

Communications and Urban Systems in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada

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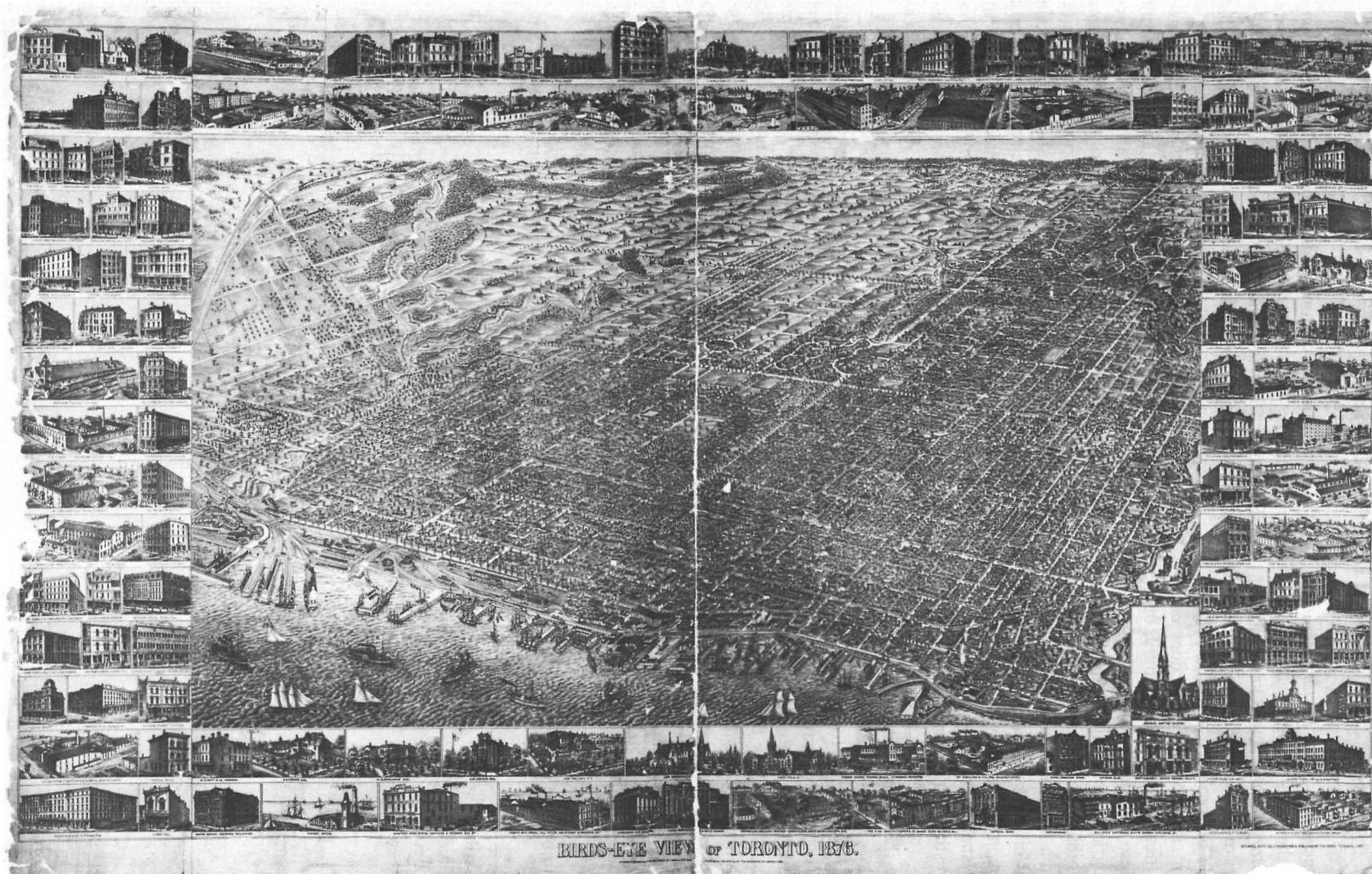
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Article abstract

In presenting the results of an analysis of the non-local economic content of the major newspapers published in British North America in 1845 and 1855, this paper offers support for the contention that public communications in the colonies were organized principally so as to secure privileged access to international sources of information, especially from Britain and the United States. The ties linking major colonial cities with international networks were well established by 1845 and preceded the effective organization of communications within the colonies. In 1855, by which time the telegraph was widely available, the importance of American sources of information had increased. By this date there was evidence that at least in Canada West regional communications and markets were becoming better organized. The paper argues that nineteenth-century British American urban communications be approached from the viewpoint of their participation in international rather than exclusively colonial or regional systems.



Bird's-eye view of Toronto, 1876.

SOURCE: National Map Collection,
Public Archives of Canada.
NMC 17628

Vue à vol d'oiseau de Toronto, 1876.

SOURCE: Collection nationale de
cartes et plans, Archives publiques
du Canada. NMC 17628.

Articles

Communications and Urban Systems in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada

Peter G. Goheen

Résumé/Abstract

A partir des résultats d'une analyse du contenu économique exogène des principaux quotidiens publiés en Amérique du Nord britannique en 1845 et en 1855, cet article soutient la thèse selon laquelle les communications publiques dans les colonies sont principalement organisées de manière à permettre un accès privilégié aux sources internationales d'information, en provenance surtout de la Grande-Bretagne et des États-Unis. Dès 1845, les liens qui unissent les principales villes coloniales aux réseaux internationaux sont bien établis, et leur constitution a en fait précédé l'organisation des communications à l'intérieur même des colonies. En 1855, le télégraphe est devenu un mode de communication répandu et les sources américaines d'information ont gagné de l'importance. A cette date, des indices permettent de conclure qu'au moins dans l'ouest du Canada, les communications et les marchés commencent à mieux s'organiser à l'échelle régionale. L'auteur estime qu'il faut étudier les communications urbaines de l'Amérique britannique au dix-neuvième siècle, dans la perspective de leurs liens avec les réseaux internationaux plutôt qu'exclusivement sous l'angle des réseaux coloniaux ou régionaux.

In presenting the results of an analysis of the non-local economic content of the major newspapers published in British North America in 1845 and 1855, this paper offers support for the contention that public communications in the colonies were organized principally so as to secure privileged access to international sources of information, especially from Britain and the United States. The ties linking major colonial cities with international networks were well established by 1845 and preceded the effective organization of communications within the colonies. In 1855, by which time the telegraph was widely available, the importance of American sources of information had increased. By this date there was evidence that at least in Canada West regional communications and markets were becoming better organized. The paper argues that nineteenth-century British American urban communications be approached from the viewpoint of their participation in international rather than exclusively colonial or regional systems.

