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“A Place to Stand”: Families, Land and Permanence in Toronto Gore Township, 1820-1890

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

Depuis les dernières années, les historiens du Canada anglais se sont beaucoup intéressés au problème de la famille canadienne au XIX^e siècle. La majorité de ces études porte sur les populations rurales et urbaines de l'Ontario et elle se préoccupe surtout des réactions diverses de ces communautés aux changements économiques et sociaux. Deux genres de populations ont été ainsi isolées: une première, flottante et migratoire, qui cherche constamment de nouveaux horizons, et une seconde, résidente et persistante, qui réagit différemment aux changements en tentant d'adapter son mode de vie aux conditions qui existent plutôt que de repartir comme la précédente. C'est ce deuxième groupe qui fait l'objet de cette recherche.

L'auteur étudie ici le phénomène de la permanence dans l'Ontario rural, et ce, à travers l'exemple d'un canton particulier du comté de Peel, le Toronto Gore. Il traite, entre autre, de la façon dont on accumule la terre; il s'intéresse à la manière dont on l'administre et il s'arrête assez longuement aux divers modes de la transmission des biens dans la famille. Selon lui, cette étude des ménages permanents — et ils constituent près de la moitié de l'ensemble — tend à démontrer que, d'une part, les liens familiaux contribuent grandement à attacher les individus à un coin de pays et que, d'autre part, l'acquisition d'une terre à l'époque s'avère d'importance primordiale. Nul doute, cet élément de stabilité dans la population mérite beaucoup plus d'attention que l'on ne lui en a accordée jusqu'à maintenant.

“A Place to Stand”: Families, Land and Permanence in Toronto Gore Township, 1820 – 1890

HERBERT J. MAYS

I

During the past decade, historians in English Canada have become increasingly interested in problems related to household and family experience in the nineteenth century. The majority of these studies have focused upon the province of Ontario and have attempted to explore human behaviour within the context of social and economic change. Large-scale quantitative social history projects, such as Michael Katz's study of Hamilton and David Gagan's Peel County History Project, have utilized nominal census returns to isolate two distinct populations in both urban and rural Canada West/Ontario.¹ The first, a floating transient population, has been depicted as one of the central features of nineteenth-century society. Studied within the context of social mobility, population turnover has been portrayed as a natural, and perhaps inevitable, response by individuals caught up in a society where a "casual commitment to place" meant that individual success often was measured in terms of distance as well as time.² The second group, referred to in the literature as the "persistent" or "linked" households, remained for one or more decennial intervals in the community where they were first enumerated. They responded differently to change. Rather than migrating in search of new opportunity as land and population pressure contracted local horizons, they sought to hang on to what they had, at the expense of making fundamental alterations in their behaviour. David Gagan has argued persuasively that the population of Peel County responded to economic crisis in the late 1850s and early 1860s by adjusting its marriage and fertility customs, as well as by adopting inheritance practices that protected the profitability and productivity of the family farm by placing the burden for the care of the siblings and widowed parents upon a single heir.³ The importance of this work should not be underestimated. As numerous scholars have been quick to recognize, the

1. Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West. Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), especially chap. 3; David P. Gagan, "Geographic and Social Mobility in Nineteenth Century Ontario: A Micro-study", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, XIII (1976), pp. 152-63.
2. Gagan, "Geographic and Social Mobility", pp. 154, 162.
3. D.P. Gagan, "Land, Population and Social Change: The Critical Years in Canada West", *Canadian Historical Review*, LIX (1978), pp. 299-306.

behaviour of individuals and households in times of stress had important social, economic, and perhaps even political ramifications for Canadian society.⁴

Yet, despite the importance of this work, our portrait of the nineteenth-century social landscape at this level remains incomplete. The great expense, in terms of both time and research funds, of studying large units of population over extended periods of time, combined with inadequacies in computer software, has dictated research designs for these projects that impose at least one major limitation on their findings. In these studies, continuity is measured in two ways; either in structural terms (by means of an analysis of inequality) or in the persistence of individual households from one decennial interval to another. There is no attempt to measure continuity in terms of the continuous presence of family members within the community. Members of a younger generation who have reached maturity and established their own independent households are treated as new and discrete units of analysis. As a consequence, the reliance upon linked household data as a measure of continuity may give problems of transiency, population turnover, and instability a greater prominence than they might deserve otherwise.⁵ All of these comments speak to the same problem; the failure, or inability, of large scale quantitative projects, at the present time, to measure stability or "permanence" in anything but the most superficial terms.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of "permanence" in rural Upper Canada/Ontario in the nineteenth century. It focuses upon the experience of the residents of a single township, the Gore of Toronto in Peel County. In 1973, an analysis of the same township was used to suggest that high levels of transiency characterized the western portion of the Home District between 1837 and 1881.⁶ Hence, the Gore provides a useful site to test the hypothesis that "permanence", in the sense of the continuous presence of one or more family members in a community over an extended period of time, also may have played an important role in the historical experience of communities where there were high levels of transiency.

The argument presented here is that throughout most of the nineteenth century the township of Toronto Gore provided a home for a substantial population of permanent families. In a very real sense, they *were* Toronto Gore. The behaviour of these families, in the way in which they accumulated land and passed it

4. See for example: Katz, *People of Hamilton*, pp. 110-4; Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society. Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 14, 247; J. David Wood, ed., *Perspectives on Landscape and Settlement in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1975), p. xxvi; Douglas McCalla, "The Wheat Staple and Upper Canadian Development", *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers*, (1978), p. 43.

5. Michael Anderson makes what appears to be the same point in his critical commentary on the work of Michael Katz. See his review essay "Family and Class in Nineteenth Century Cities", *Journal of Family History*, II (1977), p. 142.

6. David Gagan and Herbert Mays, "Historical Demography and Canadian Social History: Families and Land in Peel County, Ontario", *Canadian Historical Review*, LIV (1973), pp. 35-57.

FAMILIES, LAND AND PERMANENCE

on from one generation to another, ensured that successive generations of their children would have their "place to stand" and grow. But, in the face of social and economic pressures in the second half of the century, those places could be assured only if the symbol and basis of the family's prosperity, its land, remained uncompromised. Hence, it was the permanent families who were most likely to adopt devices that would protect the productivity and profitability of the family farm, while at the same time striving to provide a patrimony for each of their children.

II

Canadian social historians who wish to study families, and particularly permanent families, are confronted at the outset by a paucity of literature. Most of what does exist, moreover, is confusing or imprecise.⁷ Nevertheless, there does seem to be some general agreement on several important issues. All seem to agree that new immigrants were concerned with establishing their economic independence by acquiring land as quickly as possible.⁸ Thereafter, they set up commercial farms and attempted to lay the foundation for the prosperity of future generations. Particularly in the decades before mid century when labour shortages and the psychology of the staples trade in wheat dictated labour-intensive, land-extensive agricultural practices, the difference between success and failure often rested with the labour force that the family itself could provide.⁹ Hence, children, lots of children, were perceived as the key to fulfilling the family's ambitions.

Of course, the bonds of kinship ran deeper than mere pecuniary advantage. Parents were concerned as well for the welfare of their children. On occasion, they expressed this concern when they "farmed out" their children to work in nearby households. To be sure, such practices relieved the family of the burden of caring for children whose labour was no longer needed at home, but exposure to the attitudes, values, and practices of their more prosperous neighbours also was seen as a way of enhancing the life chances of the young.¹⁰ In his *History of Agriculture in Ontario*, Robert Leslie Jones provides a far less ambiguous example of the family's attempts to ensure the future well-being of its children. Some farmers

7. See, for example, Caniff Haight, *Life in Canada Fifty Years Ago: Personal Recollections and Reminiscences of a Sexagenarian* (Toronto, 1885), pp. 38-44; R.L. Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880* (Toronto, 1946), pp. 55-6, 304; G.E. Reaman, *A History of Agriculture in Ontario* (Toronto, 1970), I, pp. 117-8; A.R.M. Lower, *Canadians in the Making* (Toronto, 1958), pp. 336-7; G.P. de T. Glazebrook, *Life in Ontario. A Social History* (Toronto, 1968), pp. 161-7.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.* See also Lillian Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1968), p. 307. Contemporary reflections on the goals and aspirations of immigrants are summarized in D.P. Gagan, "'The Prose of life': Literary Reflections of the Family, Individual Experience and Social Structure in Nineteenth Century Canada", *Journal of Social History*, VIII (1976), pp. 368-9.

