

## **Boom and Bust: The Demography and Economy of the Lower Ottawa Valley in the Nineteenth Century**

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### Résumé de l'article

Peu d'historiens se sont intéressés à l'histoire de la basse vallée de l'Outaouais. La région d'ailleurs n'a jamais attiré l'attention étant loin des grands centres du Québec et de l'Ontario, n'ayant jamais été témoin d'événements historiques marquants et n'ayant jamais, de plus, produit un politicien de renom qui aurait pu la tirer de l'anonymat. Pourtant, son évolution rappelle fort bien les grands thèmes de l'histoire du Canada : diversité culturelle, immigration et émigration, ou encore, progrès et déclin de diverses activités économiques.

Par le biais d'une étude d'un comté de la région, celui de Prescott, l'auteur analyse les rapports qui ont existé entre les changements économiques qui se sont produits au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et les modifications qu'a subi le profil démographique de la région. Plus précisément, il examine les interrelations qui ont eu cours entre les conditions économiques, d'une part, et les migrations de population, d'autre part, dans un environnement qui était totalement rural à l'époque. Selon l'auteur, l'étude du comté de Prescott démontre que ces relations étaient tout à fait complexes puisqu'elles impliquaient plusieurs facteurs, soit ceux de la formation des familles, du besoin de terres et de l'émergence d'une économie plus axée sur le tandem travail/salaire. La complexité de ces rapports se reflète d'ailleurs dans l'aspect quelque peu confus qui se dégage des modèles que l'on tente d'établir en ce qui concerne l'immigration, la persistance et l'émigration, des phénomènes qui ont caractérisé l'évolution sociale du comté tout au long du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

***Boom and Bust:  
The Demography and Economy of  
the Lower Ottawa Valley in  
the Nineteenth Century\****

CHAD GAFFIELD

The history of the lower Ottawa Valley is rich in song, legend, and myth. From Dollard des Ormeaux' defense of New France at Long Sault to the daring feats of "cutting away a jam," the image of the lower Ottawa Valley is framed by courage, strength, and determination. In other respects, though, the region has a bad press. The established view implies that the lower Ottawa Valley is historically nowhere, not part of south-central Ontario, outside Quebec, and removed from the city of Ottawa. The scholarly treatment of Prescott County illustrates the extent to which this area is absent from our historical consciousness. The county simply does not exist in general texts and warrants only passing reference in specialized studies. The obvious explanation for this treatment is, of course, that places such as Prescott County deserve, in fact, to be forgotten. Betwixt and between, without great leaders and major events, the county merits no more than a footnote.<sup>1</sup>

The ambition of this paper is not to suggest that scholars have been blind to a region of true national importance and that Prescott County and all of the lower Ottawa Valley should now be thrust to the forefront of historical attention. Rather, I argue that Prescott County provides an excellent focus for analysing the interrelationships of demographic and economic change in the nineteenth century. Although the county did not produce prominent politicians or witness major historical events, Prescott's social evolution is closely linked to the central themes of Canadian history. Cultural diversity, immigration and emigration, and the boom and bust of a staples

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1. Local histories are exceptions to this generalization; they include Lucien Brault, *Histoire des Comtés Unis de Prescott et de Russell* (L'Original, 1967); C. Thomas, *History of the Counties of Argenteuil, Quebec and Prescott, Ontario* (Montreal, 1896; reprint Belleville, 1981); Alan Douglas MacKinnon, *The Story of Vankleek Hill and the Surrounding Area* (Belleville, 1979) vol. 1; and William R. Byers, *The Church on the Hill* (Hawkesbury, 1981). For research that considers aspects of Prescott County within a larger context, see D.G. Cartwright, "Institutions on the Frontier: French Canadian Settlement in Eastern Ontario in the Nineteenth Century", *Canadian Geographer*, XXI (1977) and "Ecclesiastical Territorial Organisation and Institutional Conflict in Eastern and Northern Ontario, 1840 to 1910", *Historical Papers* (1978), pp. 176-99. Some primary source material is included in Gaétan Vallières, *L'Ontario français par les documents* (Montreal, 1980).

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economy are all topics which are at the core of both the Prescott County and national experience. The value of local analysis is that these topics can be systematically examined in terms of individual, family, and therefore social development.

The following study investigates the ways in which economic change interrelated with population patterns during the nineteenth century. Demographic and economic experience are integrated phenomena in which population patterns sometimes determine and sometimes are determined by material factors. The social history of Prescott County suggests that nineteenth century families made decisions about their own behaviour which cannot be simply categorized as demographic or economic. The decision to persist or migrate, to marry early or late, to have large or small families, to farm or to work in factories, to rent or buy dwellings, and similar issues were, in practice, single considerations which reflected at the same time both demographic structures and economic realities.<sup>2</sup> This paper does not address all of these issues but rather focuses on the specific interaction of migration patterns and economic conditions in a fully rural environment. The Prescott County evidence suggests that this interaction relates to the process of family formation, land hunger, and the emergence of a wage-labour economy during the nineteenth century. The complexity of these relationships is reflected in the intricate patterns of immigration, persistence, and emigration which characterized the county's social evolution throughout the 1800s.

The area of the lower Ottawa Valley which became Prescott County in 1800 was first explored and sporadically inhabited by Algonquin tribes. By the time Champlain passed by the county's Ottawa River boundary in 1613, Indians had already established trails through the woods of the area and resting places on the small islands off the coast. During the fur trade of the seventeenth century, Prescott County's shore became a common stopping point as canoes were regrouped before and after the Long Sault rapids at the eastern border. During this century the Iroquois gained hegemony over the territory and undoubtedly the best-recorded local episode is their skirmish with Dollard des Ormeaux' band of troops who met death just a few kilometres from where Hawkesbury Village later developed. By 1800, the land of Prescott County had come under European control.

The engine of the Ottawa Valley economy in the nineteenth century was the forest industry which emerged rapidly at the turn of the century. British, American and local markets made the Ottawa River into the axis of a major economic zone connected to the vital centers of Montreal and Quebec City. This zone was based on two forms of land exploitation: first, the use and sale of timber and lumber; and,

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2. For a selection of recent work in historical demography, see Ronald Demos Lee, ed., *Population Patterns in the Past* (New York, 1977); Charles Tilly, ed., *Historical Studies of Changing Fertility* (Princeton, 1978); and Maris A. Vinovskis, ed., *Studies in American Historical Demography* (New York, 1979). Some of the best work on the rural experience has emerged from Sweden where excellent sources permit sophisticated systematic analysis; see, for example, Ingrid Eriksson and John Rogers, *Rural Labor and Population Change: Social and Demographic Developments in East-central Sweden during the Nineteenth Century* (Uppsala, 1978) and John Rogers, ed., *Family Building and Family Planning in Pre-industrial Societies* (Uppsala, 1980).

second, the establishment of agriculture. As in similar areas of Quebec and New Brunswick, the Prescott County economy operated as a *système agro-forestier*.<sup>3</sup> Families in Prescott County not only farmed but also participated in the lumber industry which offered seasonal employment as well as markets for agricultural produce and logs from land clearing. These opportunities allowed full family involvement in economic activity with husbands, wives and children fulfilling distinct but important roles.<sup>4</sup>

The family economies of Prescott County needed both farming and the lumber industry to establish viable households. Neither economic sector offered by itself a realistic chance for survival and security. The process of family formation was most affected by this circumstance. As in other times and places, this process involved two specific material considerations. First, couples who intended to marry had to be able to establish their own households. In Prescott County, households which included more than one conjugal family unit were not the norm. In terms of family formation, the need to establish a separate household required young couples to plan financially for marriage. They had to amass cooking utensils, furnishings and general household supplies as well as an actual residence.<sup>5</sup>