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Our literature is rich with grand assumptions about communications in nineteenth-century Canada, but our systematic knowledge of how they were organized is limited. The necessity of organizing the transmission of information over long distances implies the idea of a communications system, however detailed or articulated. That cities are the fulcrum of these systems has been acknowledged. A systematic assessment of the structure and content of communications flows among the major urban centres of British North America in the nineteenth century has not yet

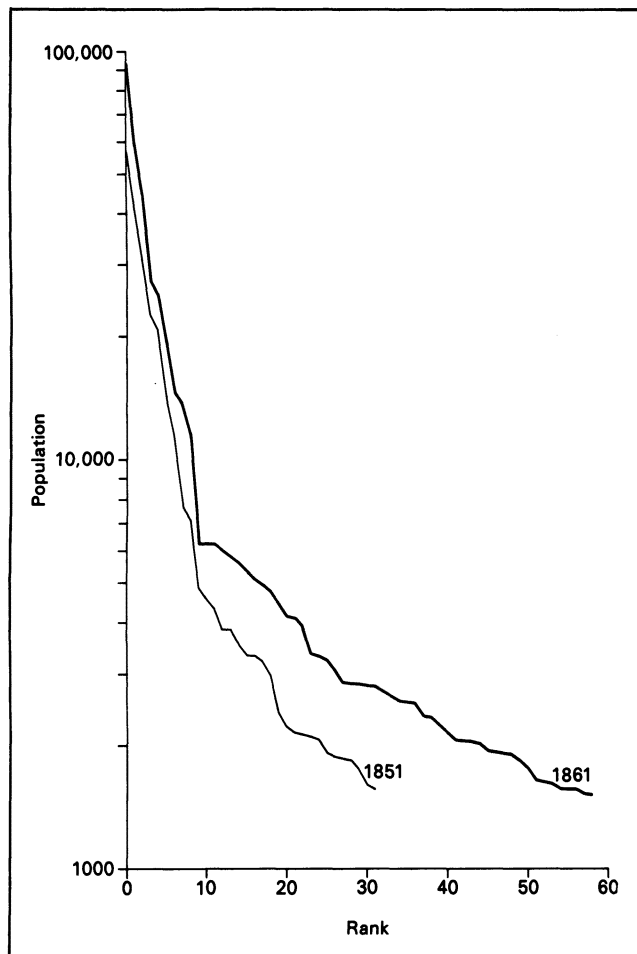


FIGURE 1. Rank-size Distributions of Towns over 1500 Population in British North America.

been contributed. It has seemed reasonable to assert that those cities which rose to metropolitan rank did so through their ability to control communications and trade with growing hinterlands, while less successful places tried or succeeded more modestly.¹ That a distinctly Canadian communications system characterized the British North American colonies has been maintained with great vigour. It has been declared to be a "system . . . which lasted as the dominant economic form for two centuries of Canadian history," an idea more recently recast as "an emerging central Canadian metropolitan system . . . to organize British North American hinterlands into a separate continental unit."² The argument has become entrenched. Restatements rely effortlessly on similar geopolitical assumptions, the literature containing propositions such as those proposing that Montreal possessed a "natural hinterland" and that Upper Canada after mid-century constituted an identifiable "urban system."³ In this paper communications among the major cities and towns of the colonies during the middle decades of the nineteenth century will be examined by undertaking a content analysis of leading newspapers in 1845 and 1855. By measuring the availability in several cities of published information about other places such basic questions of com-

munications as what is being said to whom and through what channels can be discovered.⁴ What, in particular, were the sources of public information available in the more important urban centres just prior to and after the arrival of the telegraph and the railroad? How did the pattern of information circulation change during a significant decade?

Communications among cities during this period developed in the context of urbanization, a process which implies changing relations among cities and their societies. When, as in nineteenth-century North America, it accompanies the expansion of settlement, it is marked by significant increases in the number and population size of cities. In these decades growth was most pronounced in the addition of new urban places to the lower ranks of settlements, with stability among the higher ranking centres (see Figure 1). In such conditions the role of cities as central places and the territorial imprint of their influence change through the growth of a web of communications among the growing number of centres. To consider towns in their relation to each other through this network of communications is to treat them as a system. The idea of a system focuses on coordination, communication and interdependence among the interacting elements within a territorial framework defined by the pattern and structure of the interactions. The whole functions in a distinctive manner, and not as the sum of its parts taken individually. Allan Pred has defined an urban system as

a set of cities which are interdependent in such a way that any significant change in the economic activities, occupational structure, total income or population of one member city will directly or indirectly bring about an alteration in . . . one or more other set members.⁵

The application of the logic of systems to the study of ties among cities during periods of urbanization follows logically from Philip Abrams's remark that cities are "implicated in a nodal manner in these larger systems" no matter the context of their influence, be it economic, social or political.⁶ This approach to urbanization has been termed "structural" because the activities which give rise to it are those that "require the appearance of coordinators (social positions devoted to coordinating large-scale activities . . .), communications lines (to permit coordinators to carry out this work) and cross-cutting relationships (social relationships that cross the boundaries of kinship, locality and traditional alliances)."⁷

Communications express the movement across time and space of information, in whatever form and through whatever medium, which it is in the mutual interest of sender and receiver to exchange. Their coordination requires centralized agencies to assure their effective collection and diffusion, especially when great distances must be bridged by complex connections among many places. The institutions undertaking this task will achieve their greatest comparative

advantage by maximizing their accessibility to sources and markets. This advantage is locationally specific, so that communications systems focus on cities. They function within technological constraints as to the mode, speed and cost of their operation. Under conditions such as pertained during the nineteenth century, when access to information was relatively constrained by the cost of its acquisition and transmission, a few locations possessed great advantages of access to information. Communications were organized hierarchically under such circumstances and they relied on, and indeed helped engender, urban systems.

Communications is a broad concept. Communications exist in many forms. To generalize from the mass of specific messages in which it is manifested requires an unambiguous measure of information that will be capable of representing abstractly the principal qualities of the system. These include the spatial organization of information flows and the time required for their transmission. Information can be considered to represent a generalized measure of economic value, so that "the flow of information in a social unit has many of the same properties as the flow of economic values."⁸ Geographers and social scientists studying the nineteenth century have examined numerous proxies for it. Transportation links have been an obvious choice, representing as they do specific channels for communication and implying the way they were used.⁹ The town's potential for interaction within a network is no guarantee that maximum benefit will be achieved, however. The acquisition of new transport connections has been demonstrated to be insufficient to guarantee a town's growth.¹⁰ The design of a transport system does not determine the way it will function. A useful and reliable index is one that measures flows directly. Michael Conzen analyzed bank correspondent linkages, charting the organization of the urban system in the United States at its most integrated levels.¹¹ This is a splendid principle of articulation at the pinnacles of the hierarchy, but it relies on a pre-established coherent organization of national markets which cannot be assumed to have existed in nineteenth-century British North America. Pred adopts many measures, including notably newspaper datelines, postal and trade networks.¹² Measurement and synthesis become almost insurmountable obstacles to generalization across time and space because of the large number of somewhat different measures he used. The value of examining a single, unambiguous and broadly available source over the entire duration of a study is large.