10. Gagan "The Prose of Life", pp. 370-1. See also M.H. Watkins, "A Staple Theory of Economic Growth", in W.T. Easterbrook and M.H. Watkins, eds., *Approaches to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto, 1966), pp. 57-61.

in older, more settled areas of the province, where land values were high, would sell off their homesteads and move to the frontier where they could purchase cheap farms for each of their sons.¹¹ Observations such as these have led scholars to conclude that the pre-modern rural family was a tightly knit social and economic unit, a "mutual welfare association."¹²

Translating these scattered observations into a comprehensive explanation that could be applied to the aggregated behaviour patterns of individuals and families in time past raises intellectual problems. Not the least of these is the difficulty of forging a link between behaviour and motivation.¹³ Unfortunately, there is not enough in the surviving literature to support any single explanation. Consequently, the scholar must rely upon some device or theory to make that link. At the present time, the only approach that combines an explanation for family behaviour with even an implicit concern for permanence is Richard Easterlin's "Bequest Model."¹⁴

Easterlin, an economist at the University of Pennsylvania, primarily was concerned with providing an explanation for fertility declines in the nineteenth-century American midwest. The search for that explanation led him into family history and an examination of the potential dichotomy between the farmer's attempts to improve his standard of living and his desire for children who ultimately would become consumers of wealth. Easterlin drew his inspiration from the family-oriented studies of American colonial historians, in particular Philip Greven's study of four generations of family life in colonial Andover, Massachusetts.¹⁵ These insights, augmented by the findings of agricultural historians of the American midwest, and Easterlin's own research, led to the formulation of a comprehensive model of rural family behaviour.

The Easterlin model begins with the assumption that American farmers were motivated by two concerns: preserving and increasing what wealth they had, and transmitting that wealth to the next generation. The American farm, he argued, was a corporate family enterprise that aimed to provide each of its members with a proper, and equal, start in life. Ideally, this meant establishing children on nearby farms but, when this was not possible, a non-farming occupation that carried with it proprietor, rather than employee, status was considered an acceptable alternative. The material basis for this system was the family farm which had to bear the costs of sustaining the family on a day-to-day basis, supply the desired

11. Jones, *History of Agriculture*, pp. 55-6.

12. *The Rowell-Sirois Report*, Book I, D.V. Smiley, ed., (Toronto 1963), p. 26.

13. Anderson, "Family and Class", p. 147.

14. Easterlin's work is summed up in several articles. See Richard Easterlin, "Does Human Fertility Adjust to Environment?", *American Economic Review*, LXI (1971), pp. 399-421; "Factors in the Decline of Farm Fertility in the United States: Some Preliminary Results", *Journal of American History*, LXIII (1976), pp. 600-14; "Population Change and Farm Settlement in the Northern United States", *Journal of Economic History*, XXXVI (1976), pp. 45-83.

15. Philip J. Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, 1970).

material goods, and also furnish a start in life for children. The farm that eventually would be inherited by one, or at most two, of the children had to carry the burden of supplying the capital to establish all other children.

The chief determinant of the farmer's behaviour was his *expectation* that his farm would increase in value. As the community passed from a frontier to a well-settled stage, a farmer could look forward to a much "slower growth of his capital [land value]" than during the frontier stage when land values escalated quickly.¹⁶ As a consequence, the farmer in the well-settled area was placed under material and psychological stress. His ability to provide a start in life for his children that was at least equal to the start he had received was jeopardized. Unless he could fulfil that goal, he felt that he had failed. Hence the farmer in a well-established area felt more pressure to limit the size of his family and to adopt devices that would protect the family's wealth. One such device was the passing on of the obligation to provide for siblings to the principal heir.

As for the members of the younger generation, the extent to which they became integrated into the same community depended upon the nature of their patrimony and the balance between the pecuniary and non-pecuniary advantages of staying where they were. In short, for those who did not inherit property, continued residence in the community depended upon other vocational opportunities. If those opportunities were present, then the bonds of kinship would militate against migration.

Implicitly, at least, the Easterlin model also addresses the question of permanence. The behaviour of Easterlin's farmers is predicated, to some extent, upon their desire to remain where they were. The studies upon which he based his suppositions, moreover, all pointed to a degree of permanence in the countryside. Both Allan Bogue and Michael Conzen, for example, have shown that, despite the high levels of population turnover associated with frontier communities, in each wave, or cohort, of settlers there were those who would choose to remain as permanent residents of the community.¹⁷

These studies also point to an important characteristic of those permanent residents. Most often, they had arrived among the early settlers. This point is underscored in a study of rural Kalamazoo, Michigan, by Charles F. Heller and F. Stanley Moore who found that continuity in land ownership was associated with early settlement. Heller and Moore hypothesized that the frontier farmer was motivated by the desire to establish a successful commercial farm.¹⁸ If his expectations of rising land values and being able to market his produce profitably were met, he stayed; if not, he left. Stated another way, those who were more settled, and who had achieved a measure of economic maturity in a community,

16. Easterlin, "Population Change", p. 66.

17. Allan C. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt* (Chicago, 1963), p. 26; Michael Conzen, *Frontier Farming in an Urban Shadow* (Madison, 1961), p. 48.

18. Charles H. Heller and F. Stanley Moore, "Continuity in Rural Land Ownership: Western Kalamazoo County, Michigan, 1830-1861", *Michigan History*, LVI (1972), p. 240.

were less likely to move than those individuals who were searching "for their first relatively stable farming experience."¹⁹ In Kalamazoo, those who were the most prosperous, and the most stable, had arrived early and were able to acquire large holdings at relatively little cost.

This emphasis upon early entry argues against the traditional Turnerian model of settlement that has found widespread acceptance in both the United States and Canada. The Turnerian model emphasizes the early activities of the "forelopers" — the footloose "land butchers" who cleared the land and almost immediately sold out and moved on — and finds permanence in later waves of settlers.²⁰

Although both the Easterlin model and the emphasis upon the importance of early settlement are based upon an American rather than a Canadian experience, there is considerable evidence to suggest that demographically, at least, Canadian and American settlers behaved in similar ways. Both the Katz and Gagan studies point to numerous parallels. The attractiveness of the Easterlin model is enhanced, moreover, not only by the way in which it appears to illuminate broad generalizations in the existing literature, but also by its author's conviction that it is equally applicable to Canada.²¹

Hence, a study of permanence in Ontario should begin in the pre-census period and attempt to reconstitute the first settlers on the land. In studies of colonial America, this reconstruction has been accomplished with the aid of extensive files of genealogies that can be linked to land-transfer patterns. For Upper Canada/Ontario, the task is much more difficult. Genealogies exist for very few families.²² Instead, families must be manually reconstituted from surviving township papers, land records, assessment rolls, scattered parish records, newspaper accounts, census returns, and wills. Most of these records provide an indication of kin relationships among at least the male members of the population and transfers of land from one generation to another can be identified with reasonable certainty (see Appendix).

III

The settlement of the Gore of Toronto began in 1820, soon after the Surveyor General's Office announced that the township's recently surveyed lands were to be sold at public auction.²³ The lands in question were part of a wedge-shaped tract of some nineteen thousand acres that had been carved out of the second

19. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

20. See, for example, Jones, *History of Agriculture*, pp. 56, 63.

21. Easterlin, "Population Change", p. 73.

22. The only extensive collection of published genealogies for Upper Canada/Ontario concentrates upon Loyalist and other prominent families. See Edward Chadwick, *Ontario Families*, two volumes, (Toronto, 1898; reprint edition in one volume: Huntingdon House, 1970).