3. A detailed analysis of this type of economy has been undertaken by Normand Séguin who has developed the earlier approach of Raoul Blanchard. See Blanchard's *L'Est du Canada français* (Montreal, 1935) 2 vols. and Séguin's *La Conquête du Sol au 19e Siècle* (Sillery, 1977). A summary of Séguin's view is offered in "L'économie agro-forestière: genèse du développement au Saguenay au 19e siècle", in Normand Séguin, ed., *Agriculture et colonisation au Québec* (Montreal, 1980), pp. 159-64. This perspective is now being further developed in the case of the Saguenay by the Projet d'histoire sociale de la population du Saguenay (1842-1931) under Gérard Bouchard whose publications include "Family Strategies and Geographic Mobility at Laterrière, 1851-1935", *Journal of Family History*, II (December 1977) and "Démographie et Société Rurale au Saguenay 1851-1935", *Recherches Sociographiques*, XIX (Jan.-Apr. 1978), pp. 7-31. Graeme Wynn does not explicitly employ this conceptualisation but reaches similar conclusions in his study *Timber Colony: A historical geography of early nineteenth century New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1981). The Ottawa Valley lumber industry is examined in Michael S. Cross, "The Dark Druidical Groves: The Lumber Community and the Commercial Frontier in British North America to 1854" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1968).
4. The concept of family economy has recently received a great deal of historical attention. For a general introduction based on the experience of France and England, see Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York, 1978). In the case of Prescott County, see Chad Gaffield, "Canadian Families in Cultural Context: Hypotheses from the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *Historical Papers* (1979). Also, see Bettina Bradbury, "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City: Montreal in the 1870s", *Historical Papers* (1979), pp. 71-96.
5. The work of Peter Laslett has been most important in emphasizing the historical predominance of the single-family household. A comparative perspective is provided in Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, eds., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1972). Examples of the Canadian experience are examined in Michael B. Katz, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1982) and David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada* (Toronto, 1981).

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The second material consideration involved in family formation concerned the period immediately after marriage. Couples had to be prepared not only to establish separate households but also to maintain them during the very difficult first years of family life. In this sense, economic opportunity was crucially important in the years not only preceding but also immediately following marriage. Couples had to establish their own households and then survive during the early years of child-bearing when children could only function as consumers.<sup>6</sup> The most secure source of income during the years of marriage and early parenthood was offered by the opportunity to farm independently on arable soil. While not exempt from constant material uncertainty, farm ownership was the best hedge against the economic insecurities of the time. For some, the appetite for land was quickly satisfied. A timely inheritance or a strategic marriage immediately provided the wherewithal for household establishment and perhaps land to secure the early childbearing years. But for most men and women in nineteenth century Prescott County, the ambition of independent farming was an uncertain pursuit in which the lumber industry played a vital role. Seasonal labour possibilities were especially important.<sup>7</sup>

In Prescott County, these opportunities represented economic opportunity for adolescents and young men both before and after marriage. From possible employment in sawmills to shanty labour, many young men in Prescott County depended upon income from the lumber companies to finance family formation. However, the nature of seasonal labour also emphasizes why independent farming was the general ambition of nineteenth century residents. This ambition was based at least in part on the opportunity it gave women and children to contribute to the family economy. Such opportunity was not offered in the lumber industry. The records of Hamilton Brothers of Hawkesbury, the major lumber company of the lower Ottawa Valley, include only three entries for payments to women during the 1857-1859 period

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6. The role of children in the material calculations of adults has been a central issue of recent research on fertility; see, for example, David Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism* (New York, 1977) and R.M. McLinnis, "Childbearing and Land Availability: Some Evidence from Individual Household Data" in Lee, ed., *Population Patterns*, pp. 201-27. The position of children in the nineteenth century Canadian economy is discussed in Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (London, 1980); Michael B. Katz and Ian E. Davey, "Youth and Early Industrialization in a Canadian City", in *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family* (Chicago, 1978); Katz, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* and Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers*. New studies of children and economic change also include the chapters of Joy Parr, ed., *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* (Toronto, 1982); in this collection, the Prescott County experience is considered in Chad Gaffield, "Schooling, the Economy, and Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century Ontario", pp. 69-92.
  7. The nature and importance of land acquisition in nineteenth century Canada is emphasized by David Gagan in "Land, Population and Social Change: The 'Critical Years' in Rural Canada West", *Canadian Historical Review*, LIX (1978) pp. 293-318. Also see Leo Johnson, "Land Policy, Population Growth and Social Structure in the Home District, 1793-1851", *Ontario History*, LXVII (1971), pp. 32-57 and David Gagan, "The Security of Land" in F.H. Armstrong, H.A. Stevenson and J.D. Wilson, eds., *Aspects of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1974).

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and, as would be expected, they concerned forms of domestic service. One woman, for example, was paid wages for "cleaning rooms in our office and store."<sup>8</sup> In the 1850s, the scarcity of female employment opportunities meant that women could be more economically productive in an agricultural setting within the context of family life and thus this scarcity directly encouraged the pursuit of land.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, it was the farm which allowed children to produce at the earliest age. While the sawmill offered some opportunity to boys, no income possibilities were available to young girls. The Prescott County evidence suggests that the nimble fingers and simple skills of children could only be fully utilized by family economies in a domestic agricultural setting. In this sense, seasonal labour in the lumber industry was necessarily related to family formation in Prescott County but was unsatisfactory as a long-term economic base for family life. A mature family economy depended upon the contribution of all members but since seasonal labour was not available to women and to only a limited number of children, the lumber industry ultimately represented economic opportunity only in conjunction with agriculture.<sup>10</sup>

The symbiotic relationship of agriculture and lumbering in Prescott County was not always appreciated at the time especially by social observers attached to the ideal of rural bliss on the farm. To these observers, lumbering undermined agricultural development by enticing men to the woods and thus causing them to neglect their farms. It was admitted that this enticement might lead to short-term gain but, in the *longue durée*, was said to lead to economic ruin when the inevitable withdrawal of lumbering opportunity left settlers with dilapidated farms.<sup>11</sup> In a sense, this analysis applies to Prescott County but it must be recognized that, by itself, agricultural opportunity was quite limited. Not only was shanty and sawmill labour often necessary to achieve farm establishment but the County's land and location worked against full reliance on independent farming. The soil in both high and low-lying areas presented obstacles to successful agriculture. The elevated land was not very fertile while the richer low-lying soil could suffer from flooding especially during the crucial spring

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8. Hamilton Brothers, *Account Books*, 1857-1859. These documents were generously made available to me from the private collection of James Donaldson, Prescott County.
  9. The limited number of employment opportunities for women in the nineteenth century helps to explain processes such as the "feminization of teaching," a phenomenon at least partly caused by the opportunity to pay women "half the price." See Alison Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching in British North America and Canada, 1845-1875", *Histoire sociale/Social History* (May 1975) and Wendy E. Bryans, "Virtuous Women at Half the Price: The Feminization of the Teaching Force and Early Teacher Organizations in Ontario", (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1974).
  10. A more detailed discussion of this analysis is provided in Chad Gaffield, "Seasonal Labour and Family Formation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada West", paper presented to "Class and Culture: Dimensions of Canada's Labour Past", McGill University, 7 March 1980.
  11. The negative impact of lumbering on agriculture was a major emphasis of Blanchard, *L'Est du Canada français* and is also discussed in Cross, *The Dark Druidical Groves* and Wynn, *Timber Colony*. A detailed discussion of this view is offered by Graeme Wynn, in " 'Deplorably Dark and Demoralized Lumberers?' Rhetoric and Reality in Early Nineteenth-Century New Brunswick", *Journal of Forest History*, October 1980, pp. 168-87.

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season.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the lack of good roads and general transportation facilities meant that Prescott County farmers could not easily market surplus produce except in lumbering regions to the north. Without this market, farming in Prescott County would not have surpassed subsistence level at any time in the nineteenth century. For these reasons, participation in the *système agro-forestier* was a rational economic strategy.