Newspapers were published in every commercial centre of importance and in many aspiring to the status in British North America. By the 1840s they were crucial to the economic life of the colonies. They provided "the only regular pretelegraphic communications medium through which news of distant origin could be made locally available in the form of public information."¹³ Bi-weekly and tri-weekly editions superseded weekly publications in the major centres while in Montreal the *Gazette* and *Herald* were appearing in daily editions during the summer months of heightened business

activity. The number of papers published increased at a reckless pace, and many survived only a short time in an environment of unrestrained competition. As significant as the increase in the number of papers was the appearance of dailies in the largest centres and even in some of the smaller cities of Upper Canada.

The arrival of the telegraph meanwhile quickened the pace with which information, once received, could be dispatched to any point on the lines. Cities at the termini of lines had a clear advantage of access to the wires, especially in the early years when only a few wires, and hence few simultaneous messages, connected major centres. Intermediate points waited their turn to use the system. Communicating by wire remained expensive, and in 1855 only the most vital economic and political messages were relayed, and in the most abbreviated form possible. Summaries of prices in major markets were the most regularly printed telegraphic items, with international political stories appearing more irregularly.

The allocation of the content revealed the newspaper's market. In the era before mass literacy would make possible the appearance of the popular daily the press's audience was limited to the business community and the social and political elite, usually not mutually exclusive groups. Editors reported and commented on politics with gusto and partisan passion. This was, in the years under study here, page 2 news, together with occasional social comment. In the middle decades of the century the majority of the paper was devoted to economic content. This coverage was often awarded top priority, editors frequently delaying the publication of other material if the volume of economic material, editorial or advertising, demanded it. The editorial content included, in addition to bulletins on prices in major markets, such other material as crop prospects, weather reports during growing seasons, harbour traffic, shipping intelligence, and trade reports from those regions of interest and importance to the local business community. Considering the total of economic items, advertising claimed much the greater share. In the then universal 4-page layout it was not unusual for all of page 1 to be devoted to advertisements, and standard for page 4 to be entirely claimed by paid copy. Advertising columns displayed notices for transportation services and schedules, the professions, commission merchants, manufacturers, importers, warehouses, wholesalers, and business services of every description, together with a few notices directed to a select retail clientele. From a count of lines of information printed in newspapers in Toronto and Montreal in 1849, Paul Rutherford has calculated that from 39 to 54 per cent of the content was devoted to advertising.¹⁴ Many advertisements were placed directly by firms in distant centres wishing to compete for local business; other notices were placed by agents identifying the companies on whose behalf they solicited customers from the readership of the paper.

The aim here is to analyze the contents of leading newspapers in every major urban centre where at least a semi-weekly edition was published in 1845 and 1855 (see Table 1). Weeklies were excluded from the study; a selection was read and their editorial content discovered to reflect directly what was available from the more frequently issued regional papers published to which they had access. Not only was their news more dated than that appearing in semi-weeklies but they carried little of the more current market information to be found in the semi-weeklies. Furthermore, evidence available from the major papers suggests that their editions circulated at least among the businessmen of many smaller towns where weeklies were issued.¹⁵ A problem limiting the

completeness of any survey of newspapers at this date arises because many of the papers published have not survived. Where only a few issues of a semi-weekly are extant it has been impossible to establish the representativeness of the few remaining issues, and these publications have necessarily been excluded from the list of those read.¹⁶ The French-language press was less fully developed than the English, and semi-weeklies were published only in Montreal.

Content analysis is a method for noting what symbols are used in available bodies of text where "enough attention is paid to the procedures of observation to make the operation replicable," and to develop "quantitative measures that are reasonably independent of the subjectivity of the observer."¹⁷ Its requirements, as outlined by Ole Holsti, are objectivity, system and generality. Objectivity involves explicitly formulating rules and procedures; system implies consistently applied rules to govern the inclusion or exclusion of content or categories; generality refers to the theoretical relevance of the findings.¹⁸ The symbols which it is designed to analyze are flows of words treated as expressions of attitudes: "content analysis operates on the view that verbal behavior is a form of human behavior, that the flow of symbols is part of the flow of events, and that the communication process is an aspect of the historical process."¹⁹

The non-local economic content of the papers, including both editorial and advertising matter, comprises the evidence for this investigation. The story, or the dateline, was the basic unit of editorial information counted; the advertisement was the item counted for paid content.²⁰ No purely political reporting was included. Much of the editorial content included in papers at this time was rewritten: if originating in Britain or Europe it could be copied from special news sheets prepared to precis the latest intelligence. The most commonly cited of these was prepared in Liverpool and its publication timed for ships' sailings. In cases where these sheets were used as sources, internal evidence generally identified the specific place from which the story originated. Items containing such precise identification have been so coded and counted individually. Datelines have been recorded where given. Editorial and advertising content were recorded separately. Place of origin has been categorized for the purpose of preparing summaries by the following territorial categories: the Maritimes, including Newfoundland; the Canadas (Ontario and Quebec); Britain, including Ireland; the continental United States; and Other.

Random samples were drawn of all issues published for 1845 and 1855. For 1845, because the major English-language papers in Montreal published daily during the six months of summer and less frequently during the remaining six months, two seasonally stratified independent samples have been utilized. In each sampling period, two types of samples were employed: one consecutive week; and one "constructed" week, whereby randomly selected days, the number corresponding to the frequency of publication, were

TABLE 1
Location and Frequency of Publication of
Newspapers Analyzed, 1845 and 1855

Location and Newspaper	1845	1855
St. John's, Nfld. <i>Public Ledger</i> and <i>Newfoundland General Advertiser</i>	s	s
Yarmouth, N.S. <i>Yarmouth Herald</i>	s	
Halifax <i>Morning Chronicle</i>	t	t
St. John, N.B. <i>Morning News</i>	t	t
Quebec <i>Quebec Gazette</i>	t	t
Montreal <i>Montreal Gazette</i>	t&d ^a	d
<i>La Minerve</i>	s	t
Kingston <i>British Whig</i> and <i>General Advertiser for</i> <i>Canada West</i>	s	
<i>Daily British Whig</i>		d
Toronto <i>British Colonist</i>	s	
<i>Globe</i>		d
Hamilton <i>Daily Spectator</i> and <i>Journal of Commerce</i>		d
Chatham, Ont. <i>Western Planet</i> , and <i>Semi-Weekly Western Planet</i>		s ^b

Notes: ^aTri-weekly during 6 winter months, daily during 6 summer months.