23. Public Archives of Ontario (hereafter PAO), Crown Lands Papers, R.G. 1, A-1-17, box 19. The Gore's land was to be reserved for public sale only. No free grants were to be made to individuals who had claims upon the provincial government.

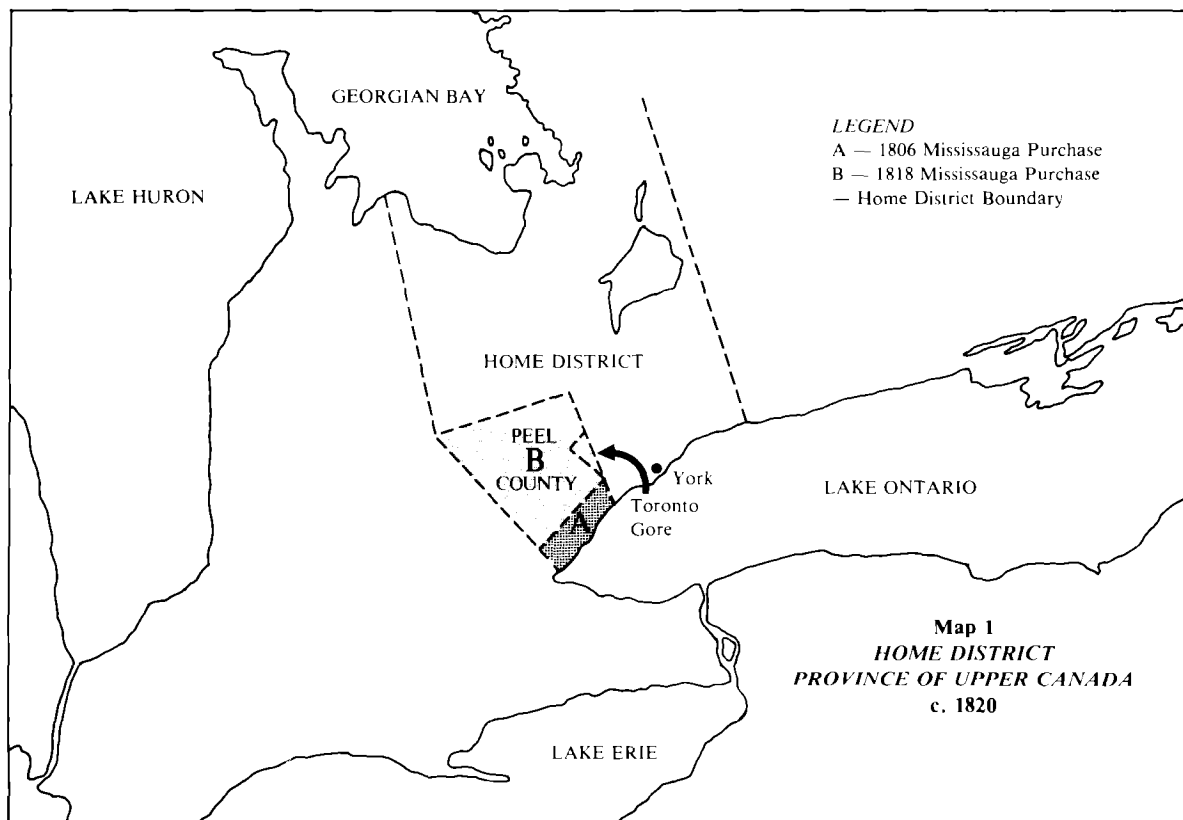
FAMILIES, LAND AND PERMANENCE

Mississauga purchase of 1818. Situated on the eastern border of what would later become Peel County, the township was well suited for prospective settlers (see Map 1). York/Toronto was only fifteen miles away and could be reached by Dundas Street via the Sixth Line Road, a government project that ran up the township's western boundary and separated it from neighbouring Toronto and Chinguacousy Townships. Equally important, the Gore contained some of the best agricultural land in the province and by mid century it had become one of the top wheat producers in Canada West.²⁴ In short, for both the immigrant and the native born in search of land, the township offered opportunities for the abundant life and economic independence they sought so fervently. Yet, despite these advantages, settlement in the area was slow. Settlers were still taking up unoccupied lands in the mid-1840s and in a demographic sense, at least, the Gore remained a "frontier" area until after the mid century.²⁵

Part of the explanation for the protracted period of settlement may lie in the provincial government's decision to reserve the township's lands for sale at public auction rather than disposing of them under the "free-grant" system that remained in force until 1828. Most settlers appear to have by-passed the Gore in favour of cheaper free-grant lands of comparable quality, and only slightly further away from York, that were available in the neighbouring townships of Chinguacousy, Caledon, and Albion.²⁶ Consequently, the organization of the township was delayed for more than a decade and the rush of settlement only materialized after the provincial government had abandoned the free-grant system in favour of land sales.

The 1820 auction attracted only twenty-four men who submitted bids on less than one-third of the township's land.²⁷ Of these, only nine men actually settled, but eight of them became the nucleus for the township's permanent population. For the better part of a decade, they were the only settlers in the area. With the adoption of the sales policy in 1828, however, the township's lands were placed on an equal footing with those in neighbouring townships. As a consequence, the late 1820s and 1830s were marked by a rush of activity in the land market as legitimate settlers, government placemen, military claimants, and speculators

24. John Lynch, "Agricultural Report of the County of Peel, 1853", *Journal and Transactions of the Board of Agriculture of Upper Canada*, I (October 1855), pp. 349-51.
25. In this case I am following the "rate of population growth" criterion set out by Michael Conzen. The Gore's rate of population growth did not reverse until after 1851. Conzen, *Frontier Farming*, Appendix B.
26. A similar argument was posed by Leo Johnson to explain the slow growth of neighbouring Vaughan Township. Leo Johnson, "Land Policy, Population Growth and Social Structure in the Home District, 1793-1851", *Ontario History*, LXIII (1971), pp. 52-3. In 1825 Toronto Gore (12.0 per cent) lagged well behind both Albion (27.8 per cent) and Chinguacousy (30.9 per cent) in terms of the percentage of lands that actually were occupied. All three townships had been opened to settlers in the same year. *Ibid.*, p. 51n.
27. Memorial of Lieutenant-Colonel James Fitzgibbon, "Lands Sold in Toronto Gore, 19 January 1821", PAO, R.G. I, C-IV, Township Papers, Toronto Gore Township.



from York and the neighbouring townships all tried to stake their claims to the township's agricultural land. How many families actually took up residence during this period can not be determined with any certainty. The records for 1832 placed the township's population at 339.²⁸ By 1841, there were 1,145 people occupying 135 households; and by 1851, the population reached its maximum of 1,820 persons and 318 households. Households, however, do not necessarily equate with families. Only those families that became part of the township's permanent population can be identified with any certainty. They continued to enter the township throughout this period and it was almost mid century before the last of them had taken up residence.