During the early nineteenth century immigrants of British descent dominated the settlement of Prescott County. The most important group was Irish followed by Scottish and, to a lesser extent, English and American settlers. By the mid-nineteenth century, British-origin settlement was superceded by heavy French-Canadian immigration. The arrival of French Canadians began in the early nineteenth century but remained relatively minimal until the 1840s when hundreds of families crossed the Ottawa River and radically altered the cultural geography of the county. By 1871, a French-Canadian presence was established in every township and, at the county level, British-origin settlers had become the minority<sup>13</sup> (see Table 1). The establishment of French-Canadian families in Prescott County related to the willingness of Quebec immigrants to take up low-lying land which was being avoided by British-origin settlers. As discussed in detail elsewhere, a distinct pattern of settlement developed in the county as a result of culturally-defined preferences for soil types. In general, early British-origin settlers chose drier sandy plains and were unwilling to extend their holdings to low-lying areas where poor drainage was considered an overwhelming obstacle. In contrast, French Canadians accustomed to the St. Lawrence lowlands were prepared to take on the task of drainage and, despite much skepticism among established Prescott County residents, were able to bring into cultivation land that had once been considered virtually useless.<sup>14</sup>

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**Table 1 — Origins of the Prescott County Population, 1871**

Origin	Number	Percentage
English	1,256	7%
Irish	4,055	23%
Scottish	2,546	15%
French Canadian	9,623	55%
Other and not given	167	—
TOTAL	17,647	100%

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12. R.E. Wicklund and N.R. Richards, *Soil Survey of Russell and Prescott Counties* (Guelph, 1962).

13. A discussion of this process is offered in Donald G. Cartwright, "French-Canadian Colonization in Eastern Ontario to 1919", (Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1973) and, with detailed information for two townships, in Jessie Turner Weldon, "The Salient Factors Contributing to the Earliest Settlement Patterns in East and West Hawkesbury Townships, Upper Canada, 1788-1846", (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 1980).

14. Gaffield, "Canadian Families in Cultural Context."

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Land availability, however, was only half of the economic equation of Prescott County and dependency on the lumber industry ensured an inherent structural weakness of all family economies. This weakness began to be exposed clearly in the 1870s. During this decade, the focus of the lumber industry moved northwest away from Prescott County, thereby making it much more difficult for families to piece together a viable existence from combined labour on the farm and in the woods. Not only did it become difficult for lower Ottawa Valley farmers to participate in shanty supply but the enlarged distance discouraged work as shantymen on a seasonal basis. In addition, the ability of families to achieve economic viability from a combination of lumbering and agriculture also suffered from the decline of seasonal employment in even the local lumber industry. By the later nineteenth century, a more sophisticated lumber processing technology engendered the need for a more skilled and stable labour force in those mills which continued to operate in the county. At the mills in Hawkesbury, only slightly more than 5 per cent of the men placed under contract between 1887 and 1903 were unskilled labourers; 68.8 per cent were semi-skilled, 17.7 per cent were skilled and 8.5 per cent were white collar employees.<sup>15</sup>

Major sawmill companies such as Hamilton Brothers were able to adjust to the retreat of lumbering into the northern part of the Ottawa Valley. However, other aspects of the local lumber industry in Prescott County were suffering by the end of the 1870s. The lower Ottawa Valley had been thoroughly exploited, and, as a result, families who were contemplating settlement could no longer plan on the same reward for land-clearing that had been possible earlier in the century. In the later nineteenth century, only a few logs were left for market at local sawmills or for production of potash. Only 19 per cent of the occupied land in Prescott County remained "in forest" in 1901<sup>16</sup> (see Table 2).

In this context, it is not surprising that Prescott County's population did not increase as it had earlier in the century. After advancing from 10,487 in 1851 to 22,857 in 1881, the county's population only reached 27,035 by 1901. These figures make it

15. These figures are from Harvey J. Graff, "Respected and Profitable Labour: Literacy, Jobs and the Working Class in the Nineteenth Century", in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 58-82.

16. The general northwestward retreat of the lumber industry and the developments in the Ottawa Valley are discussed in W. E. Greening, "The Lumber Industry in the Ottawa Valley and the American Market in the Nineteenth Century", *Ontario History* (June 1970); Michael Cross, "The Lumber Community of Upper Canada, 1815-1867", *Ontario History*, IV (1960); Robert Leslie Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1830* (Toronto, 1946), and A. R. M. Lower, *The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest* (Toronto, 1938). It should be noted that agricultural production also faltered after the 1870s. The problem with the *système agro-forestier* as it had operated in Prescott County was not that agriculture was ignored but rather that farming had sometimes been too intensive. The constant cultivation of hay and oats could quickly deplete soil fertility and in some areas, land productivity declined. By the end of the century this land began to resemble closely the soil of Quebec in the early 1800s. The economic crisis of Prescott County which began in the 1870s had already started in the region just to the south mainly as a result of the earlier settlement. A discussion of this region in 1861 is provided by R. Marvin McNinn in "Farms and Farm Families in the St. Lawrence Townships", *Historic Kingston*, No. 24 (March 1976), pp. 6-17.



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tempting to conclude that massive emigration had begun. However, the individual-level data of the manuscript census suggests a more complicated explanation. Record-linkage for each of the enumerations between 1851 and 1881 reveals a complex pattern of immigration, persistence and emigration. Unfortunately, the complete pattern during these decades cannot be demonstrated since the tracing of females from one enumeration to the next is often thwarted by name changes in marriage. In addition, there is no system currently available to link French-Canadian names rendered by anglophone enumerators. In Prescott County, such enumerators often scrawled French-Canadian names or spelled them phonetically. However, this obstacle can be surmounted for 1861 and 1871 when record-linkage is facilitated by the additional information of the agricultural schedules. The following analysis considers the French-Canadian pattern for these enumerations as well as the more complete linkage of British-origin residents for the entire 1851-1881 period.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 2 — Land Use and Availability in  
Prescott County, 1851-1901**

	<b>Held</b>	<b>Under Cultivation</b>	<b>Under Crops</b>	<b>Under Pasture</b>
1851	113,035	32,920	21,415	11,319
1861	145,223	53,934	34,474	19,237
1871	179,287	78,272	53,649	23,955
1881	220,692	122,168	76,487	44,764
1891	251,330	188,089	127,097	59,761
1901	264,781	183,797	128,557	73,683

17. The field of record linkage has developed along the direction first specified by Ian Winchester in "The Linkage of Historical Records by Man and Computer", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, I (1970), pp. 107-24. Recent advances include work at the Saguenay Project which emphasizes the importance of attempting to link individuals in the context of their respective families; see Raymond Roy, Christian Pouyez, and François Martin, "Le jumelage des données nominatives dans les recensements: problèmes et méthodes", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XIII (May 1980) pp. 173-93. The problem of name variations in record linkage is specifically discussed in Gérard Bouchard and Christian Pouyez, "Name Variations and Computerized Record Linkage," *Historical Methods*, XIII (Spring 1980) pp. 119-25. This study of Prescott County involved a manual linkage using computer print-outs of files created from the data of the 1851-1881 census enumerations of Alfred Township. The Winchester additive approach was employed although the Saguenay "individual-in-family-context" approach was the basis of the linkage whenever appropriate. In addition, information from outside sources such as the antiquarian study by Thomas, *History of the Counties*, was used as an aid in problematic cases. The rationale for this record-linkage strategy is based on Ian Winchester's perspective which has recently been summarized in "Priorities for Record Linkage: A Theoretical and Practical Checklist", in Jerome M. Clubb and Erwin K. Scheveh, eds., *Historical Social Research: The Use of Historical and Process-Produced Data* (Stuttgart, 1980), pp. 414-30.

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The example of Alfred Township suggests the complexity of population movement and stability in the lower Ottawa Valley. Between 1851 and 1881, the British-origin population of this township exhibited remarkable rates of persistence among settlers who had arrived before mid-century. A substantial proportion of such residents in 1851 not only persisted to 1861 but were still present twenty and thirty years later. Of the 284 individuals living in Alfred at mid-century, 64 per cent were enumerated in 1861, 33 per cent again in 1871, and 20 per cent yet again in 1881. The demographic context of this persistence was the family unit. Of the thirty-nine households represented in 1851, thirty were maintained by the same head in 1861 and nineteen continued to 1871. This stability was further enhanced by instances in which an inheriting son took over from his father and through his own marriage and children renewed the family's attachment to the township.

