

## Cameras in the Countryside: Recreational Photography in Rural Ontario, 1851-1920

Jacqueline McIsaac

Volume 36, numéro 1, 2013

Canada's Usable Past: Consumer Technologies in Historical Perspective

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1025787ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1025787ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

CSTHA/AHSTC

ISSN

1918-7750 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

McIsaac, J. (2013). Cameras in the Countryside: Recreational Photography in Rural Ontario, 1851-1920. *Scientia Canadensis*, 36(1), 5-31.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1025787ar>

Résumé de l'article

L'introduction et le perfectionnement ultérieur du négatif sur plaque de verre ont facilité l'appropriation de la photographie dans l'Ontario rural. En tant que technologie de consommation récréative, l'appareil photo est devenu plus facile à utiliser, financièrement accessible, et portable, donc mieux adapté aux besoins des consommateurs ruraux. Bien que les progrès technologiques ont permis à l'appareil photo d'être adopté comme un loisir, les valeurs culturelles et les normes sociales du monde rural ont conditionné son utilisation. Ces intérêts ont encadré les utilisateurs de la caméra, les modalités d'approvisionnement des fournitures photographiques, la place de la caméra dans les stratégies de diversification des revenus des ménages, et le regard du photographe. Les technologies photographiques auraient ainsi permis une extension—et non la contestation—des valeurs culturelles rurales lors de leur introduction à la campagne. Enfin, comme premier système de photographie accessible aux classes moyenne et ouvrière, les plaques de verre apparaissent comme des révélateurs des priorités visuels de ce nouveau groupe de consommateurs. Leur étude nous permet de contribuer aux discussions en cours sur les aspects culturels de la société rurale. Par conséquent, nous pouvons appréhender les caméras à plaque de verre dans la campagne ontarienne à la fois comme un support documentaire ainsi que comme une forme d'expression culturelle.

# Cameras in the Countryside: Recreational Photography in Rural Ontario, 1851-1920

Jacqueline McIsaac

University of Guelph

**Abstract:** The introduction and subsequent refinement of glass plate negative technology facilitated photography's appropriation within rural Ontario. As a recreational consumer technology, the camera became easier to use, financially accessible, and portable, thus better suiting the needs of rural consumers. While technological advancements allowed the camera to be adopted as a leisure pursuit, its use was directed by the countryside's cultural values and social norms. These interests influenced who used cameras, how photo-supplies were purchased, the camera's place within household income diversification strategies, and the photographer's gaze, all of which suggest that when photo-technology was used in the countryside, it was as an extension of, not a challenge to, rural cultural values. At the same time, as the first photography system that was accessible to the middle and labouring classes, glass plates cannot help but reveal the visual priorities this new group of consumers, thus contributing to current discussions on cultural aspects of rural society. Consequently, glass plate cameras in Ontario's countryside functioned as both a documentary medium as well as a form of cultural expression.

**Résumé:** L'introduction et le perfectionnement ultérieur du négatif sur plaque de verre ont facilité l'appropriation de la photographie dans l'Ontario rural. En tant que technologie de consommation récréative, l'appareil photo est devenu plus facile à utiliser, financièrement accessible, et portable, donc mieux adapté aux besoins des consommateurs ruraux. Bien que les progrès technologiques ont permis à l'appareil photo d'être adopté comme un loisir, les valeurs culturelles et les normes sociales du monde rural ont conditionné son utilisation. Ces intérêts ont encadré les utilisateurs de la caméra, les modalités d'approvisionnement des fournitures photographiques, la place de la caméra dans les stratégies de diversification des revenus des ménages, et le regard du photographe. Les technologies photographiques auraient ainsi permis une extension—et non la contestation—des valeurs culturelles rurales lors de leur introduction à la campagne. Enfin, comme premier système de photographie accessible aux classes moyenne et ouvrière, les plaques de verre apparaissent comme des révélateurs des priorités visuels de ce nouveau groupe de consommateurs. Leur

étude nous permet de contribuer aux discussions en cours sur les aspects culturels de la société rurale. Par conséquent, nous pouvons appréhender les caméras à plaque de verre dans la campagne ontarienne à la fois comme un support documentaire ainsi que comme une forme d'expression culturelle.

The perspectives of Ontario's past rural residents are, today, relatively hidden. As historians, we can hear their voices through diaries, tally their wealth from censuses, and read their life's highlights from obituaries. But seeing rural life as they saw it often eludes us. Piecing together their visual life experiences—the look of a successful crop in the field, the people and places they considered beautiful or significant, their prized livestock—requires reading their visual documents as active acts of commemoration that fulfilled a desire to record their tangible experiences and achievements. The qualities that gave these images personal and societal relevance are often ignored in favour of using images of people, places, and events to illustrate a fashion, building style, or social activity. The creator's intention becomes lost and with it their life's visual record.<sup>1</sup>

Photographs are especially prone to such uses, but when a photographer's entire collection is considered as part of their life-narrative a more personal rural experience emerges; rather than a chronicle of life events, the people, places, and accomplishments the photographer saw and valued materializes. The photographer's subject and method were both dependent upon cultural factors in addition to their social, occupational, and economic priorities.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, their relationship with the camera was guided by contemporary understandings of photography's commemorative potentials. This was particularly so in photography's early days, when each photograph required a tremendous amount of skill to produce and the camera was believed to be a device to accurately and objectively record the truth.<sup>3</sup> This ideology extended into

---

1. Peter Burke provides a compelling argument against historians' traditional uses of images in his book *Eyewitnessing*, noting that they often "illustrate conclusions that the author has already reached by other means, rather than to give new answers to new questions." Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 10.

2. Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography, a Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 6.

3. Stephanie Spencer, *Francis Bedford, Landscape Photography and Nineteenth-Century British Culture: The Artist as Entrepreneur* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 18; Alma Davenport, *The History of Photography, an Overview* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 34. Today such an interpretation is widely recognized as an oversimplification of the photographer-subject relationship. See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 3; Bourdieu, *Photography, a Middle-Brow Art*, 74-77; Douglas R. Nickel, "Peter Henry Emerson: The Mechanics of Seeing," in *The Meaning of*

Ontario's countryside, where many rural residents regarded the camera as a documentary tool but were directed in practice by their priorities as rural inhabitants and viewers. In effect, rural social values influenced who used cameras, why, and what was photographed, while the photographs they produced reveal both how they saw rural life and how that perspective was formed.

This paper examines the intersection of rural social ideologies, household economies, and the camera as a consumer technology, arguing that rural culture dictated the terms of cameras' recreational usage.<sup>4</sup> While the archival collections of some rural commercial photographers are considered for comparative purposes, twenty-six glass plate negative collections of recreational photographers who resided in Ontario's countryside are used to evaluate camera use in rural areas. In almost all cases, the glass plate negative, instead of the photograph, was consulted in order to assess how each photographer purchased photography goods and equipment as well as to evaluate their camera usage. Additionally, a quantity-based approach was taken in this analysis, where the frequency of certain kinds of images was taken to represent a subject's overall cultural importance. Rural Ontarians' use of cameras will be addressed on three fronts: the first section explains glass plate photography's consumer trends across Canada and specifically within rural Ontario, the second section addresses how the camera was used for recreation and documentation within rural areas, and the third section explores how it was sometimes used as an occupational diversification strategy. Ultimately, the accessibility and use of photography among rural Ontarians adopted a noticeably rural quality, where technological advances made it a feasible pursuit but its usage was guided by the countryside's social ideologies and values.

Glass plate photography was the first photographic medium to be widely used in the countryside and is thus central within studies on rural photography. While first introduced in 1851, glass plates remained popular into the 1920s among professionals and serious amateurs. Some government bodies, such as Canada's Department of the Interior, used glass plates until the 1950s. Nevertheless, the relationship between it and

---

*Photography*, eds. Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson (Williamstown, New Haven: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute ; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2008), 65.

4. This article uses nineteenth century terminology for each photographer's level of engagement with the camera. As such, commercial photographers are those whose primary occupation was photography and who made money from their business. Amateurs were more concerned with the artistic potential of photography and did not make money from their photography except through prize money they earned from exhibitions or competitions. Recreational photographers simply used photography as a pastime and generally did not earn money.

its rural usage is complex. Rural consumers only appropriated recreational photography after camera technology had progressed enough to suit their needs, but once adopted it fit into pre-existing cultural, social, and economic trends. Rural photographers were predominantly men, as technological pastimes were largely outside of women's traditional hobbies. Family finances and rural residents' partial self-sufficiency also contributed to how the camera was used, even to the point of helping their efforts towards occupational diversity. The foundations of rural culture—engagements with the land, community interdependency, partial self-sufficiency, and resource extraction as a mode of production—were all photographed extensively, indicating that these were the aspects of rural life most valued. Consequently, when rural residents picked up their camera, it was as an extension of, not challenge to, country culture.

Rural Canadian culture is an ambiguous category of analysis but helps to determine what photographers chose to capture. It is central to this discussion, but rural culture, as any other culture, is nuanced and largely resists one succinct definition, especially while considering 'rural' as a social category instead of a geographical location.<sup>5</sup> Several historians have contributed to ongoing discussions on rural culture. While arguing against a strictly agricultural and population-based definition of rural, Daniel Samson suggested that rural life primarily revolved around labour. Although rural spaces themselves were generally areas of low population density, most residents had the ability to at least partially sustain themselves through both market and non-market exchanges.<sup>6</sup> As such, exploiting the land and sea for subsistence, an ability to obtain some measure of independence from wage labour, and developing community relationships on the "social experience of work" were all foundations of

---

5. Rural culture is a developing field of academic interest that needs substantially more attention than can be given in this article.

6. Daniel Samson, *Contested Countryside: Rural Workers and Modern Society in Atlantic Canada, 1800-1950* (Fredericton, NB: Published for the Gorsebrook Research Institute for Atlantic Canada Studies by Acadiensis Press, 1994), 22-23, 27. See also Béatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 8; Doug McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 5, 10; Peter A. Baskerville. "Chattel Mortgages and Community in Perth County Ontario," *The Canadian Historical Review* 87, 4 (2006) : 584; Ruth Sandwell, "Rural Reconstruction: Towards a New Synthesis in Canadian History," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 27, 53 (1994): 10, 20, 29; Rusty Bitterman, Robert A. MacKinnon and Graeme Wynn, "Of Inequality and Interdependence in the Nova Scotian Countryside, 1850-70," *Canadian Historical Review* 74, 1 (1993): 1-45; John I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

