* Includes purchasers of 2 lbs or 1 canister of powder but no other product.

(2 at Tett & Sherin, 1 at YM 28 and F54)

Maximum rounds per customer estimated by volume of powder and/or shot.

0.25 lb powder = 1750 grains or about 16 rounds of 110 grains.

1 lb shot = 7000 grains or about 32 rounds of 220 grains.

If shot and powder estimates differ, the higher is used here. Most estimates are multiples of 16: thus, ranges focus on 16, 32, 64, 96. Unknown includes 8 who bought only flints, 12 only caps, 1 a gun, 1 a powder flask.

Boldface entries signify principal stores for gun-related sales; see text.

<sup>22</sup> For the area that included Darlingside, see, e.g., Donald Harman Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), 51, 62, 242; and see 216 for the culture and use of firearms there.

powder at a time. Powder was normally bought in lots of one-quarter (fifty-five transactions) or one-half pound (sixty-one), although twenty-three buyers made such purchases on more than one occasion in a year.<sup>23</sup> Including anything gun-related raises the number of those who made purchases on more than one day to fifty-seven (of whom twenty-two were in 1808-9). After 1808-9, not even one-quarter of the 117 buyers reached a threshold of 50¢ for gun-related purchases in a year. It was possible to buy powder, shot, and caps without reaching that threshold, but still these do not seem like the transactions of large numbers of active hunters and sport shooters. Arriving at a more precise assessment of that impression, however, requires closer analysis.

At one common figure, 110 grains per round, it was possible to fire sixteen rounds per quarter-pound of powder. From about 200 to over 500 grains of shot might be required per round depending on the gun and the objective. If the average was 220 grains, thirty-two rounds could be fired per pound of shot.<sup>24</sup> These figures are used to estimate how many rounds each buyer could have fired, based on the larger of powder and shot

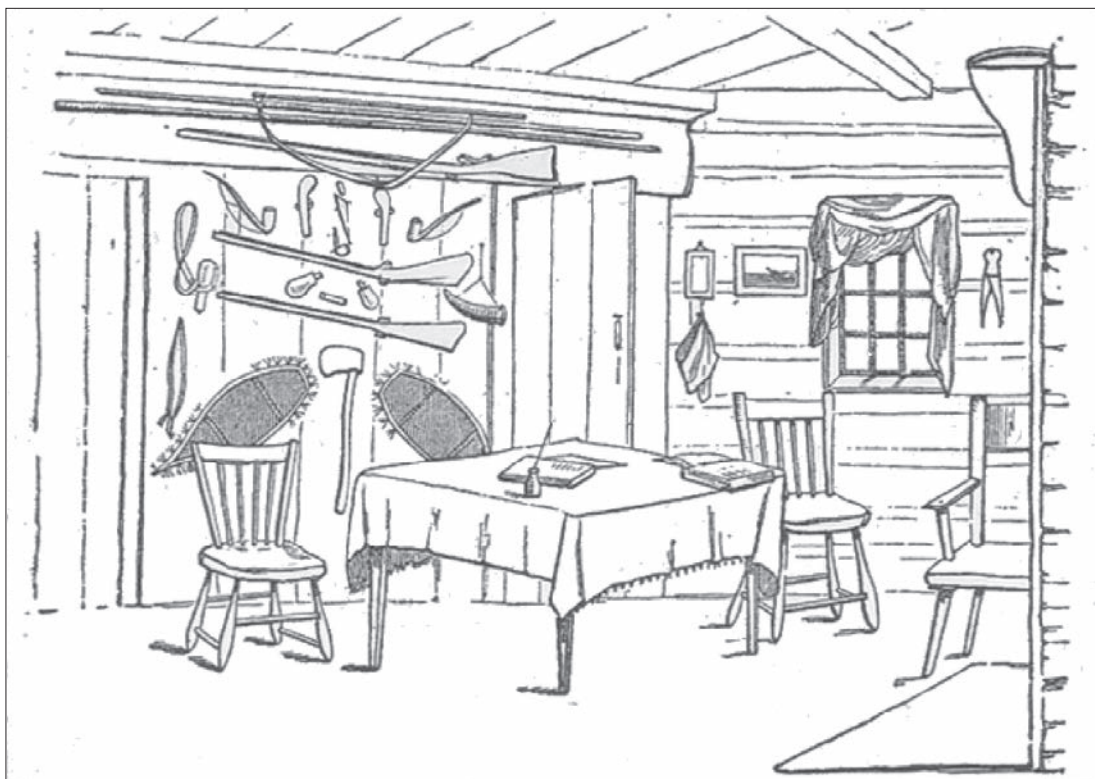
purchases (Table 5). The estimates range from thirteen people who purchased one-quarter pound of powder and/or one-half pound of shot and could have fired sixteen rounds, to one buyer whose twenty-six pounds of shot might have allowed 832 rounds. In total, there were 82 buyers in the range from 25 to 71 rounds and 34 in the range upwards from 72 rounds. As noted earlier, Hogeboom and Powers' purchases on 1 September 1808 would have allowed firing about thirty-two rounds; in total, Tryan could have fired close to 200 rounds. He was the leader among the thirteen purchasers at Yonge Mills in 1808-9 who could have fired seventy-two or more rounds. At the other three highlighted stores, there were twelve more buyers in this category. Combined, the other six samples include just nine, and four of them bought only gunpowder, quite possibly for blasting. It should be recalled also that these figures are for households; even if shooting was a mainly male activity, brothers, sons, and perhaps even hired hands were potential gun users in many households.<sup>25</sup>