General persistence was much less common among French-Canadian settlers in Alfred Township than among their British-origin counterparts but the maintenance of established households was similarly significant. Of 1,041 French-Canadians in 1861, 30 per cent continued to reside in 1871. However, over half (52 per cent) of the households established in 1861 were still represented one decade later. These distinct persistence rates are explained by a high rate of emigration among families and individuals who had been boarding in 1861. Boarding was a particularly important feature of household structure in the early 1860s as a result of the heavy immigration during these years. Settlers were often forced to board temporarily while on route to their own household establishment. Consequently, geographic mobility among this group was very high. Seventy-seven per cent of French Canadians who were not members of families with their own households in 1861 were no longer present by 1871.

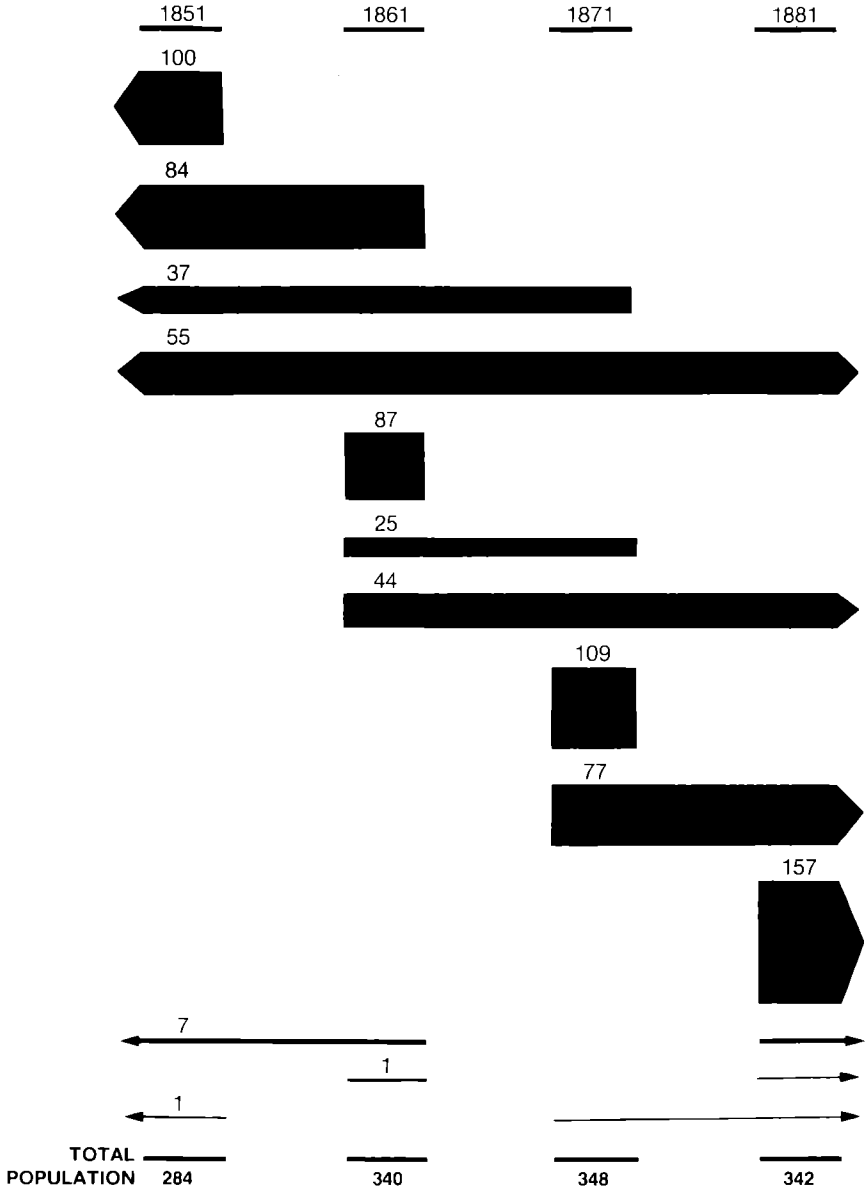
An important balance to persistence in Alfred Township was the ongoing out-migration of large numbers of sons and daughters who left their parents' households as they reached young adulthood. It would appear that such mature children most often left as newlyweds or with young families of their own rather than as individuals. The age difference between spouses was generally between two and three years and this difference was reflected in the average age of those sons and daughters who moved out of their parents' household as youths or young adults. In the 1860s, for example, the average age of sons who moved out of their parents' household in Alfred Township was twenty-one for British-origin residents and nineteen for French Canadians. For daughters, the average age was seventeen and a half for British-origin settlers and sixteen and a half for French Canadians (see Table 3). The differences in these averages are consistent with marriage patterns in which French Canadians generally married about two to three years earlier than their British-origin counterparts.<sup>18</sup> However, only a small proportion of any of these young adults established themselves in Alfred Township; most not only left their parents' household but also left the township. Among British-origin sons, only one-quarter established new households in Alfred while the French-Canadian proportion was a similar 23 per cent.

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18. This pattern is discussed in Gaffield, "Canadian Families," pp. 59-62.

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## Persistence and Transience Within The British-Origin Population of Alfred Township, 1851-1881



**Table 3 — Sons and Daughters (10 years and older) Who Left Their Parents' Households Between 1861 and 1871, Alfred Township**

**i) British-origin**

<b>Age in 1861</b>	<b>Sons</b>	<b>Daughters</b>
10-14	0	4
15-19	6	8
20-24	10	5
25 and over	4	1
	20	18

(average age = 21.35)

(average age = 17.50)

**ii) French Canadian**

<b>Age in 1861</b>	<b>Sons</b>	<b>Daughters</b>
10-14	9	12
15-19	12	16
20-24	12	5
25 and over	7	1
	40	34

(average age = 19.37)

(average age = 16.20)

N.B. These sons and daughters either established their own households in Alfred Township or emigrated while their parents and siblings persisted in the township.

The suggestion that out-migration included young couples and new families rather than simply the departure of individuals is supported by evidence on the frequency of emigration by established family units. While households were often maintained from one decade to the next, there was also a constant flow out of Alfred Township and emigrants appear to have often left with other family members. Among British-origin residents, 53 per cent of emigrants between 1861 and 1871 left with either their parents or children while most others probably were accompanied by siblings or spouses. The likelihood of family emigration for French Canadians was even greater.

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Seventy-two per cent of French-Canadian emigrants appear to have departed during this decade as part of a family unit or at least with close relatives.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, then, families were on the move in Prescott County. Since census enumerations underestimate population turnover and represent minimum measures of family migration, we can safely conclude that geographic mobility was often negotiated with immediate relatives. The departure of established families may well have been related to the same inheritance calculations which motivated family emigration from other areas in Ontario and Quebec. As David Gagan and Gérard Bouchard have demonstrated for Peel County and the Saguenay, certain mature families were prepared to seek new opportunity in order to ensure that their offspring received sufficient patrimony, usually in the form of adjoining parcels of land. This research shows that family emigration was as much a sign of material strength as declining opportunity since the act of migration was always costly.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the replacement of older families by younger ones was an ongoing feature of family migration and thus was a central component of constant population turnover.