^bWeekly to 30 May, 1855 and then semi-weekly.

Legend: s = semi-weekly publication

t = tri-weekly publication

d = daily publication, Sunday excepted

drawn²¹ (see Table 2). The sample size varied with the frequency of publication of each paper, thereby constituting a constant fraction of the number of issues published.²² A pre-test sample, comprising two consecutive and two constructed weeks for 1845 was tested for coding consistency.²³

TABLE 2
Sampling Schedules, 1845 and 1855

1845				
Sampling Period	Week of Year	Week of	Day of Publication	Type
I	04	27 Jan.	2nd day	Constructed Week
	05	3 Feb.	whole week	Consecutive Week
	08	24 Feb.	3rd day	Constructed Week
	20	17 Nov.	1st day	Constructed Week
II	07	23 June	whole week	Consecutive Week
	08	30 June	Tues., 1 July	Constructed Week
	09	7 July	Thurs., 10 July	Constructed Week
	10	14 July	Mon., 14 July	Constructed Week
	12	28 July	Wed., 30 July	Constructed Week
	12	28 July	Fri., 1 Aug.	Constructed Week
	15	18 Aug.	Sat., 23 Aug.	Constructed Week

1855				
	Week of Year	Week of	Day of Publication	Type
	07	19 Feb.	Fri., 23 Feb.	Constructed Week
	14	9 Apr.	Tues., 10 Apr.	Constructed Week
	19	14 May	whole week	Consecutive Week
	35	3 Sept.	Thurs., 6 Sept.	Constructed Week
	36	10 Sept.	Sat., 15 Sept.	Constructed Week
	38	24 Sept.	Wed., 26 Sept.	Constructed Week
	42	22 Oct.	Mon., 22 Oct.	Constructed Week

Published communications in 1845 placed every major centre in British North America within both international and regional networks. Editors of all the principal papers published a substantial amount of information from sources outside the colonies, its quantity often far surpassing the number of items from the region of publication appearing in the press (see Table 3 and Figure 2). Never less than 31 per cent of the total quantity, the "foreign" economic content was as high as 83, 78 and 72 per cent in the papers issues in St. John, Halifax and Quebec respectively.²⁴ Only to the west of Montreal did it constitute less than half of the total volume of items, this fraction decreasing significantly the farther west the paper was published. The international information appearing in the colonial press originated in two great source regions: Britain and the United States; only in St. John's did a significant proportion of the content come from elsewhere, notable the Caribbean. The spatial pattern of the influence of these sources is clear. Britain's relative significance diminished regularly as distance from St. John or Halifax increased; the relative frequency with which sources in the United States were printed increased west of Quebec. Liverpool, the British port in closest and most regular contact with the colonies, was the centre where commodity prices

for important colonial export staples were fixed, and her commerce was widely reported. Stories containing great detail about activity in her port were regularly carried. Quebec, the old port for the export trade of the Canadas, was uniquely tied to Britain, and only selectively was intelligence from the United States available as public information in her press. The Quebec paper contained references to Boston and New York. By contrast, the Montreal and Toronto Press regularly published prices received in the markets not only in these cities but in all the important commercial centres on the southern shores of the Great Lakes. In the Maritimes a strong American content was obvious in the press: Halifax and St. John papers regularly published shipping news from ports as far south as Georgia and west to New Orleans.

TABLE 3
Newspaper Contents, 1845

		% of total number of items by regions				
		M	C	B	U	O
St. John's, (49)	<i>Public Ledger & Newfoundland General Advertiser</i>	34	1	28	8	29
Yarmouth, (28)	<i>Yarmouth Herald</i>	50	2	15	30	3
Halifax, (27)	<i>Morning Chronicle</i>	26	2	39	26	6
St. John, (50)	<i>Morning News</i>	16	1	47	33	3
Quebec, (68)	<i>Quebec Gazette</i>	6	16	65	9	4
Montreal, (63)	<i>Montreal Gazette</i>	2	44	37	16	1
Montreal, (29)	<i>La Minerve</i>	1	48	24	19	8
Kingston, (33)	<i>British Whig and General Adviser for Canada West</i>	3	58	22	14	3
Toronto, (50)	<i>British Colonist</i>	3	66	7	24	0

Legend: M — Maritimes
C — The Canadas
B — Great Britain and Ireland
U — United States
O — Other

Brackets under city names give the mean number of non-local economic items per issue.

By contrast, regional links were often sparse and local hinterlands isolated. The St. John's and Maritime press especially contained few references even to the major neighbouring cities. Throughout the region the pattern of local fragmentation was extreme.²⁵ In Montreal the French-language paper, *La Minerve*, served a somewhat territorially broader but almost equally isolated hinterland. Its regional coverage overlapped in any significant degree that of no other paper examined, including the *Montreal Gazette*. Only in the English-language press at Quebec, Montreal and Toronto did the spatial extensiveness of regional coverage suggest