rural life.<sup>7</sup> Susan Lewthwaite and Catharine Wilson have addressed the centrality of the community network. Here, Lewthwaite demonstrated that rural inhabitants were more comfortable settling disputes among themselves than seeking outside intervention while Wilson showed the necessity of work bees within rural communities.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, relations with kin and neighbours helped structure rural societies. Ruth Sandwell added to this discussion by advocating the importance of 'rural' as a necessary category of analysis and inquiry. For Sandwell, 'ruralness' was characterized by various economic and social interactions. In this sense, rural culture was defined through the behaviours and ideologies of rural residents themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Photographs can help identify the elements of rural life considered most culturally valuable through the acts of visual documentation and commemoration. To this end, rural culture is seen as a complex balance of community relationships, shared labour experiences, mutual dependency, and varying degrees of self-sufficiency, but the primacy of the land and the lives rural residents built from it also become apparent through the province's many rural glass plate collections. Photographs of barn raisings, threshing bees, families and their property, and the landscape all showcase important elements of rural culture while their creation depended upon the influence of rural social values.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the camera as a consumer technology was used in accordance with customary rural social norms and facilitated the ordering of visual priorities, both of which display the influence of the countryside's culture on the camera as well as on the act of photography. As such, this paper contributes to earlier discussions by showing how rural residents saw and valued these cultural features while simultaneously suggesting that rural culture included a keen awareness of tangible relationships with the land.

---

7. Samson, *Contested Countryside*, 22, 26. See also McCalla, *Planting the Province*, 9, 69 for a discussion on the importance of economic relationships between farmers.

8. Susan Lewthwaite, "Violence, Law, and Community in Rural Upper Canada," in *Essays in the History of Canadian Law*, eds. Tina Loo, Jim Phillips and Susan Lewthwaite (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 162-63; Catharine Wilson, "Reciprocal Work Bees and the Meaning of Neighbourhood," *Canadian Historical Review* 82, 3 (2001): 431-464.

9. Ruth Sandwell, *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 11-14.

10. For examples of Ontario's early photography see S. Lynn Campbell, "R.R. Sallows: Landscape and Portrait Photographer," (1988), [http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/resources/archival\\_&\\_special\\_collections/the\\_collections/digital\\_collections/agriculture/sallows.html](http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/resources/archival_&_special_collections/the_collections/digital_collections/agriculture/sallows.html); Martyn G. Pullin, *Life in the Country: A View from One Hundred Years Ago* (Burlington: Tanner Ritchie Publishing, 2004); Jennifer Harper, *City Work at Country Prices: The Portrait Photographs of Duncan Donovan* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), 10; Jennifer McKendry, *Early Photography in Kingston* (Kingston: J. McKendry, 1998).

### Photo-Technology and Rural Consumers

The almost immediate popularity of George Eastman's 1888 roll film Kodak camera is often mislabelled as photography's initiation into the world of consumer technologies. The Kodak camera certainly did revolutionize recreational and amateur photography; its ease of use and all too accurate slogan, 'You press the button, we do the rest,' celebrated photography's newfound simplicity.<sup>11</sup> However, Eastman's Kodak camera was the next step in an already active photo-technology market characterized by competitive advertisements, frequently updated patents, and evolving consumer tastes. The foundations upon which photography's widespread consumer popularity was built began in 1851, when collodion-coated glass plate negatives were shown to be an effective and efficient method of capturing images. While photographic media were available to consumers as of 1839 with Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's daguerreotypes and William Henry Fox Talbot's calotypes, photography did not receive extensive commercial success until collodion-coated glass plates became popular.<sup>12</sup>

Glass plate negatives radically altered photography's potential as a consumer technology by being more practical and financially accessible than any previous method. The two most popular systems before its introduction, the daguerreotype and the calotype, were limited to use by educated and financially secure people because of the expense and technical knowledge necessary to own and operate a camera.<sup>13</sup> The 1851 introduction of glass plates coated in a light sensitive collodion solution, commonly known as the wet plate process, began to change who used cameras and how they did so. The wet plate process was almost immediately recognized by contemporary photographers as the best photographic process to date.<sup>14</sup> This system combined the crisp focus of

---

11. Hugh C. Wilson, "The True and the False Amateur." *American Amateur Photographer* 10, 2 (1898): 80-81.

12. This was especially so in North America, where the calotype did not receive widespread success and the daguerreotype was only accessible to the moderately wealthy. Roger Taylor, *Impressed By Light: British Photographs From Paper Negatives, 1840-1860* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 14, 27; Ralph Greenhill, *Early Photography in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965), 30.

13. Grace Seiberling and Carolyn Bloore, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 4; Colleen Skidmore, "Women Workers in Notman's Studio. 'Young Ladies of the Printing Room'," *History of Photography* 20, 2 (1996), 126; Diana Pedersen, and Martha Phemister, "Women and Photography in Ontario, 1839-1929: A Case Study of the Interaction of Gender and Technology," in *Despite the Odds: Essays on Canadian Women and Science*, ed. Marianne Gosztonyi Aimley (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1990), 91-92.