Between 1828 and the late 1840s, ninety-four of these permanent families jointed the original eight families on the land (see Table 1). Not all began their tenure as landowners. Between one-quarter and two-fifths of those families arriving each decade started out as tenants on the lands of an absentee landowner. The one characteristic they all shared was their upward mobility. Their ambition was not only to own their farms, but also to add to their property as quickly as possible. By mid century, only twenty-two of the families still held tenant status, and two-thirds of those had been in the township for less than a decade. By the mid-1850s, virtually all had achieved the coveted status of landowner. More important, they were among the operators of the township's largest farms. In 1851, the permanent families worked farms that were almost twice the average size for the whole township (127 acres/69.6 acres) and, although they represented only about one-third of the farming population, they controlled almost three-fifths (58.7 per cent) of the agricultural land.²⁹

This permanent population was composed of a heterogeneous mixture of English, Irish, Scots, and native born. Although no single ethnic group formed a majority, settlers from Ireland (48.0 per cent) and England (42.2 per cent) headed nine of ten households (see Table 2). The popular image of the poor Irish immigrant found support, during the settlement phase, in a statistically significant association between ethnicity and land tenure patterns.³⁰ Little more than half the Irish householders (53.1 per cent) entered the township as proprietors, as compared to three in four members of other ethnic groups. A shortage of capital rather than a lack of ambition to become independent proprietors seems to have marked the early Irish settlers, since they quickly invested whatever capital they

28. Public Archives of Canada, Provincial Secretary's Papers, R.G. 5, B26, vols. 1-4.

29. These figures are computed from the land records for Toronto Gore and the published census returns. PAO, G.S. 3523-4, Abstract of Deeds, Toronto Gore Township, 1819-1958 (microfilm); Canada, *Census of Canada 1851-2* (Quebec, 1853), vol. 2, Table V.

30. See, for example, Jean Burnet, *Ethnic Groups in Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 22-4.

Table 1. *Select Summary Land Tenure Statistics for Permanent Families by Settlement Cohort*

	COHORT			
	1821	1831	1841	1851
Date of Settlement	1820	1821-30	1831-40	1841-50
Number of families	8	8	50	36
A. <i>Status at end of decade of entry:</i>				
Landowners (%)	100.0	75.0	62.0	61.1
Tenants (%)	0.0	25.0	38.0	38.9
Initial purchases by landowners:				
Total number of acres	1,219	916	3,287	1,871
Mean size of farm	156.1	152.7	106.0	85.0
Standard deviation	51.4	56.9	59.5	74.1
B. <i>Status in 1851:</i>				
Landowners (%)	100.0	100.0	84.0	61.1
Tenants (%)	0.0	0.0	16.0	38.9
Total number of acres held	1,185	1,093	5,778	2,113
Mean size of farm	148.1	136.6	137.6	96.1
Standard deviation	103.2	76.2	91.2	77.4
C. <i>Per cent change for those started out as land owners</i>	-5.1	-2.5	+21.8	+12.9
D. <i>Per cent change for whole cohort</i>	-5.1	+19.3	+75.8	+12.9

Source: PAO, Copy Books of Deeds, Toronto Gore Township, vol. 1, 1820-1858, GS. 3525, (microfilm).

could amass in land.³¹ By mid century, a sufficient proportion of the Irish born had entered the ranks of the landowning population (73.5 per cent) to wipe out any association between membership in a particular ethnic group and tenancy. Nevertheless, an initial lack of capital continued to plague many Irish families for

31. Contemporaries believed that the English were more likely to accept places as tenants because they preferred to invest their capital in improvements rather than land. Lynch, "Agricultural Report", p. 351. In fact, however, by the mid century, land was becoming so scarce and expensive in the township that most newcomers had to accept tenant status. In this same period, Irishmen seem to have by-passed the township in favour of areas where land was more readily available. Gagan and Mays, "Families and Land", p. 44.

Table 2. *Select Summary Land Tenure Statistics for Permanent Families by Birthplace*

	England	Ireland	Scotland	Canada	Other
<i>A. At time of entry:</i>					
Landowners (%)	76.7	53.1 ^a	71.4	100.0	100.0
Tenants (%)	23.3	46.9	28.6	0.0	0.0
Total number of acres owned	3,234	2,860	718	211	341
Mean size of farm	98.0	110.0	143.6	105.5	341
Standard deviation	64.5	55.4	71.0	146.4	—
<i>B. In 1851:</i>					
Landowners (%)	81.4	73.5 ^b	84.7	100.0	100.0
Tenants (%)	18.6	26.5	14.3	0.0	0.0
Total number of acres owned	4,699	4,324	593	211	341
Mean size of farm	134.3	120.1 ^c	98.8	105.5	341
Standard deviation	93.1	79.7	59.7	146.4	—
<i>C. Per cent change for those who started out as land owners</i>					
	+ 39.3	+ 17.2	-31.4	0.0	0.0
<i>D. Per cent change for all in group</i>					
	+ 45.3	+ 51.2	-17.4	0.0	0.0
N	43	49	7	2	1

Source: PAO, Copy Books of Deeds, Toronto Gore Township, vol. 1, 1820-1858, (microfilm); PAC, MS. Census of the Canadas, 1851-52, Agricultural Census, (microfilm).

^aIrish were more likely than English to enter as tenants rather than landowners. Significance levels: $p < .05$ ($\chi^2 = 4.77$). For Irish and non-Irish, significance level is: $p < .01$ ($\chi^2 = 6.67$). ^bNo statistically significant difference between Irish and rest of the population for land tenure. ^cIrish were more likely than other ethnic groups to fall below the median size of farm (116.8 acres). Significance level: $p < .001$ ($\chi^2 = 12.97$).

decades. The majority, even once they had acquired land, were more likely to occupy farms that fell below the median size for the area (116.8 acres). It was well into the second half of the century before intermarriage and prudent purchases had blunted even this distinction.

Since no nominal census or assessment roll survives for this township before 1852, it is difficult to assess what proportion of the population actually was composed of members of the permanent families. It is possible, however, to estimate the turnover of households. Directories were published for the area in 1837, 1846,

and 1850. From these directories, three components of the township's early population can be identified. The first group, of course, was comprised of householders related to the township's permanent families. That is to say, those families that remained in the area for more than one generation, long enough for their children to reach maturity and to succeed to the land (see Table 3). The second group was made up of "persistents" whose names appeared on two successive records, but disappeared from the township's rolls soon after. Finally there was a substantial, highly mobile, transient population (48.9-51.1 per cent) for whom the Gore provided a temporary residence for a few years at most.

As Table 3 illustrates clearly, the permanent households represented a substantial but growing minority of the population throughout the period 1837-50. By mid century, almost half the township's householders had forged links with this township that would continue, in one way or another, until the end of the century. The settling of brothers, sons, and other kinsmen on nearby farms meant that the total number of permanent households always exceeded the number of permanent families. By 1850, one in every ten households (10.9 per cent) was headed by the son, or a close relative, of one of the early settlers who had acquired his homestead before 1846.³²

Like the farmers in Heller and Moore's study of Kalamazoo, Michigan, they had arrived early and had not only acquired property, but sufficient property to ensure a comparatively high standard of living. In a word, so long as the opportunity for a stable farming experience remained within their grasp, there was no reason for them to leave. Binding them to the community, as well, was the prospect of being able to settle their kinsmen around them. In the second half of the

Table 3. *Permanence, Persistence and Transiency, 1837-1850*

	1837	1846	1850
Total number of households	178	268	296
Permanent households (%)	41.6	46.6	47.3
Persistent households (%)	9.5	2.3	—
Transient households (%)	48.9	51.1	—

Source: George Walton, *The City of Toronto and the Home District Commercial Directory with Almanack and Calendar for 1837* (Toronto, 1837); George Brown, *Brown's Toronto City and Home District Directory 1846-1847* (Toronto, 1846); Henry Rowsell, *Rowsell's City of Toronto and County of York Directory for 1850-1851* (Toronto, 1850).

32. Herbert J. Mays, "Families and Land in Toronto Gore Township, Peel County, Ontario, 1820-1890", (Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1979), p. 98.

FAMILIES, LAND AND PERMANENCE

nineteenth century, as agricultural opportunities in the area contracted markedly, it was the children of early settlers who were most likely to find acceptable places in the social and economic structure. Between 1850 and 1890, the importance of a kin relationship to an early settler was documented by the levels of persistence and transiency.