The largest account, by a wide margin, was that of Peter Stevens; he bought six pounds of shot from Tett's store on 10 March 1842 and someone else (the

<sup>23</sup> When shot and powder were purchased simultaneously, transactions at Yonge Mills in 1808-9 tended to be at a ratio of four to one. Later, ratios of four to one and two to one were about equal.

<sup>24</sup> For some examples of powder and shot requirements in these ranges, see Russell, *Firearms, Traps & Tools*, 36, 86-92; and Brian J. Given, *A Most Pernicious Thing: Gun Trading and Native Warfare in the Early Contact Period* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994), 97-9. For a gun that used balls 36 to the pound, see Galt, *The Canadas...*, 235.

<sup>25</sup> Note also that the women buyers may have had men (e.g. sons, brothers) in their households; in one case, a son was the actual purchaser on his mother's account. Women are sometimes recorded as buyers on accounts in their husband's or father's names as well; the most common buyer if not the account-holder himself was a son.



*Guns often are found in images of pioneer household interiors, such as in Anne Langton's well known "Interior of John's house [looking north], 1837". How they were used is another matter, of course. John Langton, a gentry immigrant living on Sturgeon Lake, was likely to have hunted for sport. Source: Early Days in Upper Canada: Letters of John Langton, W.A. Langton ed (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926), 89. Original is in Archives of Ontario, F 1077-8-1-4-20.*

name is illegible) bought three pounds of powder and twenty pounds of shot on his account on 4 April. It proved impossible to link Stevens to the census, but next to his name Tett noted "Indian". As the third-party transaction indicates, he might have been buying for more than one person; but such purchases are reasonable for someone who hunted

for food and likely for earnings.<sup>26</sup> Two other "Indians" also ranked among the six leading buyers at Tett's, John Hagar, who bought a half-pound of powder, three pounds of shot, and four flints on 15 February, and Little John, who bought a canister of powder on 12 December. All three had small quantities of venison and skins credited to their accounts, as

<sup>26</sup> For the hunting of an avid English sportsman in the Kettle Creek and later Long Point areas of Upper Canada, see Harry B. Barrett, *The 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Journals & Paintings of William Pope* (Toronto: M.F. Fehely, 1976), 32, 34, 146-67. Pope hunted and/or fished on more than half the days each month in the summer of 1842, for example, and in a typical year would have fired 500 to 1000 rounds, or more. My thanks to Harry Barrett for drawing this work to my attention.

did two other Indians (one of whom seems to have been Hagar's wife). Little John's credits also included a few pairs of moccasins and mitts.