14. Andrew J. Birrell, "The Early Years: 1839-1885," in *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada, 1839-1940*, ed. Lilly Koltun (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry &

daguerreotypes with calotypes' ability to reproduce images, but after 1878, when the gelatine dry plate process was perfected, photography became less expensive and more 'user-friendly,' thus further extending photography's potential user base.<sup>15</sup> Due to photography's increasing popularity, competition among photo-goods manufacturers kept prices of photography equipment and materials low, making glass plates a more financially accessible form of photography than any previous technology.<sup>16</sup> During the 1880s and 1890s, an average entry level camera, lens, bellows, and stand could be purchased for \$10 and the consumable items such as glass plates, chemicals, and corners could be purchased for less than \$5.<sup>17</sup> Used or inferior quality cameras could be purchased for under \$5.<sup>18</sup> At a time when most labourers earned approximately \$1 per day, photography had become a hobby that many individuals could afford, unlike previous methods that used prohibitively expensive materials to produce even a single image.<sup>19</sup>

The glass plate process was also much more refined and had fewer complexities than previous formats, thus a thorough knowledge of chemistry and physics was less vital to the proper production a photograph. The wet plate process required the direct involvement of the photographer, as they needed to coat their glass plates in collodion immediately before exposure. However, the introduction of the gelatine dry plate process in 1878 altered how photographers used and purchased their materials, as they no longer needed to immediately expose their

---

Whiteside, 1984), 5.

15. Brian Coe, *Cameras: From Daguerreotypes to Instant Pictures* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1978), 13; Davenport, *The History of Photography, an Overview*, 23.

16. Bloore and Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, 107.

17. Greenhill, *Early Photography in Canada*, 59.

18. Alfred Arner. Diary, 1908. "Cash Paid Out." Alfred Arner Collection. Harrow Early Immigrant Research Centre (henceforth HEIRS).

19. Ralph Greenhill, *Canadian Photography, 1839-1920* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1979), 25. Some daguerreotype cameras could be purchased for \$5, but the cost of materials and chemicals to produce an image was restrictive. The silvered copper plates used for each daguerreotype was the most expensive item in the process, costing between 12¢ and 17¢ each. Later dry plate negatives cost approximately 4¢ for the same size plate. Unlike the later collodion and gelatine glass plate processes, daguerreotypes process did not use negatives, meaning that each image would have required the same amount of time and materials to produce. For example, a commercial portrait taken using glass plates would have cost between 16¢ and 33¢ each, or between \$1 and \$2 for six prints, as was a typical order. A daguerreotype of the same size would have cost between \$3 and \$5. See also Keith F Davis, Jane Lee Aspinwall, and Marc F Wilson, *The Origins of American Photography: From Daguerreotype to Dry-Plate, 1839-1885* (Kansas City; New Haven, Conn.; London: Hall Family Foundation : In Association with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art ; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2007), 64.



negatives directly after sensitizing them. Instead of exposing wet plates, the gelatine process used glass plates coated in light sensitive gelatine that had been allowed to dry. This gelatine retained its light sensitivity for several months, which made mass manufacturing and distribution to rural areas possible. Whereas wet plate photographers had been confined to the studio or forced to bring their chemical stock with them while traveling, dry plate photographers could work outside of the studio, needing only to bring their camera, stand, and negatives with them when they chose to do so.<sup>20</sup>

Ontario's rural areas were not excluded from the benefits dry plate photography offered as many of its residents bought cameras for recreational purposes after its development. Between 1851 and the 1920s participation in recreational photography steadily increased and those residing in rural Ontario, such as farmers, labourers, and lumbermen, began purchasing and using cameras for pleasure, and occasionally for profit.<sup>21</sup> The gelatine glass plate process suited rural consumers; while few had participated in the wet plate process, dry plate technology caused a surge in the number of rural residents who recreationally used the camera because it allowed photographers to take their cameras with them around the farm while affordable enough to not be considered frivolous.<sup>22</sup> This technology was also better able to capture the kinds of images most socially valued by rural men and women since the images they most often took necessitated a portable camera. Photographs of farms, fields, livestock, and woodlands predominate within their collections, all of which were much easier to capture with dry plates. Ultimately, the technological advantages dry plates offered made photography flexible enough fit within rural lives in a practical and meaningful way.

Photography equipment and supplies were generally available to small-town Ontarians as of the 1870s through two sources: photography studios and general or speciality stores.<sup>23</sup> The 1870s was a significant decade for Ontario's photographers since many studios opened in rural and small towns at this time. This follows wider provincial trends since studio

---

20. Coe, *Cameras*, 26.

21. Glass plate use continued beyond the 1920s. Canada's Department of the Interior, for example, used large format glass plate negatives even in the 1950s. This paper's analysis concludes in the 1920s because, by this time, most rural recreational photographers had adopted film as their photographic medium of choice. For more on class involvement with photography over time see Taylor, *Impressed By Light*, 68-69.

22. Of the twenty-six recreational photographers included in this study, only one used wet plates.

23. Commercial photographers and serious amateur photographers ordered their supplies and equipment directly from manufacturers, but this practice appears to be less common amongst recreational photographers.

photography became more popular during this decade, but whereas most urban areas had access to daguerreotype studios, most small towns did not.<sup>24</sup> Even studios using wet plate glass photography were scarce in rural areas most likely because of the limited portability of this process; as will be discussed below, most small-town commercial photographers were solicited to photograph surrounding barns and farmhouses, which could be complicated by restricted mobility. Once studios opened, they became a source of materials and instructions for some hobby photographers. E.S.B. Moore, from Simcoe, was once such commercial photographer who advertised, “we sell amateur supplies” to all of his studio clients.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, some recreational photographers such as Alfred Arner and Duncan Fraser MacDonald purchased photographic supplies when they travelled into larger towns for business or to sell produce.<sup>26</sup> In either case, photography equipment and supplies were available to remote recreational photographers.