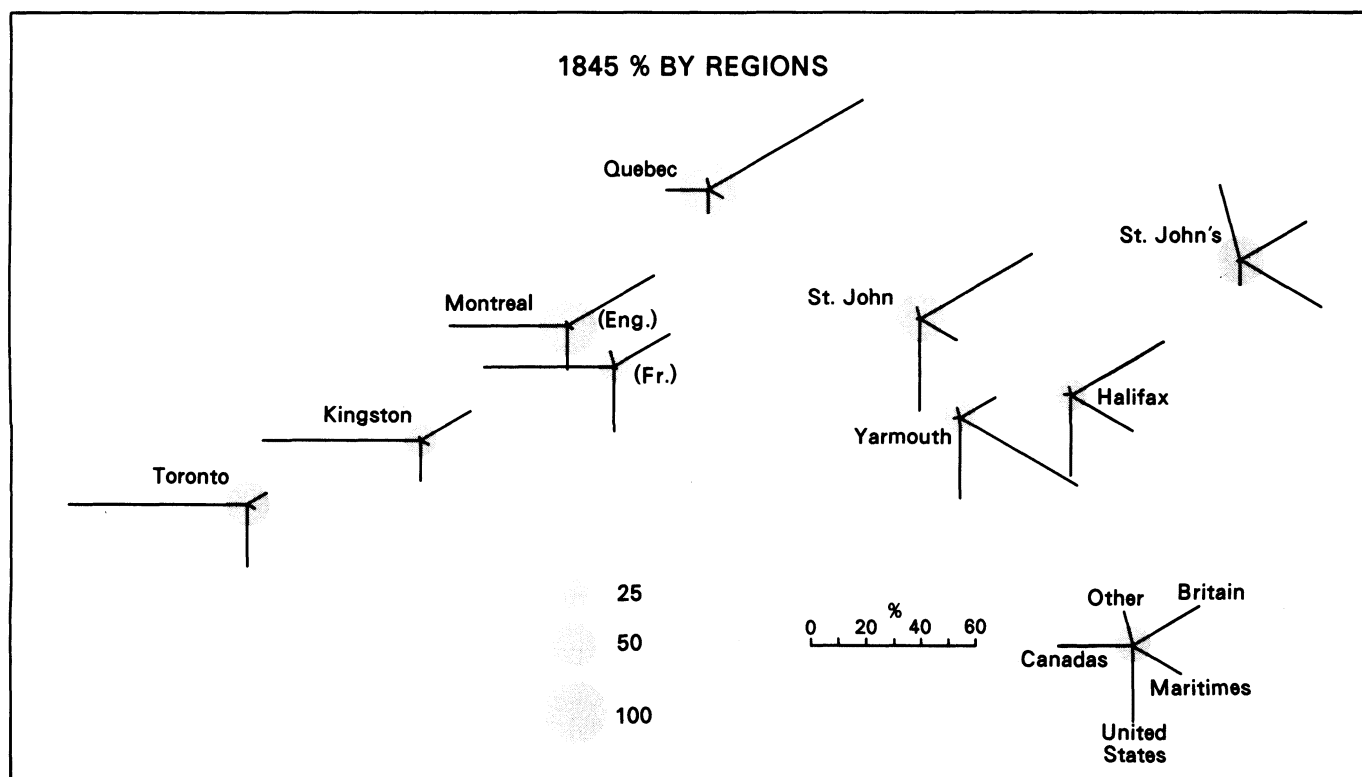


FIGURE 2. Per Cent of the Economic Content of Newspapers by Source Region, 1845.

Legend: The graduated circles are proportional to the mean number of items published per issue.

The lines are proportional in length to the per cent of items originating in each source area.

that a significant integration of markets existed. The Quebec paper regularly carried reports from Montreal and Kingston and, during the commercially active summer season, from Bytown.²⁶ The *Montreal Gazette* carried reports frequently from Quebec and contained a wide range of stories on conditions influencing staples in the upper colony. Toronto readers, through the columns of the *British Colonist*, received regular economic intelligence from Montreal and Quebec, together with occasional news from Kingston and points west. Kingston's editor printed Montreal and Quebec prices only irregularly, and offered significantly less dated editorial matter than the editors in Quebec, Montreal and Toronto. This editorial content tended to be less current and less comparable than dated material. Clearly, Montreal and Quebec were the foci of information circulation within British North America: their editors collected and published data from a wider area in the colonies than did any others, and the summaries of their markets were more widely diffused through being reprinted in other papers than items from any other colonial source.

Given the measure of isolation within their broadly defined regions, it is perhaps no surprise to discover an almost total absence of references in the papers of the Atlantic colonies and the St. Lawrence basin to each other. It was an exclusion that operated in both directions: the press in the

Canadas paid little attention to the Atlantic colonies whose press virtually never mentioned Quebec or points west. This condition pertained despite the official organization of postal communications, still under British administration.²⁷ This imperial system, designed and imposed from Westminster, organized the whole network to focus on the trans-Atlantic link and funnelled these through Halifax, an arrangement which accounts for most of the references made to it in the Canadas. The figures of information exchange between the regions document a cause for the bitter complaint made by the business community in the Canadas about the inappropriateness of the imposed structure of postal arrangements. The need was for reliable and rapid links with Britain and the United States, which a system conceived according to a unitary colonial outlook could not possibly achieve. The system as legislated placed the cities in the Canadas at an immense disadvantage in securing information from Britain via Halifax. Sailings were more frequent to Boston than the colonial city, and it was quicker and easier to reach the American coast from the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes region than to get to Halifax, even when travelling by sea from Quebec.²⁸ Other means of securing content information from Britain were found, and these included principally the use of the U.S. mails to reach Boston or New York and then, Britain. Private couriers, an even more legally irregular but still quicker means of getting to the Boston or New York, were

also resorted to at least on occasion. Inasmuch as the official arrangements for the colonial post office took no account of the interchange of mails with the United States the colonies were simply left to make their own arrangements, entirely unofficially.

Reflecting the spatial bias noted in the circulation of information, the mean time lags of published, dated items indicate clearly the functional structure of communications²⁹ (see Table 4). Reading the cells indicates the dramatically long lapse between the despatch of news and its publication. The figures average items moving in both directions between the pairs of colonial cities. Between Halifax and Montreal the elapsed time to publication was 13½ days; 10½ days separated public information exchanged between Quebec and Halifax. The 12-day average duration required between Quebec and Toronto is also remarkable. The frequency of publication of the two cities' papers, semi-weekly in each case, may account for a day or two of that time but cannot explain the total, nor the 8 days to reach publication of dated items travelling between Kingston and Toronto. Some of the delay was undoubtedly also a result of the irregularity and unreliability of the mails, a more serious problem in late autumn or late winter than in summer. Summer travel was quicker, as between Quebec and Toronto, but obstacles did not altogether disappear. When it is remembered that only the most important and recently received news was dated in the press, and that the vast majority of news was printed without dates being given, these figures become more extreme. The likelihood was that most news published in any of these cities about any of the others would have been more dated than is indicated by these figures.

TABLE 4
Mean Time Lags for Published Information, 1845

Halifax							
3½	St. John						
10½	10	Quebec					
13½		3	Montreal				
		5	6	Kingston			
		6			Bytown		
		12,7½	4	8½		Toronto	
5½		4½	2			4½	Boston
6½		7,2½	4½			4½	New York

Note: where two figures are given, the first is for winter months and the second for the summer.