Darling's store provides the 1861 sample with the most extensive gun use. Just three buyers, however, could have fired seventy-two or more rounds. Norman Landon was a forty-two-year-old farmer with a family of two, farming fifty acres, twenty cleared; someone from his household made forty-eight visits to the store, on eight of which gun-related purchases were made, totaling 2.5 pounds of powder, 7.5 pounds of shot, and two boxes of caps. John Wallace was a fifty-three-year-old farmer with sixteen in his household, farming 100 acres, with twenty-five cleared; his was the second largest sample account at this store, with transactions on 139 days. His family purchases, made on seven days, totaled two pounds of powder, four pounds of shot, and two boxes of caps. Stephen Patterson was fifty years old, with a household of eight (including two sons old enough to be recorded as labourers in the census); he had 100 acres on Ash Island, of which thirteen were under culture: there were transactions on this account on forty-two days, including a pound of shot on 2 February and another two pounds of shot and a half-pound of powder on 15 November. In contrast to these large purchases, nine of the twenty leading accounts at this store did not buy any-

thing gun-related, although family members frequently visited the store. Two of this group, Marsey Chismore and James Deer, were among the four largest sample accounts, with transactions on 124 and 100 different days respectively. And there were transactions on six of the other seven non-buyers' accounts on at least twenty-four occasions during the year. All but three of the twenty largest accounts, whether they bought gun-related products or not, were farm households.

I began with a poem by William Kirby on the glories of winter hunting. That winter was an active hunting season is also suggested by other anecdotal sources. Writing to family in Dublin from the wilderness of Erindale in January 1832, Thomas William Magrath described winter deer hunting:

while the ground is covered  
with snow, and sealed up by  
frost, to the prevention of all  
farming operations ... we make  
it a point to provide abundantly  
for our larder.<sup>27</sup>

Yet only about one-sixth of all the transactions occurred from December to March. The peak months were April and August to November. It makes sense that the main shooting would be when animals were active and birds were migrating, even if these coincided with peak times of farm activity. In any case, winter had its own schedule of pressing activities in rural society.

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas William Magrath to Thomas Radcliff, January 1832, in *Authentic Letters from Upper Canada*, Thomas Radcliff, ed., (Toronto: Macmillan, 1952 [1833]), 144



Powder and shot were stocked by every one of these stores and clearly were a normal part of the rural world. In four cases, together making a line from 1808-9 to Darling's in 1861, there is evidence of gun use by many (in 1808-9, most) of the principal customers. On the other hand, it is striking that four of the five 1861 samples had only a very limited number of buyers. And among all buyers, just 116 customers (thirty-two of them in the first sample) bought enough to fire twenty-five or more rounds in a year. Of these, only thirty-four exceeded the higher threshold set here, seventy-two rounds per year. Given the variety of ways in which people used any one store, we would not expect any product to be bought by all the main customers.<sup>28</sup> Still, it would be difficult to argue from this evidence for consistently high use of guns after the first phases of settlement. Indeed, it seems reasonable to speculate that among the more than sixty per cent of larger accounts for which no gun-related purchases were recorded, a substantial number may not have used a gun at all.

These arguments are reinforced by data on imports of gunpowder. In 1868-69, the first year for which trade figures include

volumes, Canada's imports of gunpowder were 69,000 pounds, valued at just over \$25,000. The "gunpowder and fireworks" imported in 1861 had almost the same value. But the figures for 1868-69 translate to a value of almost thirty-seven cents per pound, well beyond what the retail prices at sample stores suggest for a valuation at the port of entry. To use import data to estimate usage in 1861 in a way that avoids an underestimate, it would be more appropriate to use an import price of twenty cents per pound to calculate the volume of gunpowder imports then. On that basis, the volume of gunpowder imported in 1861 might have been almost 125,000 pounds. Even if this all went to civilian use, that was equivalent to less than five ounces per household in the Canadas.<sup>29</sup> In a mainly rural population, that rate scarcely suggests widespread and extensive shooting by most families.