Learning how to use a camera in rural areas was also manageable. Some rural residents sought photography lessons, as Stephen Sylvester Main of Sheffield did when he travelled to Port Huron on 9 April 1895.<sup>27</sup> However, it seems likely that many recreational photographers took a less formal approach to their photographic education by learning from a friend or relative. Alfred Arner, for example, bought a camera for his friend, Harry Lumsden, while in Windsor.<sup>28</sup> Lumsden was frequently employed by Arner and often worked alongside him in Arner’s tobacco fields. Arner seems to have allowed Lumsden to try photography with his camera, as there are several photographs of Arner while working his field.<sup>29</sup> Other photographers seem to have learned through trial and error.<sup>30</sup> Although the availability of equipment, supplies, and lessons was not as abundant as in urban areas, rural residents who were interested in recreational photography could and did find ways to participate.

---

24. For more on the increase of studio photographers in nineteenth century Ontario, see Glen C. Phillips, *The Ontario Photographer’s List, 1851-1900*, vol. 1 (Sarnia: Iron Gate, 1990), viii.

25. E.S.B. Moore. Studio Register of E.S.B. Moore’s Studio, no. 4, January 1913 – 30 January 1917. Eva Brook Donly Museum and Archive (henceforth EBD).

26. Arner. Diary, 1908. “Cash Paid Out”; Arner. Diary, 1909. 30 January 1909; Duncan Fraser MacDonald. Diary, “Bills Payable – November,” 1872. Duncan Fraser MacDonald Fonds, F 1023, MS 396. Archives of Ontario (henceforth AO).

27. Main. Diary, 9 April 1895. Martin Pullen Private Collection.

28. Arner. Diary, 30 January 1909.

29. Arner. Photograph, *Tobacco Harvesting 1*. [n.d.] Alfred Arner Fonds. HEIRS; Arner. Photograph. *Tobacco Harvesting 2*. [n.d.]

30. [Unknown]. Photograph. *Untitled*. 0-0-0-11. Nancy Hazelgrove Collection. F4541. AO; [Unknown]. Photograph. *Untitled*. 0-0-0-15. Nancy Hazelgrove Collection.

## Using Cameras

While the introduction of glass plates made photography more financially and practically accessible to rural Ontarians, it does not explain why they decided to pursue photography as a hobby.<sup>31</sup> Rather than just a newfound activity, photography fulfilled a desire to visually document and commemorate important friends, relatives, and achievements. As a graphic tool that produced a document meant to be displayed, the camera provided a different kind of record than did a diary, which made it appealing to those who wanted to preserve and exhibit the important visual elements of their lives.<sup>32</sup> While the individual decided if photography was an appropriate documentary tool for them, rural social values dictated how they engaged with the camera itself.

More than simply exposing a negative, the act of photography, or the acts of taking and making a photograph, is an expression of the photographer's priorities as a viewer. These priorities are predominantly shaped by the culture, values, and experiences of the surrounding society, therefore the photographer cannot help but place visual worth in scenes that are widely regarded as important.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, the photographer's camera is led by their understandings of what is or what should be photo-worthy, making it an extension of their cultural experiences. Similarly, cameras point both outwards and inwards; they capture what was in front of them while at the same time recording the photographer's perspective.<sup>34</sup> Rural Ontario photographers were guided by these same patterns, as evidenced by who used cameras, the amount of money they spent on photography, and the subject of their photographs. Consequently, the resulting images display the most socially valuable elements of rural society because the photographer, inseparable from their cultural perspectives, commemorated that which he or she considered most relevant.<sup>35</sup>

---

31. Bourdieu, *Photography, a Middle-Brow Art*, 13-19.

32. There is no evidence to suggest that the camera was a substitute for literacy. By the turn of the century, most rural Ontarians defined themselves as literate, therefore they did not need to use a camera to record important events. Rather, they chose to do so. See Chad Gaffield and Gérard Bouchard, "Literacy, Schooling, and Family Reproduction in Rural Ontario and Quebec," *Historical Studies in Education / Revue D'histoire de L'éducation* 1, 2 (1989): 205-206.

33. Bourdieu provides an excellent discussion of culture and class as influential to photography. Bourdieu, *Photography, a Middle-Brow Art*, 6-7; Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 9.

34. Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson, "Introduction: Photography's Double Index (A Short History in Three Parts)," in *The Meaning of Photography*, xi.

35. Anthropologists have often used photographs taken by various groups for cultural and social insight. Historically, the camera served primarily documentary purposes for

Gelatine glass plates' technological superiority certainly helped to establish photography within rural areas, but rural Ontarians' use of cameras fits within the countryside's wider social patterns. There is no better example of how rural social norms influenced the camera's use than the disparity between male and female photographers. As elsewhere, rural women's participation in photography was far below that of their male counterparts, but their participation was even less than urban or commercial female photographers. For example, 2 of Ontario's glass plate commercial photographers were women between 1851 and 1910. At the same time, there were 97 urban female commercial photographers.<sup>36</sup> While there is not enough data to indicate gender's role in a photograph's composition, the lack of female participation suggests that social norms influenced who purchased and used cameras.