It should also be remembered however that the attraction which Alfred held for immigrants was sometimes short-lived. While some new settlers became part of the stable core of persisters, others remained present for only one enumeration. This pattern can be shown systematically in the case of British-origin settlers. Of the ninety-one immigrants to Alfred in 1861, 64 per cent were not there ten years later while of the immigrants to Alfred during the 1861-1871 period, 40 per cent were no longer resident by 1881. It is certainly possible that the new arrivals to Alfred in 1861 and 1871 included a large transient group for whom migration was an ongoing feature of life. Members of this group may have come to Alfred planning to stay only a few years or even only a few weeks, especially during the 1850s when land was still available elsewhere in Canada West. It is also likely, however, that Alfred Township did not always live up to the expectations held by new immigrants. For some the attraction of the township seems to have been more apparent than real, and after a period of acquaintance with this reality, a proportion of those who had come to settle

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19. The likelihood of family emigration cannot be confirmed since it is possible that family members left on their own at various times between enumerations. However, immigrants to Prescott County generally arrived as family units and it seems unlikely that this pattern would be substantially altered thereafter. For a general discussion of the importance of family migration in nineteenth-century Canada, see A. Gordon Darroch, "Migrants in the Nineteenth Century: Fugitives or Families in Motion?", *Journal of Family History*, VI (Fall 1981), pp. 257-77. The findings of the Saguenay project offer several points of comparison; see Christian Pouyez, Raymond Roy, and Gérard Bouchard, "La mobilité géographique en milieu rural: le Saguenay, 1852-1861", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XIV (May 1981), pp. 123-55. For another comparison, see Anders Norberg and Sunē Åkerman, "Migration and the Building of Families: Studies on the Rise of the Lumber Industry in Sweden", in Kurt Agren *et al.*, eds., *Aristocrats, Farmers, Proletarians: Essays in Swedish Demographic History* (Uppsala, 1973). Emigration as a family strategy is also demonstrated in Alan A. Brookes, "Family, Youth, and Leaving Home in Late-Nineteenth Century Rural Nova Scotia: Canning and the Exodus, 1868-1893", in Parr, ed., *Childhood and Family*.

20. Gagan, "Land, Population and Social Change", and Bouchard, "Family Strategies and Geographic Mobility".

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reconsidered and then moved on. Thus, this evidence suggests that among the younger families attracted by the opportunity to replace those no longer resident, some found a certain level of satisfaction and stayed while others met disappointment and left.

In sum, therefore, the data suggest that the Prescott County population included both transients and persisters at any one point in time and must be analysed in terms of several demographic groups. The Alfred Township enumerations suggest the relative importance of these various groups for British-origin residents during the 1851-1881 period. Graph 1 analyses the population of this township in terms of the number of enumerations for which individual residents were present. In this way the components of the Alfred British-origin community can be clearly identified at the start of each decade. Particular clarity is offered by the 1861 and 1871 enumerations as a result of the opportunity to analyse both previous and later decades. In 1861, for example, the Alfred population can be divided into two general groups: persisters from 1851, and individuals who appear for the first time, including the young children of these persisters as well as immigrants to the township. In turn, each of these groups can be further analysed according to their subsequent length of residence. Persisters from 1851 can be separated into those who do not reappear in 1871, those who reside for at least another decade but then are not present in 1881, and those who remain in the county throughout the period and perhaps longer. Similarly, individuals who appear on the 1861 enumeration for the first time include three possibilities: those who do not reappear, those still present in 1871 but then not in 1881, and those who remain through 1881.

Viewed in this way, the impact on Alfred Township of the specific demographic features of settlement and migration becomes readily apparent. The most significant overall result was the maintenance of an approximately constant population size. While the British-origin population was relatively stable, the out-migration of a large proportion of mature children ensured that the persistent population did not increase naturally. On the other hand, the diminished immigration of the second half of the nineteenth century meant that the population did not grow artificially. Taken together, these factors maintained the Alfred population at an established level. Subsequent to the early decades of settlement, the size of the population reached a numerical level which fluctuated but did not increase or decrease significantly for the rest of the century. The British-origin population of Alfred was 284 in 1851 and 270 in 1901. The same phenomenon was apparent at the county level where the population consistently included between seven and eight thousand British-origin residents. It should be remembered, however, that this relatively constant size was not the result of demographic homeostasis but rather the complex product of persistence and transience.

The French-Canadian pattern was quite distinct since emigration was more than balanced by the heavy immigration from Québec during the mid-nineteenth century and, thus, the French-Canadian population of Prescott County increased dramatically. By 1871, there were 9,623 French Canadians in the county and in 1881, this number increased to 14,601. After the 1880s, however, immigration from Quebec subsided considerably. The number of Quebec-born Prescott County residents declined from a peak of 6,771 in 1881 to 5,935 in 1891 and then dropped to 5,415 by 1901. This decline

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in immigration can be explained in terms of Prescott County's economic malaise. As a result of the *système agro-forestier*, Prescott County no longer attracted those in pursuit of survival and security. However, the ongoing phenomena of emigration and persistence in both good and bad economic times cannot be explained in the same way. Why was there constant emigration during the period of relative economic opportunity at mid-century? Why was there persistence when economic conditions deteriorated in later decades?

The full answers to these questions will never be known but some resolution is suggested by reconsideration of the process of family formation within the *système agro-forestier*. Seasonal labour in shanties and sawmills did represent economic opportunity both before and after marriage but did not always allow the desired farm establishment. In Prescott County during the mid-nineteenth century, the value of land as a base for mature family economies had a differential impact on the culturally-mixed population of Prescott County. As noted earlier, land acquisition was more difficult for those British-origin residents who sought elevated, relatively dry soil. By the 1850s when this type of land cost up to \$10 per acre, even a small lot of fifty acres would thus necessitate an investment of \$500. In contrast, a similar lot in the more available low-lying areas sought by French Canadians might cost as little as \$60.<sup>21</sup> The implications of this difference appear to have extended directly to population patterns in the county. The available evidence suggests that sufficient capital could not be accumulated during the life course phase of seasonal labour and family formation for purchase of the more expensive elevated lots. This labour might support marriage and early childbearing but it could only produce savings equal to the less costly low-lying land. As a result, it was the French-Canadians who most commonly made the transition from seasonal labour to independent farming in local townships.<sup>22</sup> Young British-origin residents generally had to depend upon inheritances or other financial support in order to fulfil agricultural ambitions within the county. Not surprisingly, this dependency engendered substantial out-migration during the mid-nineteenth century. Except for a minority who did acquire land through family support or who achieved economic independence perhaps through salaried positions in the lumber industry, most young British-origin residents left the county rather than accept the reality of continued status as a seasonal labourer. Both cultural trends contributed to rapid turnover of the lumber industry workforce. The Hamilton Brothers' records demonstrate this pattern. As would be expected, labourers involved in both shanty and sawmill work exhibited the highest rate of employment stability. Of these workers, 16 per cent worked only the first year of the two year period examined. Of those who

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21. The value of land in Prescott County was usually given by the census enumerators in 1851; see, for example, the returns for Alfred and Caledonia Townships.

22. This pattern is discussed in Gaffield, "Canadian Families", pp. 53-4. For a related example of the implications of a seasonal labour economy, see Allan Greer, "Fur Trade Labour and Lower Canadian Agrarian Structures", *Historical Papers* (1981), pp. 197-214.

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worked for Hamilton Brothers only in the shanties, 27 per cent did not return the second year while 36 per cent of the sawmill labourers had to be replaced.<sup>23</sup>

The turnover among Hamilton Brothers' employees was related to factors such as the possibility for French Canadians of successful family formation and eventual land acquisition as well as to the probability of English-Canadian out-migration. In other words, employment stability was connected to residential stability. However, the rate of labour turnover at Hamilton Brothers was also related to the inherent nature of lumber industry participation which appears to have often inspired pursuit of economic opportunity elsewhere. Involvement with companies such as the Hamilton Brothers included significant negative implications even during the relative prosperity of the mid-nineteenth century. There were several structural features of the Prescott County economy which worked against successful family formation and eventual farm acquisition. At the time, observers indicated that Ottawa Valley shantymen received higher wages than in any other part of Canada and one opinion depicted lumber industry employment as representing "une fortune."<sup>24</sup> However, work in the lumber industry was inherently temporary and employers such as Hamilton Brothers hired labourers only for the precise amount of time they were needed and job security only extended from day to day. Moreover, while Hamilton Brothers offered a variety of employment opportunities, they also dominated the village marketplace in Hawkesbury and through the company store recovered a substantial amount of their employees' wages. The store reportedly overpriced its products and stocked luxury goods which were offered on credit to Hamilton Brothers' workers. By payday at the end of each month, earnings could have been expended.<sup>25</sup>