The contrast in the figures between the speed of access to information from other colonial cities and to data from American Atlantic coast seaports is striking. For purposes

of presentation only Boston and New York are included, although dated entries from Oswego, Buffalo, Rochester, Philadelphia, New Orleans and other American cities frequently were published, as is implied by the data on U.S. material published in the colonial press. On the average, Halifax, Montreal, Quebec and Toronto could all receive news from American port cities in a shorter time than they could be in contact with each other. The single exception to this generalization among these cities was the Montreal and Quebec link which was quicker than Quebec's access to Boston or New York. Montreal, however, had news from Boston faster than news from Quebec. The magnitude of the time advantage which these cities enjoyed when in communication with Boston or New York, in contrast to the internal pace of travel, is clear from the figures calculated from the time-lag date (see Table 5). Quebec received news from Boston 9 days, on average, ahead of material sent at the same time from Halifax. Even the Boston to Montreal trip was likely to be speedier than that from Montreal to Quebec.³⁰ Boston, where the British mails to the United States were landed, was favoured over New York. It is the generality of this advantage that is significant, and which contributes toward understanding the spatial bias of communications revealed in the content analysis of the British North American press. Access to the Atlantic ports involved two advantages. First, it provided a preferred route by which the Colonial population could secure the latest British economic intelligence, and offered them the quickest route by which to send messages to Britain. Second, it provided a comparative advantage to any who wished to conduct their business with the United States, in contrast to those who relied on colonial communications linking the colonial cities. Here was a direct incentive not to rely on colonial establishments and not to organize business services on a colony-wide basis.

TABLE 5
Mean Time Advantages from Canadian
Cities to Boston and New York

Difference (in Days) in the time lag of published information from Boston and New York over items from other Canadian Cities.		
	From Boston	From New York
Toronto, from Montreal	2	
Toronto, from Quebec	3	
Toronto, from Kingston	4	4
Montreal, from Halifax	8	7
Montreal, from Quebec	1	
Montreal, from Toronto	2	
Quebec, from Halifax	9	5½ to 11
Halifax, from Quebec	5	4

Between 1845 and 1855 the arrival in British North America of the telegraph opened the possibility of a radical new technology of communications. Information could now

move faster than the pace of travel. By late 1846 American border cities were wired and in December a line from Toronto to Hamilton was in place, on its way to link these centres with the American system at the Niagara frontier. The lines joined in the early days of 1847.³¹ Montreal was soon thereafter in telegraphic touch with Toronto, and by the close of 1847 this line — belonging to the Montreal Telegraph Company — operated 540 miles of wire and had opened 9 offices.³² In 1849 Montreal's ties to the American system became more direct when a line was built south across the 45th parallel to Troy, N.Y. where it joined with the trunk system.³³ Construction proceeded quickly throughout the length of the Canadas.³⁴ In just the one year, 1855, by which time the Montreal Company controlled the route to Troy, this company built or acquired 541 miles of line and 101 offices were in operation. The Company controlled lines stretching from the Atlantic to Detroit.³⁵ In the Maritimes, the impetus to string wire came from the United States, from the metropolitan American press who sought the quickest possible access to British news. By the end of 1849 Halifax was in telegraphic communication with New York, via Amherst and St. John.³⁶ By 1855 telegraphy made possible a radical spatial and temporal redefinition of information circulation in British North America.

Evidence of the consequences of this fundamental change in accessibility can be found in the growth in volume and changing sources of non-local economic material published in the leading papers in 1855. In Toronto, Halifax and Montreal English-language papers, the per cent change in the decade was greatest (234%, 144% and 82%). By 1855, the Hamilton *Daily Spectator* printed, by the measure employed, the third largest volume of information in the colonial press. Each of these cities enjoyed direct access by telegraph not only to regional information but more importantly to American sources. Not coincidentally, 52 per cent of the editorial content of the Toronto and Hamilton press originated in the United States.³⁷ Kingston and St. John papers, publishing a significantly higher volume of material than ten years previously, likewise secured high proportions of their editorial matter from American sources (77 per cent and 46 per cent respectively). By contrast, the Quebec press published scarcely any more non-local material than it had in 1845 (a 6% increase) and in St. John's the volume had declined (by 16%).³⁸ Both cities had lost locational advantage in two ways: with the reorientation of communications as a consequence of an integrated North American telegraph network, and with the upheaval to traditional trading patterns following the collapse of old policies of colonial preference in Britain.³⁹

The American penetration of colonial information channels was universal; from St. John's to Chatham, Ontario, the proportion it constituted of the total increased in every single instance and doubled in several (see Table 6, Figure 3). Its volume overshadowed the Canadian content in the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Quebec Gazette* as well as the Maritimes content published in the St. John's *Public Ledger* and the St.

John *Morning News*. To attribute such an increase in American news and advertising to a mere improvement in the ability to gather information is to miss the fundamental point: the colonial cities were becoming absorbed into an American communications system at the cost of improved access to the circulation of information internally within the colonies or among them. The point is all the clearer when the availability in the press of regular commercial reports — market summaries and port records in the main — is examined. The press in each of the principal cities reported on an almost daily basis the market prices in New York, while commercial data from other colonial cities were reported only infrequently and often irregularly. In the *Montreal Gazette* and *Toronto Globe* telegraphed market items from New York were printed the following day. *The Daily Spectator* carried the same reports. In Halifax and St. John the press carried regular and extremely detailed items on shipping activities in all the major Atlantic ports. Items from neighbouring cities appeared, by contrast, with far greater infrequency, and sometimes less often than reports from smaller American cities such as, — in the Toronto, Hamilton, Chatham and Montreal papers — Boston, Rochester, Oswego, Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago among others.

TABLE 6
Newspaper Contents, 1845

Location	Newspaper	% of total number of items by regions				
		M	C	B	U	O
St. John's, (41)	<i>Public Ledger</i>	20	2	27	23	28
Halifax, (66)	<i>The Morning Chronicle</i>	37	3	18	29	13
St. John, (69)	<i>Morning News</i>	17	1	34	44	4
Quebec, (72)	<i>Quebec Gazette</i>	7	22	43	24	4
Montreal, (115)	<i>Montreal Gazette</i>	3	26	23	44	4
Montreal, (30)	<i>La Minerve</i>	1	65	6	24	4
Kingston, (49)	<i>The Daily British Whig</i>	0	46	18	35	1
Toronto, (167)	<i>The Globe</i>	0	55	2	43	0
Hamilton, (91)	<i>Daily Spectator & Journal of Commerce</i>	0	57	9	33	1
Chatham, (58)	<i>Western Planet, & Semi-Weekly Western Planet</i>	2	45	10	38	5

Notes: M = Maritimes; C = The Canadas; B = Great Britain and Ireland; U = United States; O = Other.

Brackets under city names give the mean number of non-local economic items per issue.