IV

After the mid century, both stability and instability continued to characterize the township's development (see Table 4). In each decade, approximately one-half of the township's householders were on the move (48.2-51.3 per cent). Although the absolute number of households declined by almost one-fifth between 1851 and 1890 (318 to 256), most of the migrants in any given decade were replaced by others who continued to search out opportunities in the area. At any point in time, between one-half and three-quarters of these new households were recruited from outside the township's borders. Joining these newcomers were the sons of the early settlers who had reached maturity and established their own independent households. Together, these two groups whose most obvious characteristic was their youthfulness seemed to constantly rejuvenate this society.³³ The net result of this constant in- and out-migration has been described in another context as a society that appeared "not half so raw, but certainly as 'new'" at the end of the 1880s as it had been at mid century.³⁴ Yet, although there is truth in this generalization, it ignores the importance of kinship in promoting permanence and stability in this community.

In fact, if the subsequent behaviour of the newcomers is any indication, the hoped for vocational and economic opportunities that drew them to the township

Table 4. *Transiency and Persistence Among Householders, 1852-1891*

Year	N	Population Stability During the Following Decade		Composition of the Population New Households		Persisted from last record %
		Transient %	Persistent %	Immigrants %	Sons %	
1852	318	51.3	48.7	44.6	14.2	41.2
1861	297	51.0	49.0	34.3	13.5	52.2
1871	276	48.2	51.8	35.1	12.0	52.9
1881	254	48.9	51.1	21.3	22.8	55.9
1891	256	—	—	39.1	10.6	46.5

33. Gagan and Mays, "Families and Land", p. 40.

34. *Ibid.*

never materialized. As shall be seen, there was little chance for the ambitious newcomer to acquire sufficient land to establish a stable economic existence in the Gore. Before ten years had elapsed, almost all would pull up stakes and move on.

The key to persistence in this community was a kin relationship to an early settler (see Table 5). In any given decade, more than 80 per cent of the surviving heads of the 102 families that had settled before 1846, or their kinsmen who had succeeded to the land, persisted. The only exception came during the 1880s when the first stirrings of the massive rural depopulation that characterized the final decades of the nineteenth century were being felt. Yet, even then, more than three-quarters of the members of the permanent families remained. By way of contrast, as time passed, more and more of the newcomers left. By the 1870s, almost 95 per cent were uprooting themselves within a decade.

The importance of early settlement and kinship can be demonstrated in quite another way. As might be expected, not only was kinship associated with persistence from one decade to another, but also with longevity in the township. Between 1852 and 1890, 826 *different* households containing more than four thousand people lived within the boundaries of this small township. One hundred and thirty-two of those households maintained a continuous residence in the area for twenty or more years (see Table 6). All of those households came from the ranks of early settlers and their children. Among those who appeared on the township rolls on only one occasion, better than four in five (85.1 per cent) had neither an early connection with the township nor any relatives among the early settlers.

Table 5. *Kinship and Persistence*

	1851	1861	1871	1881
A. Total number of households				
in the township	318	297	276	254
Per cent persistent	48.7	49.0	51.8	51.1
B. Number of householders				
related to an early settler	145	154	163	165
Per cent of all households	45.6	51.8	59.1	64.9
Per cent persistent	84.1	81.2	84.1	75.8
C. Number of householders not				
related to an early settler	173	143	113	89
Per cent of all households	54.4	48.1	40.9	35.0
Per cent persistent	19.1	14.6	5.4	5.6
D. Correlation between				
kinship and persistence				
[Phi (Φ) coefficient]	.65	.66	.77	.65
Significance	.001	.001	.001	.001

**Table 6. Minimum Number of Different Households
1852-1890**

	All householders		Proportion related to an early settler	
	N	%	N	%
A. Householders persisting for:				
40 years or more	11	1.3	11	100.0
30-39 years	43	5.2	43	100.0
20-29 years	78	9.4	78	100.0
10-19 years	196	23.7	80	40.8
less than 10 years	498	60.3	74	14.9
B. Total minimum number of households				
	826	100.0	286	34.6

V

Despite this striking association between kinship and the continued presence of individual households in the township, kinship by itself does not provide an adequate explanation. There was also a strong, albeit complicated, association between the ownership of land and persistence.³⁵ When, after 1850, the residents of the Gore were subjected to two different, but related, kinds of economic stress, the relationship between kinship and the ownership of land became crucial. In less than a decade, the township's residents began to feel the first effects of land and population pressure that were followed soon by a collapse in the land market. In a very real sense, these events amounted to a crisis that had profound implications for continued agricultural opportunity. As well, they had ramifications for the behaviour of the township's permanent families.

Often, land and population pressure are measured in terms of population density. In general, but particularly in the case of the Gore of Toronto, a population density measure poses both intellectual and practical problems. In the first place, population density reveals nothing about either the sex ratios or the age structure of the population. Not everyone was a prospective landowner. Real land pressure resulted from the demands of landless men in particular age groups. Secondly, a population density measure does not address the question of "how much land was enough?" Depending upon soil quality and other factors, the size of farm required for an acceptable standard of living might vary widely from area to area, even from individual to individual. These considerations are especially important in the case of Toronto Gore where the population actually declined

35. *Ibid.*

from 1,820 to 1,247 persons between 1852 and 1890. In other words, the population density fell from 60.7 persons per square mile at mid century to 41.6 forty years later.³⁶ Yet, during those same years, the township passed from a stage where agricultural opportunities, in the form of unalienated and unimproved acreages that could be converted into farmsites, were limited, to one in which they were virtually non-existent for all but the most fortunate. None of this is revealed by the population density measure.

A far better way of measuring land pressure and agricultural opportunity was provided several years ago by Don R. Leet.³⁷ His "Index of Economic Stress" is based upon two assumptions: that all young men in the community aspired to become agriculturalists, and that the "how much land was enough" issue can be approximated by taking the average number of improved acres per farm. Despite the obvious problems inherent in these assumptions, in the absence of a direct measure of economic stress, Leet's technique remains as good as any, and better than most of the indirect measures.

Table 7 presents a modified form of Leet's calculation of economic stress. The number of deaths has been calculated from cemetery records rather than approximated from life tables. Males from fifteen to thirty years of age have been used rather than fifteen to twenty-five, as Leet suggests, because young men in this township purchased land at an average age of thirty. Finally, unlike Leet's calculations, the table presented here allows for a small woodlot for each farm, based on the average size of woodlot in the township in 1890.

The results of this analysis demonstrate clearly that agricultural opportunities became fewer as time passed despite the declining population. During the 1850s, the township was able to provide places for more than half (52.6 per cent) of its young landless men. A decade later, the problem of finding places had reached crisis proportions. Less than one young man in four (22.6 per cent) could hope to fulfil any aspiration he might have had to become a farmer. Thereafter the situation worsened.

One effect of this economic stress was to drive land prices unrelentingly upward. As well, the land market responded to short-term fluctuations in local and international markets. Graph 1 illustrates changes in the local land market between 1831 and 1891 by focusing on the average selling price of land. The general upward trend in land prices is shown clearly. Obvious, as well, is the short-term impact of the expansion of the staples trade during the early 1850s as exports grew to meet the demands of new markets created by the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 and the Crimean War. Also depicted is the disastrous collapse of the land market in the late 1850s following the failure of the wheat market and the onset of the

36. Canada, *Census of Canada 1851-2* (Quebec, 1853), vol. 1, Table I; Canada, *Census of Canada 1891* (Ottawa, 1893), vol. 1, Table II.