Similar to the distribution of labour by gender, some recreational activities were considered more suitable for men and others for women. Typical nineteenth century leisure activities that were thought appropriate for women included the production of various fancycrafts and tended to be based in the home. Despite being essential to farm production through outdoor labour, even at a young age, girls were discouraged from participating in most physical leisure activities, especially if learning a physical skill was involved. Conversely, boys were encouraged to participate in physical activities and generally had more mobility within a community.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, women's access to technology was limited.<sup>38</sup> Many early household technologies, such as radios, had to be built before use, thus making it a suitable hobby for boys. Domestic technologies, or technologies directed towards women, were often neglected in favour of

---

anthropologists, but recently scholars such as Elizabeth Edwards, Christopher Pinney, and Nicholas Peterson have advocated the use photographs to help anthropologists address questions of self identity and social values. Elsewhere, Edwards and Christopher Morton argued in favour of dissecting the various cultural stories told through photographs. Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson, *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003); Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards, eds., *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

36. Phillips, *The Ontario Photographer's List, 1851-1900*, vi.

37. Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 251-52.

38. Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963*, 184; Charlotte van de Vorst, *Making Ends Meet: Farm Women's Work in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2002), 52. It should also be noted that when it was necessary, many women used cars and tractors to help on the farm. However, these uses of technology revolve around labour and not recreation.

purchasing farm machinery. Active recreational activities and recreational technologies were uncommon in rural women's daily lives.<sup>39</sup>

Like most other household technologies, the camera did not fit within the framework of suitable recreational activities for women. Even when photography supply manufactures began promoting their products directly to women at the turn of the twentieth century,<sup>40</sup> rural women did not engage with the camera as producers.<sup>41</sup> The discrepancies between male and female education in the sciences does not explain why such a large gender gap continued to exist in rural regions when female participation was increasing in other areas of the province.<sup>42</sup> Instead, their use of cameras corresponds with wider social trends that governed rural women's interactions with recreation and leisure activities. Most rural recreational photographers took photographs almost exclusively outside, both because flashes were not common and because outdoor scenes were of greater social importance.<sup>43</sup> Of the twenty-six recreational photographers here under study, seven took photographs indoors, albeit quite infrequently, and it appears that only two used artificial light sources. For rural residents, photography was an outdoor activity and while the amount of equipment a photographer needed to bring on any excursion became lighter and more compact as the technology evolved, it was still rather precarious. Since women were generally excluded from outdoor recreational physical activities, photography would not have been considered an appropriate pastime. Consequently, rural men were the primary users of cameras in rural areas.

Despite the lowered costs of participating in photography, many hobby photographers appear to have been conservative in their consumption of

---

39. See also Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

40. Pedersen, Diana and Martha Phemister, "Women and Photography in Ontario, 1839-1929: A Case Study of the Interaction of Gender and Technology," in *Despite the Odds*, 88-89. Additionally, Lilly Koltun speculated that the low number of women who participated in Canada's amateur photography scene was primarily a reflection of their private use of cameras, but given the low number of recreational female photographers, it seems more likely that women simply did not use cameras to the same extent as men did for a variety of socially-directed reasons.

41. It should be noted that rural women often had their photographs taken by commercial photographers.

42. Penderson and Phemister contend that Women's minimal participation in early photography was largely due to their limited access to scientific education, but they do not account for regional differences across the province.

43. Igniting magnesium strips was used as a slow burning but intense light source for indoor photography as of the 1860s, but this process was too expensive and dangerous for most recreational photographers. In the 1880s, the increased light sensitivity of gelatine dry plates in addition to falling magnesium prices allowed for more practical short-burst magnesium flashes to become popular. Coe, *Cameras*, 225.

dry plate negatives by choosing to purchase small negatives and therefore small cameras. There was a wide array of negative brands and sizes from which to choose.<sup>44</sup> While some brands were marginally more expensive than others, cost was principally dependant upon size. The majority of recreational photographers used small negatives ranging from  $3\frac{1}{4}\times 4\frac{1}{4}$  inches to  $6\frac{1}{2}\times 8\frac{1}{2}$  inches, which would have cost between 45¢ and \$1.65 per dozen.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, cameras using smaller negatives were less expensive than cameras designed for large negatives, thus further keeping costs to a minimum.<sup>46</sup> That almost all of Ontario's rural recreational photographers used small-format cameras indicates their preference for participating in photography without incurring unnecessary costs.

Purchasing the necessary equipment to take and make photographs was often less expensive than it was to hire a professional photographer for several visits. Some commercial photographers who operated in Ontario's small towns travelled to their clients' properties in order to photograph their farms, livestock, and land. These photographers charged their clients for the initial negative in addition to each print. For example, E.S.B. Moore charged between 70¢ and 92¢ for an  $8\times 10$  inch print made from a new negative. He also charged between 60¢ and \$1.20 for each  $8\times 10$  inch reprint he made from earlier work.<sup>47</sup> Cabinet cards and *cartes de visite* were smaller photographs that were typically reserved for portraits. Because of their size, they were significantly less expensive. Studios within rural Ontario charged between \$1 and \$2 for the sitting and printing of six  $3\frac{1}{2}\times 4\frac{1}{2}$  inch photographs while the same service for one  $8\times 10$  inch photograph cost between 75¢ and \$2.25, depending on if the resulting photograph was to be framed. Reprints cost far less, on average 25¢ each for cabinet and card photographs and between 50¢ and 75¢ for an  $8\times 10$  inch print.<sup>48</sup>

Instead of hiring a commercial photographer, some rural Ontarians chose to take their own photographs. Rather than spending 25¢ on each  $3\frac{1}{2}\times 4\frac{1}{2}$  inch professional print, they opted to spend approximately 4¢ by taking and printing the photograph themselves. Put another way, a recreational photographer could purchase his or her own new camera,

---

44. Seiberling and Bloore, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, 107.

45. *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer* 22, 4 (1898); *Ibid.* 6, 1 (1888): xxxv.