In the colonies no more evidence of an exchange of information between the Canadas and the Maritimes existed in 1855 than 1845. In the absence of direct rail of telegraph

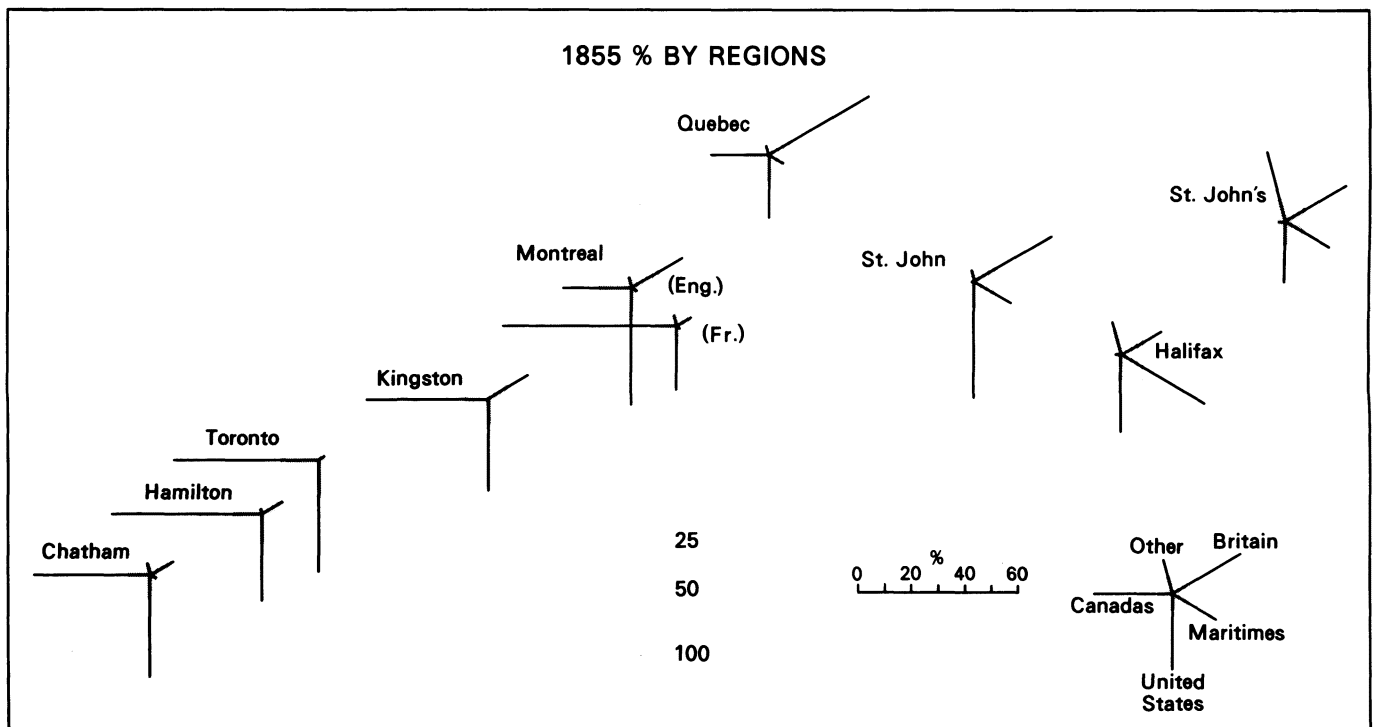


FIGURE 3. Per Cent of the Economic Content of Newspapers by Source Region, 1855.

Legend: The graduated circles are proportional to the mean number of items published per issue.

The lines are proportional in length to the per cent of items originating in each source area.

connections, and with American cities serving as termini for trans-Atlantic mails to the Canadas, ties with Halifax continued to atrophy. *La Minerve*, of Montreal, of all the papers, devoted its columns most exclusively to its region. In the upper colony news and advertising, facilitating a rapidly expanding commerce in the local hinterlands, occupied large portions of each issue of the local papers. Here at least the former isolation of individual trade area was disappearing, and more integrated circulation patterns were becoming established.

While the volume of information in circulation increased, and while trading areas became less isolated a process of stratification in the functions served by the press was also operating. Regular, dated commercial reports were conspicuously missing from several papers in 1855, notably those published in Kingston and St. John's, and appeared infrequently even in the *Quebec Gazette*. Montreal and Toronto papers circulated widely in the Canadas, as judged from the territorial scope of notices placed in their advertising columns. The internal markets, at least in the Canadas, were becoming better organized as the reach of papers from the principal commercial centres extended into formerly largely autonomous hinterlands and into the expanding regions of settlement north and west of Toronto. In the Maritimes few signs of such a trend yet existed, although Yarmouth, its paper having ceased bi-weekly publication, would seem to

have been losing its ability to compete with Halifax or St. John for access to channels of information. These findings may be partially a result of both the increasing accessibility of the principal papers to wider hinterlands as internal communications improved. Telegraphy offered for the transmission of information a technological advantage comparable to that which railroads provided in the distribution of goods, including newspapers. In each case the gain was maximized in the centres where control resided, and especially in Toronto and Montreal. Significantly, the mails, always heavily burdened by the weight of the papers they had long been committed to carrying, utilized the railways as soon as even short stretches were operational.⁴⁰ By 1855, with the building of several trunk lines already well advanced, the promise of direct rail lines from Quebec and Montreal to Sarnia and from Toronto to Niagara and Detroit was in prospect.

Through a systematic and objective examination of the public economic information routinely published in the more important urban centres of the British colonies it has been established that at mid-century the communications channels employed by editors and advertisers reached well beyond national political limits and simultaneously remained isolated within regional boundaries. During the ten-year period studied, the importance of international sources of information increased, even as the value of the cities' hinterlands

increased consequent to the growth of their population and a quickening of commercial activity. Some progress toward creating effective regional markets was registered, especially in the mutual exchange of current economic news among the few leading cities. In Canada West the trend could be detected among smaller centres as well. That a communications system, or systems, functioned, and functioned increasingly effectively, in reducing the lag of time over distance, is clear. That institutions in the principal urban centres organized and managed the system is also clear. It would be to misinterpret the evidence to conclude from this evidence that an autonomous Canadian communications systems had developed. The degree of closure necessary simply was not present; the trend of increasing reliance on American market information does not support it. A distinctive quality of urban communications systems in the colonies was precisely their international character, operating not in the place of colonial information channels but as an organizing principle, on a larger territorial framework, within which the growth of regional communications networks were possible.