37. Don R. Leet, "Human Fertility and Agricultural Opportunities in Ohio Counties: From Frontier to Maturity, 1810-1860", in David C. Klingaman and Richard K. Vedder, eds., *Essays in Nineteenth Century Economic History. The Old Northwest* (Athens, Ohio, 1975), pp. 145-8

Table 7. *Indices of Economic Stress, 1851-1890*

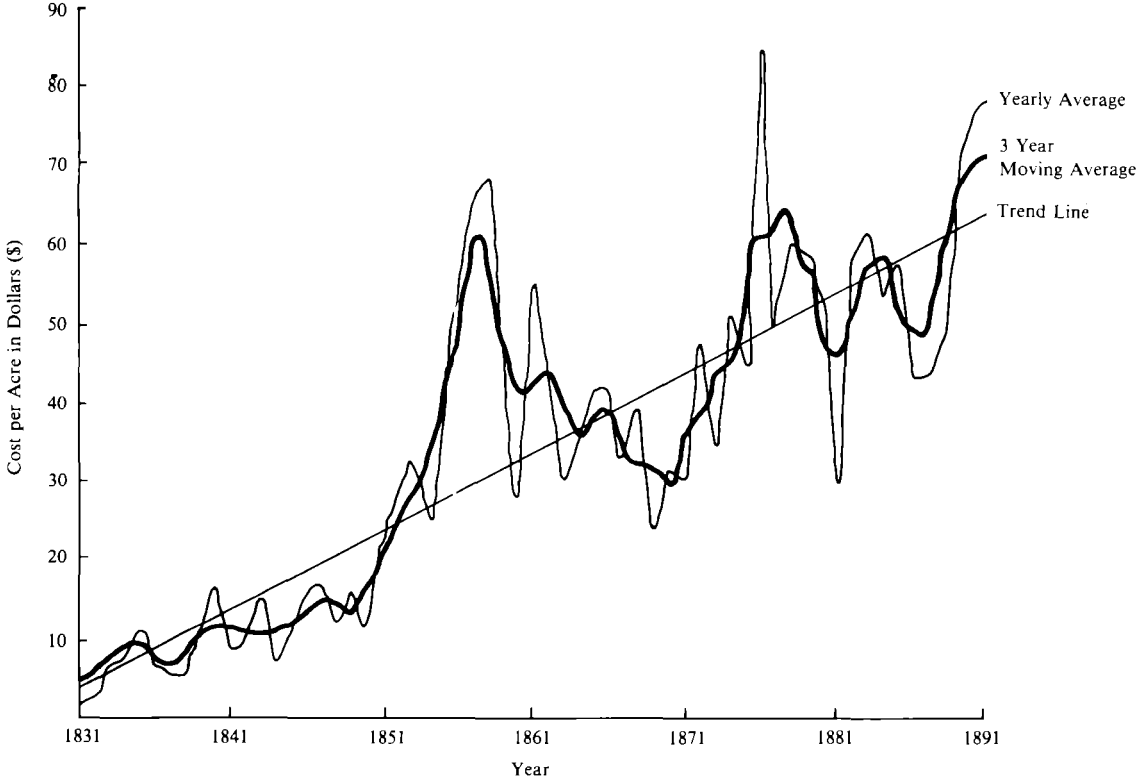
	1851-60	1861-70	1871-80	1881-90
A. <i>Number of farm sites freed by death of occupiers</i>	13	10	13	17
B. <i>Farm sites not yet developed:</i>				
1. Cultivable land (acres)	17,835	17,835	17,835	17,835
2. Improved land at beginning of decade	11,389	13,664	16,467	16,322
3. Cultivable land not in use [B1 - B2]	6,446	4,171	1,368	1,513
4. Average number of improved acres per farm	45.7	79.0	84.4	82.9
5. Farm sites undeveloped [B3 ÷ B4]	141	53	16	18
C. <i>Total farm sites available</i> [A + B5]	154	63	29	35
D. <i>Males 15-30 years of age in the township</i>	293	279	222	208
E. <i>Economic Stress</i>				
1. Excess demand for farms [D - C]	139	216	193	173
2. Per cent of demanders not satisfied [(E1 ÷ D) X 100%]	47.4	77.4	86.9	83.2

Source: Adapted from Don R. Leet, "Human Fertility and Agricultural Opportunities in Ohio Counties: From Frontier to Maturity, 1810-1860", in David C. Klingaman and R.K. Vedden, eds., *Nineteenth Century Economic History. The Old Northwest* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975), p. 147.

depression in 1857. The trends shown here are virtually identical to those identified by David Gagan in his examination of the crisis in Canada West during the late 1850s and early 1860s.³⁸ As Gagan has argued, the behaviour of the land

38. Gagan, "Land, Population and Social Change", p. 300.

Graph 1: Toronto Gore Land Values, 1831-1891



market during these years had a profound effect on the farmers of Canada West. Land, whether it was purchased for speculative purposes, to provide a patrimony for children, or to improve a standard of living, had become a risky investment.³⁹ The farmer's *expectation* that his capital, in the form of land, would multiply was shaken in two ways. First, the wild fluctuations that are evident in the yearly curve suggest that any investment in land was a risky business. Secondly, even if the farmer recognized that over the long haul land prices were moving upward, he also realized that those increases were relatively small. The anticipation of a rapid increase in capital that had informed his early actions was gone forever.

It was under these conditions that newcomers and the sons of permanent families were forced to establish their independence; it was in the face of these conditions, as well, that the first generation of settlers had to determine how they would transfer their property to their children.

The subsequent behaviour of the agricultural population suggests that the ownership of land was the key to continued residence in the township. Some places in the community were created for either newcomers or sons by the movement of successive waves of transients. As it happened, however, most of those places were in the tenant population.⁴⁰ A young man might be willing to accept tenant status temporarily but, if he could not acquire land within a reasonable period of time, he was likely to leave. This was no less true for the sons of the permanent families. Better than two-fifths (43.5 per cent) of the second and third generations began their independent economic life as tenant on the lands of their parents, relatives who had left the community, or other absentee landowners.⁴¹ But, after 1860, less than one in ten remained in the area if he had not reached the status of owner-occupier within the decade.⁴²

Since the aging of the permanent population ensured that more land would become available as time passed, some sons were willing to wait for their patrimony. At the same time, however, they must have realized that there was an upper limit on how many farms the township could support. Family land could not be subdivided indefinitely without seriously affecting its productivity and profitability.⁴³ Many, therefore, had to look for opportunities to purchase land from neighbours. Their inability to acquire that land, as well as their impatience, is documented in the increasing portion of sons who abandoned the township after a few years as a tenant farmer. Those who stuck it out invariably were successful in obtaining land, but most had to await their father's death and the subdivision of the estate.

Across the whole timespan, the family remained the principal source of land for sons, either through direct sales, early inheritance, or the division of estates

39. *Ibid.*

40. This replacement is discussed at length in Mays, "Families and Land", chap. 4.

41. In the second half of the century, much of the absentee-held land was in the hands of relatives of the permanent families. They had either lived briefly in the township or had inherited the property.

42. Mays, "Families and Land", Table 6-2.

43. Cf. Easterlin, "Factors in the Decline of Farm Fertility", p. 613.

following the death of the head of household (see Table 8). What changed over time was not the family's role in supplying land, or the means to acquire it, but the way in which it was transferred. For the older generation, the decision to sell land to children, or to support their efforts to buy land from outside the family, involved risks. It could place in jeopardy both their own old age security and their ability to provide equally for other members of the family.

Table 8 records two general but inter-related trends in patterns of land acquisition for sons. Between the 1840s and 1880s, direct sales to sons declined significantly. At the same time, inheritance became increasingly important. These changes were related almost solely to the aging of the permanent population and were reflected, as well, in the decline in the proportion of sons who were required to assume obligations with the purchase of land.