46. *Canadian Photographic Standard* 4, 6 (1895): 163.

47. Moore. Studio Register of E.S.B. Moore's Studio, no. 4, January 1913 – 30 January 1917. Moore's clients could choose from a variety of paper qualities, which accounts for the fluctuation in his prices. He also broke his work into cost brackets, having, for example, a \$3 class of work.

48. See Moore. Studio Register of E.S.B. Moore's Studio; Simon Peter and Herman Arthur Bartle. Photograph. *Mrs. Neufone*. [n.d.] Bartle Brothers Fonds. C 2. AO.

bellows, stand, lens, chemicals, corners, 12 negatives, and paper for the same price as sitting for one session then and printing forty two 3½×4½ inch or seventeen 8×10 inch photographs. Most recreational photographers had several dozen unique negatives in their collections, from which they could have made an endless number of prints. For many, the ability to make their own visual documents through purchasing a camera and its accompanying equipment was simply more financially sound and visually diverse than hiring a commercial photographer.

Rural recreational photographers' treatment of the costs associated with their cameras generally mirrored their approach to other hobbies and reflected their desire to minimize unnecessary expenditures. Even in the early twentieth century, most farm families were reluctant to devote much money to recreation or entertainment.<sup>49</sup> Instead, most rural household income was spent on necessary goods and supplies, such as farm machinery, animals, imported goods, or basic groceries.<sup>50</sup> Rural women reduced costs where they could by sewing clothing, producing their own butter, cream, and making soap or candles. Rural men participated in labour exchanges or the timber trade.<sup>51</sup> For these individuals, frugality was an integral aspect of remaining economically stable.<sup>52</sup> Rural inhabitants' approach to photographic supplies was similar to their other purchasing and money-saving trends. They saved money by taking their own photographs, using smaller glass plates, and purchasing cameras that were relatively inexpensive. Although participating in this activity fell outside of what most rural residents considered a necessary expenditure, when they did engage with photography, their spending habits were modest and in most cases more economical than hiring a commercial photographer.

## Rural Photographs

Regardless of the photographer's gender or purchasing patterns, several notable themes run throughout almost all of Ontario's recreational

---

49. Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 250.

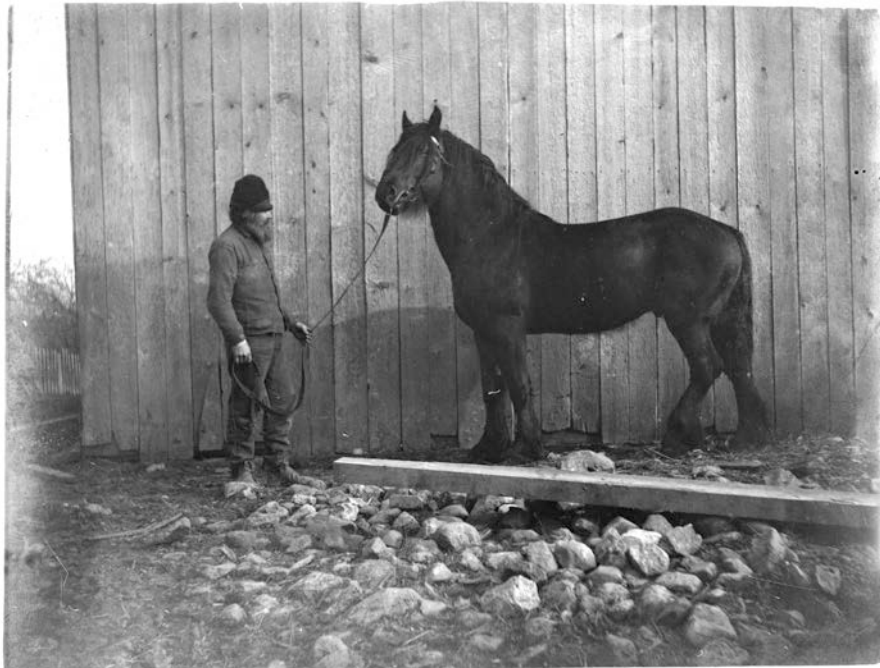
50. Baskerville, "Chattel Mortgages and Community in Perth County, Ontario," 586, 606, 617; Douglas McCalla, "A World without Chocolate: Grocery Purchases at Some Upper Canadian Country Stores, 1808- 1861," *Agricultural History* 79, 2 (2005): 166-168.

51. van de Vorst, *Making Ends Meet*, 9-12; Wilson, "Reciprocal Work Bees and the Meaning of Neighbourhood," 3-6; Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 148-9, 153; Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists*, 10, 194; McCalla, *Planting the Province*, 93, 100.

52. These traditional forms of income saving strategies were combined with selling produce in markets to help sustain a farm family. See Catharine Wilson, *Tenants in Time: Family Strategies, Land, and Liberalism in Upper Canada, 1799-1871* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 14.

collections, showing the objects, people, and places considered significant enough to document. These subjects extend beyond regional and occupational boundaries, and were not merely convenient; hobby photographers from around the province and working in various occupations took similar pictures, suggesting that some rural scenes were widely recognized as important. Families, their farms, and livestock (fig. 1) or the landscape were the two most frequently photographed subjects in rural Ontario. These two themes share one commonality: the photographer's relationship with the land. In both, the photographer emphasized the people, tools, places, and animals that facilitated their success, but their engagement with the land and resource extraction tied these elements together. When a photographer captured these images, they were celebrating both the means through which they made their livelihood as well as the rewards of their work. Such acts of commemoration reveal an important aspect of rural ideology by demonstrating what the social, occupational, and personal priorities of the photographer combined to represent.