It should also be emphasized that seasonal labour exacted a heavy physical toll. The lumber industry was only for the strong and healthy. For those who were inherently weak, family formation had to be supported in other ways. But even for the physically able, seasonal labour presented constant risks. Frostbite, machine-related accidents at the mill, and the well-known dangers of the drive were only some of the characteristics of lumber industry participation. For some young men, brief acquaintance with these working conditions was sufficient to inspire pursuit of economic opportunity elsewhere despite the promise of relatively good wages. In 1855, for example, Michel Dupuis worked three days and then "ran away."<sup>26</sup>

23. These percentages are based on examination of a computer file created from the data of the Hamilton Brothers employee records of 1856-57 and 1857-58. For a more detailed discussion, see Gaffield, "Seasonal Labour and Family Formation". Unfortunately, linkage of these records with the census returns is not possible since the names of employees are the only identifying variables.
24. Alexis de Barbezieux. *Histoire de la province ecclésiastique d'Ottawa* (Ottawa 1896), vol. 1, p. 164.
25. This pattern is evident from the Hamilton Brothers' account books and is similar to employment situations such as among the Lachine Canal workers who fought back in the 1840s; see H. Clare Pentland, "The Lachine Canal Strike of 1843", *Canadian Historical Review* (1948).
26. Hamilton Brothers' employee records, 1856. The Prescott County newspapers continually reported accidents and deaths in the lumber industry; see for example, *The News and Ottawa Valley Advocate*, 20 June 1876.



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Even the apparent fringe benefits of lumber industry employment were sometimes mixed blessings. The provision by Hamilton Brothers of plank houses for young couples lowered the economic threshold which marriage normally represented, and thereby encouraged individuals to enter the difficult childbearing years, perhaps before they were truly prepared. If marriage occurred before an adequate material base was established, the need to continue acquiring basic household goods would thereafter compete with the inevitably increasing demands of family consumption. In such a situation saving would be very difficult and, most significantly, the important transition to agriculture would become increasingly unlikely. Just as a few weeks without expected wages could jeopardize household maintenance, a few years without savings could have serious long-term implications for young families. Ideally, the move out of seasonal labour occurred just as the oldest child became able to contribute in an agricultural environment. But more importantly, this move had to occur before the number of older children made saving impossible. If family size reached the level where income could only match consumption before land was acquired, farming would probably never be achieved. The difficult years of childbearing had to be alleviated as soon as possible since saving in village areas became increasingly difficult as families matured.

Thus, the importance of seasonal labour to family formation could be insidious in several ways. Shanty and sawmill work might support preparation for family life and, thereafter, the first years of childbearing but this work was inherently insecure and represented a tenuous economic niche. This phenomenon helps explain the relatively late age-at-marriage in Prescott County in the mid-nineteenth century. In these years, couples continued to approximate the traditional European pattern of marriage in the mid-twenties. The European pattern has been explained in terms of the limited opportunities offered by a relatively closed economy.<sup>27</sup> While this explanation cannot be applied to Prescott County, the evidence suggests that widespread dependency on seasonal labour may have continued to make establishment of a separate household a considerable achievement and thereby engendered significant apprehension about family formation.

The obstacles to viable household establishment even during relatively good economic times help to explain the ongoing pattern of emigration from Prescott County but analysis of these obstacles makes the question of persistence even more perplexing. Why did a significant proportion of the population remain in the county especially after the 1870s? This question is more than a demographic issue although adjustments are certainly evident in individual and family behaviour. The decline of immigration and the continuance of emigration relieved some of the demographic pressure and parents also contributed by having fewer children. The ratio of children under five years of age to women between fifteen and forty-nine declined from 731 in 1881 to 674 in 1891 and then dropped to 648 by 1901. However, this type of demographic adjustment was occurring throughout central Canada and thus does not directly help explain why some families stayed in townships such as Alfred. To address

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27. A seminal article on this topic is J. Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective", in D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History* (London, 1965). More recently, see Levine, *Family Formation*.

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this question, we must attempt to probe into the mentality of late nineteenth century residents in Prescott County.<sup>28</sup>

One approach begins with the assumption that people prefer to persist rather than migrate. Without strong incentive, people choose to continue residing in the same location. Kinship is an important factor in this consideration. In nineteenth century Prescott County, family members and neighbouring relatives formed networks of mutual support. These networks became increasingly intensive as settlement matured with certain siblings and children locating in similar areas.<sup>29</sup> The importance of family and kinship support is emphasized by the dominance of the family as the basic unit of migration. As elsewhere in the nineteenth century, the image of footloose individuals is not appropriate to Prescott County. As we have seen, migration was generally a family affair even in the case of young couples who chose to marry before they sought opportunities elsewhere. Family and kinship offered at least the hope that individual difficulty could be compensated by collective effort.<sup>30</sup>

The role of kin support as an anchoring factor contributed to a sense of place for at least some Prescott County residents as settlement matured during the nineteenth century. Although the historical record is silent concerning the thoughts of most of the population, local newspapers of the late nineteenth century indicate that journalists, businessmen and civic leaders had developed a keen awareness that the lower Ottawa Valley had special needs and interests which demanded specific articulation and action. The initial editorial of the *Eastern Ontario Review* published in Vankleek Hill promised that the "local interests of these Eastern Counties will ever be our first solicitude, and in whatsoever we can do to promote the welfare of its people, that shall engage our most earnest labors."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the newspaper *La Nation* saw itself as the "organe des intérêts canadiens dans la partie Orientale de la province d'Ontario."<sup>32</sup> In articulating an attachment and belief in the region, social leaders engaged in two somewhat contradictory activities during the economic crisis of the late nineteenth century: an uncritical boosterism and the devising of solutions to the readily-apparent material problems.

The agricultural difficulties helped to inspire a belief that the development of towns held the solution to the area's economic problems. Three towns in Prescott

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28. The role of mentality in historical demography has recently attracted a great deal of attention including John Knodel's provocative article, "Family Limitation and the Fertility Transition", *Population Studies*, 31, (1977).

29. Kinship settlement was reflected in the names of certain communities in Prescott County such as Smith Settlement and Bradyville. For a similar example of the way in which migration and relocation was negotiated through family and kin, see Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City* (New York, 1978).

30. The persistence of families in Prescott County is quite similar to the experience of Toronto Gore Township which has been examined by Herbert J. Mays in "A Place to Stand: Families, Land and Permanence in Toronto Gore Township, 1820-1890", *Historical Papers* (1980), pp. 185-211.

31. *Eastern Ontario Review*, 15 December 1893.

32. *La Nation*, 26 September 1885.

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County aspired to leadership in this regard: Vankleek Hill, L'Original, and Hawkesbury. Since the sawmill industry ensured that Hawkesbury was less affected than elsewhere by the retreat of the forest frontier, promotional spirit was most apparent in Vankleek Hill and L'Original. The leaders of each community admitted that their towns had not yet achieved much stature but they all foresaw bright futures. Optimism was high despite the reality of grim times. In the case of Vankleek Hill, enthusiasm was based on geographic location and institutional strength. The Hill was described as the "natural centre of the trade and business of eastern Ontario" since it was located right between Montreal and Ottawa. Moreover, Vankleek Hill was "in the foremost rank as an educational centre" with not only common schools but also a Model School to train teachers and a high school to train county leaders. Churches and societies such as the Freemasons were also fully represented "while the women are busy in their own good way, having organizations of their own, for various purposes." These features of Vankleek Hill combined to support a heady assessment of the town's future.

As yet, 'the Hill' is a comparatively small community, but if the progress made in the past be an earnest indication of the future, the day is not far distant when it will claim a first place in the list of go-ahead (what shall we say?) cities.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, village leaders in L'Original were convinced that it was their own community which would rescue the county and, indeed, the lower Ottawa Valley from economic disaster. In the later 1870s, this conviction was based on anticipated railway construction which would link L'Original with the world beyond and produce a ripple-like burst of economic development.