At mid century, most of the men who had settled in the township during the 1830s and 1840s were still relatively young. Their desire to provide places in the township for their sons had to be balanced against the necessity of providing for their own old age, and later meeting their obligations to other children. Consequently, when a son was provided with early inheritance, he was required to

Table 8. *Sources of Land For Second and Third Generation Landowners*

	1841-50	1851-60	1861-70	1871-80	1881-90
1. Number of sons becoming landowners for the first time	22	37	28	24	22
2. Percentage acquiring land from:					
(a) relatives	54.5 ^a	40.5	35.7 ^b	8.3 ^c	31.8 ^d
(b) inheritance	9.1 ^e	32.4 ^f	42.8	50.0 ^g	36.4
(c) outside the family	36.4	27.2	21.4	41.6	31.8
3. Acquired land with some form of family help (%)	63.6	72.8	78.6	58.4	68.2
4. Sons making purchases from parents:					
(a) Number	20	19	17	19	13
(b) Mean size of purchase	75.8	75.3	71.0	74.2	89.2
Standard deviation	44.1	63.3	30.2	46.3	53.4
(c) Per cent paying less than the average selling price per acre of land.	56.2	16.5 ^h	52.9 ⁱ	63.6	76.9 ^j
5. Obligations attached to the purchase of land (%)	30.0	26.4	23.5	10.5	30.8

Differences significant at $p < .05$ = b-c, c-e, e-f, h-i; $p < .01$ = e-f, h-j, $p < .001$ = a-c.

assume obligations to care for his parents in their old age, as well as to furnish the capital that his brothers and sisters would need to establish their own independence. In most cases, protection in the form of a performance bond was built into the agreement to ensure that there would be no default on these obligations. This device became a principal means by which property was passed from one generation to another. In times of great economic stress, it enabled farmers to sell land to their sons at below market value since the real value of the property would be reflected in payments that would have to be made later. Even more important, it ensured the protection of the productivity and profitability of the family farm which, after all, was the basis of the family's security and status.

Virtually all members of the permanent population, regardless of their ethnic origins, made use of this system (see Table 9). Sons usually acquired land at about age thirty, and the farm they purchased represented all, or almost all, of the family's holding. Their parents either retained a few acres to ensure that they would have some independence in their old age, or sold the farm in its entirety and retired to one of the nearby towns of Brampton, Bolton or Mono Mills. The only difference between the English and Irish appears to have been the age at which they furnished land to their sons. The fact that Irish sons often received smaller farms was more a function of the slightly smaller holdings among the Irish population than any differences in practice.

These same concerns and practices also were carried over into the final act of each head of household's economic life, the writing of his will. Each testator had the choice of dividing his property equally among all his heirs (partible inheritance), leaving everything to a single heir (impartible inheritance), or adopting what A.R.M. Lower once misnamed the "English-Canadian" system of inheritance.⁴⁴ The Canadian system involved leaving property to one, or at most two heirs, and then requiring them to pay bequests to anyone else who had a claim on the estate, in short, a system identical to the practices that had been adopted by many of those who had given their children early inheritance.

The principal factors influencing what kind of will would be drawn up were the family's economic position and the number of sons for whom provision had to be made. Those with real estate and a large number of sons were more likely to adopt the Canadian system since it would protect the farm while ensuring that each of the children received his fair share, if not in land then in the form of a bequest that could help to finance his independence.

From Table 10, it is clear that the Canadian type of will was favoured by the foreign born, those who had settled early, and members of permanent families. The membership of these categories was virtually identical. It also is clear that the Old World concern for property was very much in the minds of the first generation. Nevertheless, there was no cultural carry-over in terms of the retention of so-called traditional patterns of inheritance. Regardless of whether their background was English or Irish, members of the first generation demonstrated

44. Lower, *Canadians in the Making*, pp. 336-7.

Table 9. Mean Age and Size of Purchase for Sons Acquiring Land from Parents by Ethnic Group and Birthplace, 1851-1891

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
1. <i>Whole Population:</i>					
Mean age when land acquired	29.9	29.9	29.9	32.2	31.8
Standard deviation	7.3	7.6	6.8	9.4	8.6
Mean size of holding	118.4	92.1	113.3	103.6	113.5
Standard deviation	73.6	37.4	54.8	56.4	56.4
2. <i>Ethnicity:</i>					
(a) Mean age					
English	28.5	31.8	31.9 ^a	33.6	32.0
Irish	30.8	28.9	27.7 ^b	30.5	32.1
(b) Mean size of holding					
English	137.9 ^c	110.0 ^e	124.2 ^g	108.7	118.0
Irish	109.3 ^d	73.9 ^f	91.1 ^h	93.0	114.9
3. <i>Birthplace:</i>					
(a) Mean age					
Native born	—†	27.5	28.2	29.9	—
Foreign born	—	33.6	34.1	35.5	—
(b) Mean size of holding					
Native born	—	85.3	122.1 ⁱ	85.8 ^k	—
Foreign born	—	96.3	85.7 ^j	118.0 ^l	—
<i>N for each category:</i>					
All	19	26	29	25	20
English	9	8	13	17	12
Irish	9	16	13	9	7
Native born	0	10	22	15	20

Note: This table includes only those land transfers of more than five acres. †In 1851 and 1891, there were either no native or foreign born sons. t-ratios for differences in means were significant at: $p < .05$, 1 tail = c-d, $p < .01$, 1 tail = a-b, k-l; $p < .01$, 2 tails = e-f, g-h, i-j.

the same concern in drawing up their wills — to protect the land. Hence the Canadian system was merely a variation of a well-used device that was designed to protect the family's place in the community. For those who had adopted early inheritance, a resort to the Canadian system was not necessary. They simply chose partible or impartible inheritance to dispose of their remaining wealth.

Table 10. *Percentage Distribution of Testators by Type of Will Written, for Select Variables, 1832-1900*

		Impartible type	Partible type	Canadian type
1. <i>No of testators</i>		29	50	66
Per cent		20.0	34.5	45.5
2. <i>Per cent of testators for each type of will who had:</i>				
i. Personal property ^a		72.4	56.0	54.5
ii. Real estate in Toronto Gore ^b		13.8	36.0	93.9
iii. Land outside the township ^c		31.0	72.0	45.5
iv. Both personal property and real estate ^d		37.9	46.0	45.5
v. Real estate only ^e		17.3	32.0	54.5
vi. Personal property only ^f		44.8	22.0	0.0
3. <i>Percentage distribution of testators by type of will:</i>	(N)			
i. Birthplace: ^g				
Native born	(13)	38.5	53.8	7.7
Foreign born	(110)	34.5	10.9	54.5
ii. Ethnic origins: ^h				
English	(51)	5.9	39.2	54.9
Irish	(46)	10.9	34.8	54.4
iii. Settlement cohort: ⁱ				
Before 1850	(103)	13.6	35.0	51.5
After 1850	(42)	35.7	33.3	31.0
iv. Permanence: ^j				
Permanent family	(106)	14.2	34.9	50.9
Non-permanent	(39)	35.9	33.3	30.8

Significance levels:^a $p < .05$ ($X^2 = 6.0$);^b $p < .001$ ($X^2 = 66.31$);^c $p < .001$ ($X^2 = 14.2$);^dnot significant ($p > .05$);^e $p < .01$ ($X^2 = 13.6$);^f $p < .001$ ($X^2 = 30.9$);^g $p < .001$ ($X^2 = 19.6$);^hnot significant ($p > .05$);ⁱ $p < .01$ ($X^2 = 10.9$);^j $p < .01$ ($X^2 = 9.4$).

VI

Evidence that these land transfer practices worked, if that was their intention, is found in the persistence rates of members of the second and third generations. There was, of course, a social cost attached to these practices — the migration of a number of children for whom there was no place in the community. But there can be no doubt that family, and the role of the family as a principal source of land, promoted a high level of stability in this community. It is clear, as well, that the roots of that stability were to be found in the settlement process itself.

Children in Toronto Gore grew up in an environment where they were surrounded not only by family members, but where their neighbours were brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and in-laws of various degrees. It was only natural, therefore, that as they reached maturity some would aspire to settle nearby, and would seek marriage partners among neighbours who were similarly inclined. Even when kinsmen moved on, as they did with some regularity, their moving had little effect on the stability of this community. By 1891, there were few members of this society who could travel five miles in any direction without encountering at least a half dozen people to whom they were related (see Map 2).⁴⁵ Equally, there were few who could look to any agricultural organization, church, or institution of local government where their relatives, long-standing neighbours, or the relatives of those neighbours were not involved.