Notes

1. This point has been demonstrated in many studies, among which R.G. Albion's ranks highly. Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port* (New York: Scribner, 1939).
2. The quotations are found in: Donald Creighton, *The Empire of the St. Lawrence* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956), 15; and J.M.S. Careless, "Metropolis and Region: The Interplay Between City and Region in Canadian History Before 1914," *Urban History Review*, 7 (February 1979): 103, respectively.
3. George A. Nader, *Cities of Canada*, Vol. 1 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada), 152.
4. This is the model Harold Laswell constructed in the 1940s. Harold D. Laswell, "The Structure and Function of Communications in Society," in *The Communication of Ideas*, ed. Lyman Bryson (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1948), 37-51.
5. Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 187.
6. Philip Abrams, "Towns and Economic Growth: Some Theories and Problems," in *Towns in Societies*, ed. Philip Abrams and E.A. Wrigley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 24.
7. Jan de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 12.
8. Richard L. Meier, *A Communications Theory of Urban Growth* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1962), 128.
9. This has been a popular theme in the geographical literature. The writing in this vein includes: C.F.J. Whebell, "Corridors: A Theory of Urban Systems," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, 59 (1969): 1-26; Michael P. Conzen, "A Transport Interpretation of the Growth of Urban Regions: An American Example," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1 (1975): 361-82; Edward K. Muller, "Selective Urban Growth in the Middle Ohio Valley, 1800-1860," *Geographical Review*, 66 (1976): 178-99; W. Randy Smith, *Aspects of Growth in a Regional Urban System: Southern Ontario 1851-1951*, Geographical Monographs No. 12 (Downsview, Ont.: Atkinson College, York University, 1982).
10. Robert Higgs, "The Growth of Cities in a Midwestern Region, 1870-1900," *Journal of Regional Science*, 9 (1969): 369-75.
11. Michael P. Conzen, "The Maturing Urban System in the United States, 1840-1910," *Annals, A.A.G.*, 67 (1977): 88-108.
12. In addition to Pred's earlier volume (see f.n. 5), see: Allan Pred, *Urban Growth and City-Systems in the United States, 1840-1860* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); and Pred, *City-Systems in Advanced Economies* (New York: Wiley, 1977), Chapter 2.
13. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information*, 20.
14. Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 39.
15. The *Montreal Gazette*, for instance, printed lists of hotels and public places outside Montreal where its issues were regularly available.
16. The author has been unable to locate any copies of semi-weekly papers published in Ottawa for 1845 or 1855. The surviving issues of London papers are too few and scattered to be incorporated into this analysis.
17. Ithiel de Sola Pool and others, *The Prestige Press: A Comparative Study of Political Symbols* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1970), x, xi.
18. Ole R. Holsti, *Content Analysis in the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969).
19. Pool, *The Prestige Press*, 26.
20. There is a choice among counting units when undertaking content analysis. This research adopted a standard measure, employed frequently. See: Guido H. Stempel, III, "How Newspapers Use the Associated Press Afternoon A-Wire," *Journalism Quarterly*, 41 (1964): 380-84; G. Cleveland Wilhoit and David Weaver, "Foreign News Coverage in Two U.S. Wire Services: An Update," *Journal of Communication*, 33 (Spring 1983): 132-48.
21. This procedure is widely adopted as a means to stratify random sampling. See: Richard W. Budd, Robert K. Thorp and Lewis Donohew, *Content Analysis of Communications* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), Chapter 1; David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, "Foreign News Coverage in Two U.S. Wire Services," *Journal of Communication*, 31 (Spring 1981): 55-63.
22. Leslie Kish, *Survey Sampling* (New York: Wiley, 1965), p. 35.
23. William A. Scott, "Reliability of Content Analysis: The Case of Nominal Scale Coding," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 19 (1955-56): 321-25.
24. "Foreign" refers to sources outside British North America.
25. The fragmentation of the Maritimes was extreme, and the *Yarmouth Herald* provides an excellent example of it. Its Maritime content focussed on the immediate southern shore of Nova Scotia and as far as Digby.
26. Reports on the harvesting of the forests in the Ottawa valley regularly appeared, from Bytown, in the *Quebec Gazette* during the commercial season.
27. A classic history of the Post Office in British North America, largely written from the perspective of its colonial administrators, is: William Smith, *The History of the Post Office in British North America, 1639-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920).
28. Advertisements in the Montreal and Toronto Papers regularly announced the services of express companies that provided quick carriage of mail to the American ports. The firms and their services were well known, and the postal authorities tolerated it.
29. The data in Table 4 have been calculated from the newspaper date-lines. Where, as was frequently the case in the press in the smaller centres, information was often provided without dates, it has not been possible to calculate mean time lags. Other cells in the table may be empty for lack of regular contact between the centres, as in the case of St. John and Bytown, or Halifax and Kingston.
30. The figures on time lags before publication accord with Glazebrook's interpretation of transportation developments in the 1840s. See: G.P. de T. Glazebrook, "Nationalism and Internationalism on Canadian Waterways," *Essays of Transportation in Honour of W.T. Jackman*, ed. H.A. Innis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1941), 1-16; Glazebrook, *A History of Transportation in Canada*, I, Carleton Library no. 11 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 154-55.

31. Ernest Green, "Canada's First Electric Telegraph," *Papers and Records*, Ontario Historical Society, 24 (1927): 366-72.
32. John Murray, *A Story of the Telegraph* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1905), 110.
33. James D. Reid, *The Telegraph in America* (New York: Derby Brothers, 1879), 330.
34. Before Reid (see f.n. 33) wrote his comprehensive study, many other studies had been published chronicling the spread of telegraphy in North America. See: Alexander Jones, *Historical Sketch of the Electric Telegraph* (New York: Putnam (New York: Putnam, 1852); "British-American Telegraph System," *American Telegraph Magazine*, 1, no. 4 (Jan. 31, 1853) — an advertisement of routes and rates; and the more recent study focussing on the United States: Robert Luther Thompson, *Wiring a Continent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 253-54.
35. Public Archives of Canada, Canadian National Railways, RG 30, vol. 10484, pp. 184, 202-204. This volume contains records of the Montreal Telegraph Company.
36. Murray, *A Story of the Telegraph*, 111-12.
37. The Montreal paper, *La Minerve*, equalled this figure, the highest in the colonial press.
38. The *Yarmouth Herald* had become a weekly by 1855 and, although it was read, was not included in the 1855 calculation.
39. Reciprocity in 1854 did not suddenly disrupt trading patterns, according to McDiarmid. Orville John McDiarmid, *Commercial Policy in the Canadian Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), 71-84. Tucker has stressed that the St. Lawrence waterway system failed on its own merits and not suddenly because of changes to British Imperial policy. Gilbert N. Tucker, *The Canadian Commercial Revolution*, Carleton Library no. 19 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 43-44.
40. Smith, *The History of the Post Office in British North America*, 277-79.