This is not to question that there was a tradition of hunting and gun use in rural society. Men like Tryan, Stevens, Landon, and Wallace (or members of their families) used their guns extensively, likely to put food on the table and in some cases to earn income. But they represent the extreme on the spectrum of shooting activity, not

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Douglas McCalla, "Retailing in the Countryside: Upper Canadian General Stores in the Mid-19th Century," *Business and Economic History*, 26: 2 (winter 1997), 400, which used a threshold of \$20 to define a large account. Of 135 accounts in 1861 with debits totaling \$20 or more, 83% bought tea, 75% bought tobacco; and 72% bought boots and/or shoes; 24% bought something gun-related.

<sup>29</sup> Based on an average of six persons per household. All data from annual Tables of Trade & Navigation, published in the *Sessional Papers*. Figures for 1868-69 are from Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Sessional Papers*, 1870 #1, Tables of Trade and Navigation for 1868-69, Schedule 4; 1861 data are from Province of Canada, Legislative Assembly, *Sessional Papers*, 1862 #2, Tables of Trade and Navigation for 1861, schedule 3. A value of \$23,000 is given for 1861 in schedule 2. For the five-year period 1859-63, the value of such imports averaged about \$22,000 per year, with a range from \$12,000 in 1858 to \$32,000 in 1863.

the norm, especially after the first (1808-9) sample. Subsequently, many (in six cases most) leading customers did not buy anything gun-related; and most even of those who did buy purchased quantities suggesting limited gun use. At prevailing prices, it is unlikely that the cost of powder and shot was a barrier to shooting. Numbers of large game animals in close proximity to settlement may never have been as great as the images of abundance suggested and must have diminished over the years. Depletion is, in fact, a powerful theme in the literature of the settlement era, but it seems improbable that in the sample areas, with their abundant water and extensive forests, the population of every kind of game had been reduced by mid-century to the point of severe scarcity.<sup>30</sup> A more likely explanation comes from colonial America; there fish and game played a sharply diminishing role in the food supply after the earliest years.<sup>31</sup> As that reminds us, and as the generally modest powder and shot purchases by members of the samples in 1861 evidently confirm, the point of

agriculture was to put food on the table reliably, without having to depend on hunting. Shooting might perhaps be necessary to protect one's stock and crops; hunting, on the other hand, was a choice, one that a substantial and growing proportion of rural Upper Canadians do not seem to have pursued.<sup>32</sup>

This conclusion is reinforced by some of the anecdotal literature, which offers a nicely modern explanation for the limited use of guns: lack of time. "But little time was given to sport," one man recalled of his upbringing in the 1830s, "although there was plenty of large game. There was something of more importance always claiming attention."<sup>33</sup> This was the observation also of William Radcliff, an Irish gentleman settler in Adelaide Township, on the settlement frontier west of London. In 1832, he wrote home enthusing about the abundance of game not only in the woods but in the cleared fields as well: "You will be impatient to hear of the shooting... [W]ould you believe? – I have not even had time to think about it..."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See J. David Wood, *Making Ontario: Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-Creation before the Railway* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 2000), 17-20.

<sup>31</sup> See Miller, "An Archaeological Perspective on the Evolution of Diet," 183-7, 193. Also relevant is Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 62-8. For the importance of wild meat in early settlement on the Canadian prairies, see George Colpitts, *Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western Canada to 1940* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2002), 75-81.

<sup>32</sup> Rather, hunting and fishing became recreational pursuits for urban dwellers, and guiding them became a specialized occupation for some rural dwellers. See Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Canniff Haight, *Life in Canada Fifty Years Ago: Personal Recollections and Reminiscences of a Sexagenarian* (Toronto: Hunter Rose, 1885), 41

<sup>34</sup> William Radcliff to Arthur Radcliff, Dec. 1832, in *Authentic Letters from Upper Canada*, Radcliff, ed., 106-7. See also 144, Thomas William Magrath to Thomas Radcliff, January 1832: "I have known the most devoted sportsmen, when once settled on their own property ... to have abandoned the fowling piece altogether, during the busy season..."