Obviously, kinship provided individuals with a strong emotional tie to the area and, hence, a propensity to persist. But emotional ties, alone, were not sufficient to account for the stability that characterized this township. The other factor binding individuals to this community was the opportunity to fulfil their economic aspirations. In a word, this meant the acquisition of land. Early settlement enabled the first generation to acquire comparatively large farms which serviced expanding markets at York/Toronto. Later, in the face of considerable economic stress, the adoption of particular practices of inheritance ensured that at least some of their children could not only acquire land, but also aspire realistically to the good life. At the same time, obligations to other children were met by providing them with the capital needed to seek their places elsewhere. In the process, the first generation also determined that in this township, at least, a high degree of stability would be maintained throughout much of the nineteenth century in the midst of continuous motion.

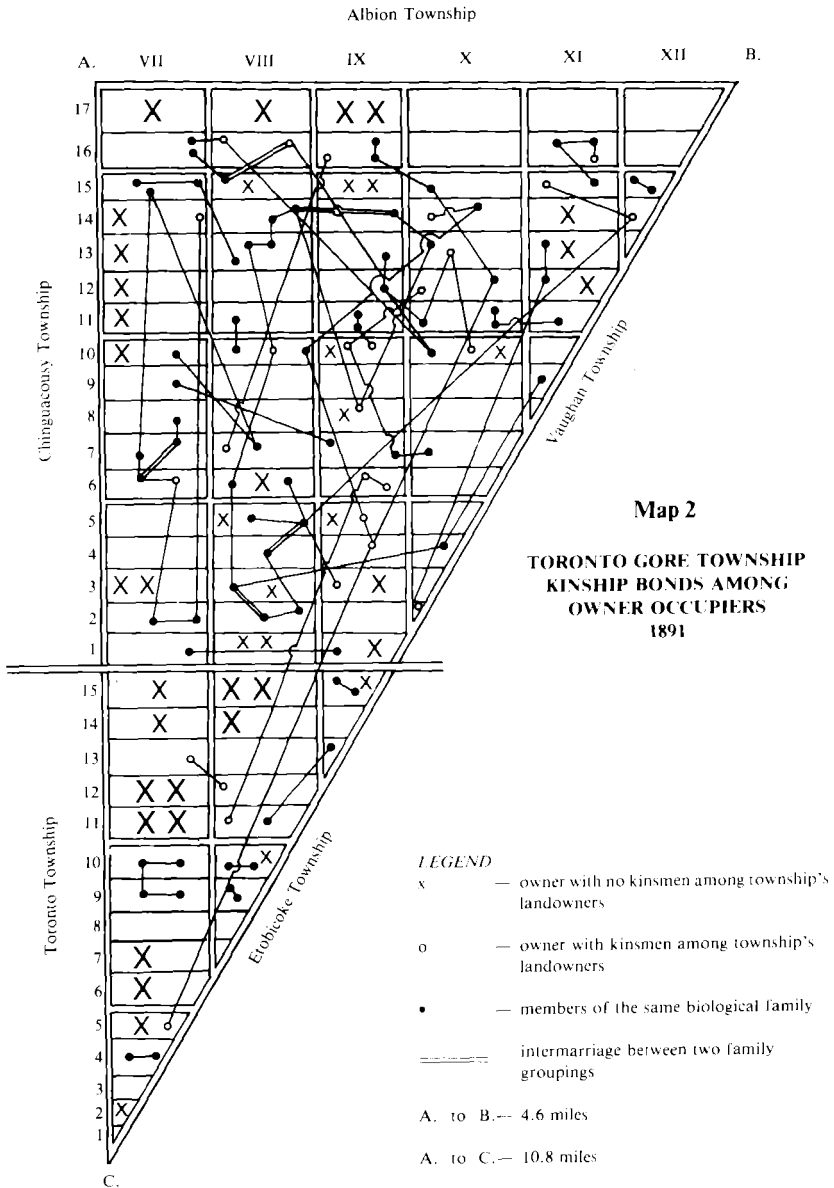
APPENDIX

A Note on Family Reconstitution and Record Linkage

This study was based upon a series of family files generated from land, census, assessment, probate, parish, and genealogical records. The starting point for the construction of these files was a collection of genealogies and family records compiled for prominent Peel County families by the Toronto lawyer and amateur historian, Perkins Bull. The Perkins Bull Collection, created during the 1930s, is housed at the Public Archives of Ontario and the Victoria College Archives. In

45. Map 2 depicts kinship bonds among *only* those householders who were part of the landowning population in 1891. As a consequence, it represents only a *conservative* estimate of the temporal and spatial dimensions of permanence. It should be noted, as well, that these kinship bonds extended beyond the boundaries of the Gore into the neighbouring townships of Peel and York counties. The social and economic horizons of the township's permanent families were not circumscribed by lines drawn on a surveyor's map. Rather, they extended throughout the Humber Valley watershed.

FAMILIES, LAND AND PERMANENCE



addition to genealogies, it contains excerpts from family bibles, newspaper cuttings, transcripts of cemetery registers, and parts of an unpublished manuscript on the history of Toronto Gore's families written by a descendent of one of the early settlers, William Porter. Of the more than two hundred families for which the Bull Collection provided information, approximately thirty were from Toronto Gore. All were still residents of the township in the twentieth century. The accuracy of these records was checked employing two techniques developed by the growing schools of demographic and social history in Europe, the United States, and Canada: family reconstitution and record linkage.

The technique of family reconstitution involves the "bringing together of scattered information about the members of a family to enable its chief demographic characteristics to be described as fully as possible."⁴⁶ Vital statistics registers, land records, assessment rolls, and probate documents record not only social and economic events involving individuals but, in the case where two or more family members were involved, they also identify family relationships. For example, the assessment rolls for the township identified farmer's sons living on the same or adjacent property.

Essential to the process of reconstitution is record linkage. Stated in its simplest terms, record linkage involves the comparison of key items on two or more documents (such as name, sex, age, occupation, religion, birthplace, and marital status) in order to establish whether the documents refer to the same individual. How many items are sufficient to establish an identification, and the relative weight that should be given to each item, is an arbitrary decision made by the researcher. The process is complicated by misspellings, the transposition of letters, misreporting of ages, and changes in occupational, religious, and marital status. For example, the Aikins family of Toronto Gore was variously reported as the "Aikins", "Aitkins", or "Eakins" family. Only some familiarity with the historical experience of this, and other families, permitted the linking together of its records. In a word, record linkage involves probability statements that two documents refer to the same individual.

The Peel County History Project, with which this study was associated, employed an automated Soundex record linkage programme that was developed by Ian Winchester for Michael Katz's Canadian Social History Project.⁴⁷ The results of this linkage were then checked manually. Since this programme was not available at the time this study began, the linkages for Toronto Gore were performed manually from the outset. There is no reason to suppose, however, that they should be any less accurate than those made by an automated procedure using the same principles.

46. An excellent introduction to the technique of family reconstitution is provided in E.A. Wrigley, ed., *An Introduction to English Historical Demography* (New York, 1965), chap. 4.

47. A brief description of the automated Soundex record linkage programme used by the Peel County History Project is found in Gagan, "Geographical and Social Mobility", pp. 162-3.

FAMILIES, LAND AND PERMANENCE

The creation of multivariate data sets that would permit a description of the family at points in time as well as the identification of continuity and change was accomplished by focusing on the 1851 census. Links were made backwards to family files created from the Bull Collection, the Township Papers, directories, and parish registers at the Public Archives of Ontario. Once it had been established through comparisons with directories and other records that there was no significant under-enumeration on the census returns, linkages were made forward by adding the 1861 and 1871 census and the assessment rolls for 1881 and 1891. This process corrected inaccuracies in the records for the thirty families contained in the Bull Collection, as well as adding an additional seventy-two families, all present in 1851, to the "permanent" population. Many of these additional families either had left the township before Bull's researchers began their inquiries or had been subsumed by an ongoing process of intermarriage. It is the experience of these families, compared to the larger population, that forms the basis for this study.