Our farmers will find [themselves] provided convenient, cheap and speedy means of conveyance for their produce to places where it will find a ready market. Our merchants will have increased facilities for bringing in their goods; supply will create demand. Ready access to L'Original will bring in additional customers. Additional customers will afford a stimulus to increased exertions to supply their various needs. The necessity for additional house accommodation will encourage capitalists to invest in buildings. Building sites will be in demand, new streets will be opened, and the sites already in the market will be rapidly taken up and utilized. With the natural advantages of L'Original and coupled with the increased facilities of communication with our great centres, L'Original will become a summer resort. Trade that has been languishing will revive and the county town of the united counties of Prescott and Russell will become one of the most thriving spots in the Ottawa Valley. The high tide is beginning to set in, and taken at the flood, will lead on to fortune. L'Original will take the place which a county town should hold – the thriving centre of a busy, important, and flourishing community.<sup>34</sup>

The boosterism and community spirit of local leaders promoted persistence in Prescott County during the late nineteenth century. These leaders articulated a sense of attachment, a sense of place which encouraged them to stay rather than leave the "state

33. *Eastern Ontario Review*, 15 December 1893.

34. *The News and Ottawa Valley Advocate*, 20 June 1876. The local French-Canadian press also saw railway construction as a key to economic revitalization. In admitting that local residents were not even "aussi riches que ceux d'autres comtés relativement moins favorisés," *La Nation* asked, "ne peut-on l'attribuer à leur manque de communications?" See 10 December 1885.

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of utter paralysation,” as it was called at the time.<sup>35</sup> For some, emigration was not an appropriate response to the economic conditions. The local French-Canadian press deplored “le triste sort, la funeste manie d’un nombre encore trop grand de familles canadiennes qui chaque mois prennent la route des États-Unis, le chemin de l’exil.”<sup>36</sup> Such sentiment obviously reflected the self-interest of community leaders who recognized that their own positions were in peril. However, these leaders also attempted to devise practical strategies for material improvement. Some ideas were not too helpful. One “remedy for hard times” was thrift: “stop spending so much on fine clothes, rich food and style. Buy good, healthy food, cheaper and better clothing; get more real and substantial things of life every way....”<sup>37</sup> Other ideas were more to the point. In the 1870s, there was great interest in dairy farming, especially cheese manufacturing. Local farmers held meetings to share information about this new activity and to listen to guest speakers such as an “experienced Dairyman from Vermont” who in 1876 promised that dairy farming would lead to replenishing of exhausted soil.<sup>38</sup> During these years, cheese factories were established throughout Prescott County increasing from six in 1891 to seventy-two by 1901.

A second survival strategy involved a common refuge of unproductive places: tourism. In addition to L’Original’s potential as a summer resort, Prescott County’s claim centered on the mineral springs at Caledonia which earlier in the century had attracted vacationers and health seekers from faraway regions. At one time, Caledonia Springs boasted three hotels and several boarding houses but a series of fires and other misfortunes ruined the resort by the early 1870s. However, the property was sold in 1876 and the new owner began formulating plans to build a railway directly to the Springs. Moreover, the Grand Hotel was reopened and through advertising was even able to identify an export market; in 1880, Caledonia Springs contracted for the export to Europe of one hundred barrels per week of mineral water. This activity confirmed local belief in these years that Prescott County did indeed possess tourist possibilities which could be exploited to energize the stagnant economy.<sup>39</sup>

The transition to dairy farming and tourism promotion held some hope for Prescott County residents but the most astute diagnosis of material weakness focused on the lack of economic diversification. Some community leaders were convinced that the establishment of factories was needed to balance staple production. These leaders were not fussy about the type of desired factory.

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35. *Ibid.*, February 1876.

36. *La Nation*, 4 June 1886.

37. *The News and Ottawa Valley Advocate*, 17 February 1880.

38. *Ibid.*, 2 January 1876 and 12 December 1876. The transition from wheat, hay, and oats farming to a dairy emphasis in Prescott County was part of a larger agricultural transformation in the region; see, for example, Lloyd G. Reeds, “Agricultural Regions of Southern Ontario, 1880-1951”, *Economic Geography*, 35 (January 1959), pp. 219-27.

39. See, for example, *The News and Ottawa Valley Advocate*, 30 May 1876 and 3 February 1880.

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Our situation upon the Ottawa River with the Railway on the North Shore, makes it a most desirable position for a manufactory of any kind. We hope to see the attention of our village Councillors turned to this project at an early day....<sup>40</sup>

*La Nation* also foresaw a bright future for Prescott and neighbouring Russell County as a result of the anticipated economic diversification. The editors predicted that with “la multiplicité de leurs manufactures, les deux comtés de Prescott et Russell deviendront dans un avenir rapproché un pays florissant et prospère.”<sup>41</sup>

The desire for factories, however, was widely shared in late nineteenth century Canada, and Prescott County residents soon learned that special concessions to businessmen would be required even to enter the competition for industry. The prospect of “special concessions” usually in the form of low-cost or free land with reduced taxes tested the level of desperation among the county’s established leaders who would have to continue without similar concessions. Their concern delayed action for awhile but as conditions worsened, the question of inducements had to be answered.

Would it not be well to ascertain the feeling of the electors of the County town towards offering inducements to any company desirous of erecting a factory at L’Original, that would employ from one to two hundred hands? A slight consideration of the kind might be productive of much good in directing the attention of persons having capital to invest.

By 1880, village leaders in L’Original were ready to take the initiative in “inducing capitalists”:

With the object of inducing the erection of manufactories or workshops within the village limits the Reeve urged upon the Council the passage of a measure relieving any capitalists who may erect workshops within the village limits, from taxation for twenty years. The subject met with the unanimous approval of the Council and a resolution authorizing the introduction and passage of a By-law for the purpose was carried with the condition however that such a factory should not employ less than twenty labourers on an average each year.<sup>42</sup>

The extent to which optimism and promotional initiative was widely shared in Prescott County is impossible to assess but the patterns of persistence and migration emphasize that there was no simple relationship between economic conditions and population stability at any period in the nineteenth century. The Malthusian associations of relative prosperity with rapid immigration and material difficulty with mass emigration are partly justified but also quite misleading. These associations slight the importance of ongoing emigration and persistence.

The Prescott County example specifically suggests that persistence must not be ignored within a general emphasis on population turnover. Despite the economic crisis of the late nineteenth century, a significant proportion of residents remained in the county. One explanation involves the extent and strength of family and kinship attachment. This consideration was not simply associated with sentiment. Rather,

40. *Ibid.*, 10 October 1876.

41. *La Nation*, 26 September 1885.

42. *The News and Ottawa Valley Advocate*, 4 May and 1 June 1880.

individuals believed that their best chance for survival and security lay in the potential material support of relatives. Family and kinship attachment also contributed to a "sense of place" at least among some Prescott County community leaders. Memory of what had been led to optimism about what might be, and these residents attempted to devise new ways of achieving material security. For the most part, their efforts were doomed to failure for reasons that were not clearly seen at the time. It is significant, however, that local belief in the need to escape from substantial reliance on a staples economy was, in fact, a primitive formulation of dependency theory. Although the full implications of this theory would certainly not have been accepted by community leaders, the kind of development engendered by the *système agro-forestier* did, indeed, ensure underdevelopment in the county.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, the Prescott County evidence also suggests that a key determinant of net population growth during the nineteenth century was immigration. Even during periods of economic opportunity, communities would lose significant numbers of residents through emigration. The ambition of farming and the uncertainties of wage-labour employment were constant factors of life in nineteenth century Canada. For young couples, the process of family formation was never easy while for mature families the question of inheritance was a prime consideration. In either circumstance, emigration was a common strategy throughout the century.<sup>44</sup> In this context, the Prescott County experience emphasizes that land hunger in the nineteenth century must be understood in terms of the concept of family economy. It was various forms of land exploitation which allowed all family members the best and most constant opportunity to realize their own productive potential. This point cannot be over-emphasised since the pursuit of land has traditionally been viewed in the context of psychological motivations which became largely irrational as "modernization" appeared on the horizon. Macho individualism, primitive wastefulness, and pastoral attachment are only some of the characteristics which have been associated with the conquest of land in North America during the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> However, the emerging wage-labour economy did not always represent "progress" to those struggling to survive since there was limited opportunity for women and children and generally only seasonal work for young men. Thus, family life remained a materially insecure and uncertain process even during periods of overall economic growth.

The long-term implications of this security and uncertainty are also worth emphasizing since nineteenth century social leaders considered an inability to establish viable farms to result from individual failings and character weaknesses. As Kenneth Duncan suggests, failure to settle in a rural environment was blamed "on the evil attractions in the city of cheap alcohol, numerous grog shops, and the general

43. Normand Séguin pursues this concept in the case of Hébertville and Robert J. Bryon and R. James Sacouman have collected a related set of articles in *Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada* (Toronto, 1979).

44. For another example of this process, see Bouchard, "Démographie et Société Rurale."

45. Land in Canada also has had a positive image associated with both a rural myth and a sense of nationalism; for a discussion of this perspective, see Cole Harris, "The Myth of the Land in Canadian Nationalism", in Peter Russell, ed., *Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto, 1966), pp. 27-43.

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excitement of urban life. Many a sad picture was drawn of the innocent countryman enticed into a gin mill, debauched by wicked companions, and, thereafter, a slave to alcohol, condemned to a miserable existence in a city slum.<sup>46</sup> Critics also suggested that laziness and apathy explained why agricultural ambition was frequently left unfulfilled. Joy Parr has noted that Canada West observers pictured the urban poor as "idlers who lacked the initiative to seek out ready opportunities."<sup>47</sup> From this perspective, those families which achieved independent farming were virtuous and hardworking; those which failed had only themselves to blame. In other words, the ultimate determinant of successful family formation was not the nature of economic opportunity but rather individual character.

The thrust of these impressionistic analyses is clearly not supported by the experience of Prescott County. Certainly, individual characteristics were important but the Prescott County evidence suggests that structural features of the emerging wage labour system undermined the traditional nature of the family economy and significantly weakened the customary advantage represented by the collective productive ability of the family unit. This customary advantage was still pursued by families in light of wage rates which generally did not allow individuals to act as single family breadwinners but the opportunity for collective contribution was substantially altered. While certain historians may be correct in suggesting that the new wage labour economy engendered certain psychological and material benefits, especially to women as individuals, the initial implications of this system also included significant negative components in terms of family formation.<sup>48</sup>

It is in this sense that the *système agro-forestier* marginalized large segments of rural society in the nineteenth century. The Prescott County evidence generally supports the conceptualization of this process which has been offered in recent work, especially the important research on the Saguenay.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, some subtle

46. It should be noted that Kenneth Duncan's own interpretation does not suggest that the failure to re-settle rurally was related to the nature of the family economy. Rather, he urges that Irish immigrants settled in urban areas in an attempt to maintain the communal attachment and social cohesion that did not appear possible in the Canadian countryside. Duncan suggests that if "the immigrants rejected rural life in Canada they did so in order to retain their peasant values. The distances, the wildness, but above all the physical and social isolation taken for granted by Canadian farmers overwhelmed the Irish peasant. Used to constant companionship in large social groups he was appalled by the isolation imposed by the structure of Canadian agriculture, and apparently found it impossible, in a rural situation, to recreate his traditional pattern of life." The relative importance of this kind of psychological dimension should become clearer as further research better defines the actual possibility of rural settlement. See Kenneth Duncan, "Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* (1965). A recent reinterpretation of Irish settlement in Ontario which undermines Duncan's emphasis on the pull of urban centres is offered by Donald H. Akenson in "Ontario: Whatever happened to the Irish?", in Donald H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, III, (Gananoque, 1982).

47. G.J. Parr, "The Welcome and the Wake: Attitudes in Canada West Toward the Irish Famine Migration", *Ontario History* (1974).

48. See Gaffield, "Seasonal Labour and Family Formation."

49. Séguin, *La Conquête* and Bouchard, "Family Strategies and Geographic Mobility."

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differences are also apparent. In some cases, lumbering may have indeed enticed workers away from proper attention to farming but, from the point of view of Prescott County residents, independent agriculture was not only often beyond their reach but also did not afford a chance of even temporary material security without the lumber industry. The lumber industry cannot be held responsible for subsistence farming in Prescott County; rather, given land conditions and geographic circumstances, this industry gave farmers their one motivation for surplus production even if only for a few decades.

Similarly, the *système agro-forestier* did encourage migration but this phenomenon occurred in a more general nineteenth century context of declining land availability and an emerging wage-labour system in the staples economy of central Canada. The forest was not simply a Scylla luring would-be farmers into the Charybdis of lumber industry participation. The decision to participate was a component of individual and family survival strategies in the face of rapid social change. Rather than blaming families of the *système agro-forestier* for choosing poorly, we should view their decision as forceful testimony of widespread economic dislocation in nineteenth century Canada.

The economic strategies employed in late nineteenth century Prescott County were not equal to the task of material regeneration. The transition to dairy farming offered some relief but the establishment of factories also meant that cheese and butter production was removed from the family economy. These factories did create employment opportunities but the number of jobs was limited. In 1901, only 115 workers were employed in cheese and butter factories.<sup>50</sup> Prescott County's tourist ambitions for Caledonia Springs were even less fulfilled. Just as the new owners re-established the resort in the late 1870s, a mysterious illness ruined the Springs. News of this illness spread quickly and the resort closed as new visitors failed to arrive. Although there was a report of new mineral springs at Caledonia in 1883, Prescott County's potential as a major tourist center was no longer even discussed.<sup>51</sup>

Efforts to diversify economically were no more successful than the other strategies of Prescott County residents. Beyond the establishment of cheese and butter factories, there was little economic development in the late nineteenth century. The lumber industry continued to be the major employer in the county. In addition to the sawmills at Hawkesbury, companies made wooden boxes, wood pulp, and other lumber products. However, this industry had been taken over by a small number of firms and in 1901 there were only fourteen such establishments. Other manufacturing activity was restricted to a few flour and grist mills, several carriage and wagon factories, and four brick, tile and pottery establishments. The total employment opportunities offered by all industries amounted to only 1,277 jobs.<sup>52</sup> In the context of failed economic diversification, towns such as Vankleek Hill and L'Original did not grow into

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50. The impact of local factories was immediately felt within family economies. In 1871, homemade cheese totalled 49,005 lbs. but then dropped to 39,194 lbs. in 1881 and 11,102 lbs. in 1891. The next census enumeration did not even request this information.

51. *The News and Ottawa Valley Advocate*, 10 August 1880.

52. The lumber industry was the major employer with 530 wage-earners employed in "log products."



## BOOM OR BUST

cities. There was little urbanization in Prescott County despite the rural economic crisis. The county was left without a meaningful place in the economic world of central Canada.

There is no doubt that within the optimism and initiative of community leaders there were competing visions of Prescott County's future by the end of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, however, these competing visions came to focus on issues of cultural identity rather than on material circumstance. In this context, the absence of labour organization is particularly noteworthy. The trade union movement which emerged so forcefully in other parts of Ontario especially during the 1880s was not represented in Prescott County.<sup>53</sup> Poor economic conditions and the power of lumber merchants partly explain this phenomenon but the development of hostility between Anglo-Canadians and French Canadians is closer to the heart of the issue. Under the leadership of merchants, politicians and religious leaders, the material crisis of the lower Ottawa Valley was subsumed within the larger cultural crisis of late nineteenth century Canada, and cultural consciousness emerged as the ultimate expression of local frustration and failure. This process represents yet another level at which the demography and economy of the lower Ottawa Valley are central to the major themes of Canadian history.

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53. The lumber industry did involve labour disputes in neighbouring regions up the Ottawa River although labour organization was limited; see Edward McKenna, "Unorganized Labour versus Management: The Strike at the Chaudiere Lumber Mills, 1891", *Histoire sociale/Social History* (November, 1972) as well as the general discussion of the late nineteenth century in Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, "The Bonds of Unity: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900", *Histoire sociale/Social History* (November 1981).