*Figure 1. William Beatty and Horse at Barn, Innisfil – from Glass Negative [n.d.]*



*Source: Courtesy of the Simcoe County Archives. Don Beatty, [photograph], Don Beatty Collection, Acc. 2004-02; E5-B2 R58 S7 Sh5*



Most rural recreational photographers' collections are predominantly comprised of pictures of friends and family on the farm. Whether working or relaxing, the interactions between people and the landscape were frequently documented. Some recreational photographers, such as Alfred Arner, J.J. Kerfoot, John Boyd, and Mossom Boyd were interested in people working on the farm,<sup>53</sup> while others such as L.W. Shipman, Stephen Sylvester Main, John Black, and William Dowson were more interested in rural life surrounding of their work.<sup>54</sup>

Images such as figure 2 are typical representations of life at a lumber camp. Groups of workers gathered around stacks of felled trees, in front of their temporary dwellings, or sharing a meal do not necessarily show the work associated with the lumber trade, but do depict the importance of the social networks formed around that occupation. Likewise, photographs of families and farms were not taken simply because they were abundant or convenient subjects. Rather, recreational photographers photographed these elements because they valued what these scenes represented. Raising a barn, ploughing a field, leading a cow, or inspecting crops were all essential activities for farmers and testaments to their accomplishments. Likewise, stacking felled trees, driving horses, and group work were important aspects of life within a lumber camp, all of which were also photographed often.<sup>55</sup> While occupationally diverse, these forms of rural labour intersected with their treatment of the land and how those working the land lived. Extracting resources, depending on social networks for assistance, and taking pride in their dwellings all defined the lives of these individuals. While the scenery itself was different, the reason for taking a photograph and what it represented was the same.

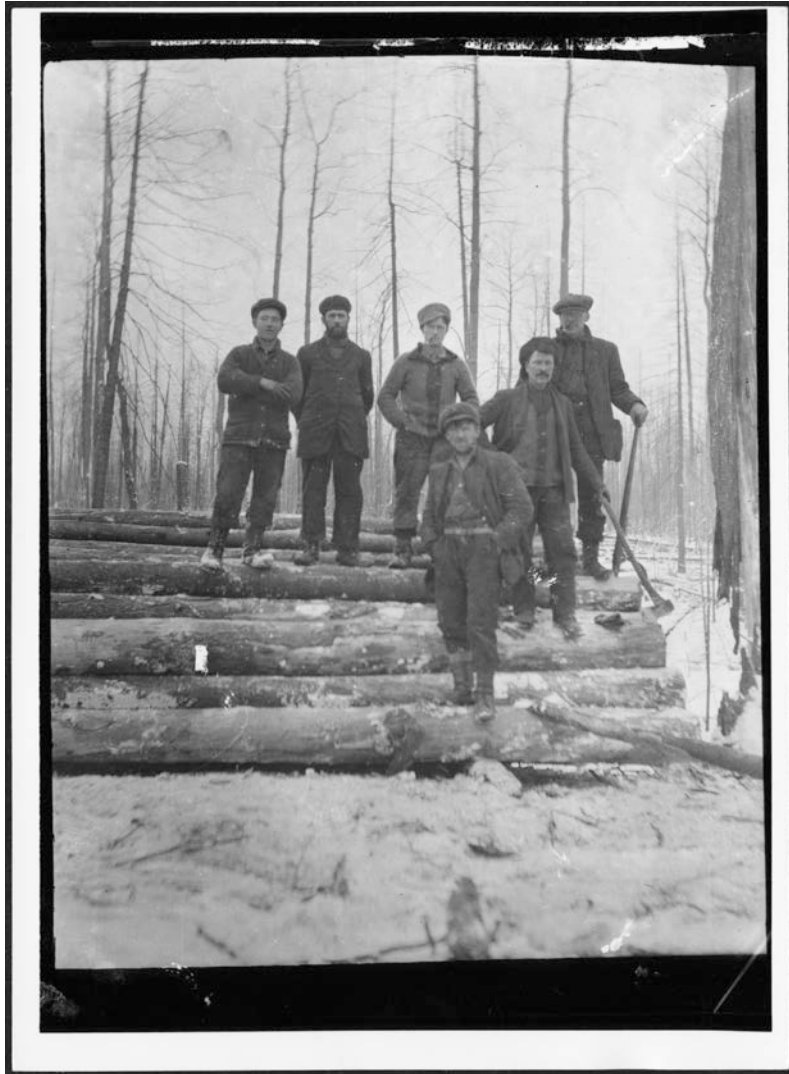
---

53. Arner. Photograph. *Hauling Hay and Tiling 2*. [n.d.]; John Boyd. Photograph. *Flax Pulling – Pickers at Work*. [27 July 1911]. John Boyd Fonds. R9726-0-4-E. Acc. 1971-120. LAC; Mossom Boyd. Photograph. *Untitled*. [n.d.]. Mossom Boyd Collection. R5987-0-9-E. Acc. 1970-217. LAC.

54. L.W. Shipman. Photograph. *Untitled*. [n.d.]. Mrs. Frank Spear Collection. R9477-0-6-E. Acc. 1972-161. LAC; Stephen Sylvester Main. Photograph. *Barn built for Oscar Rosebrough 1910 L6C6 sth part S Dumfries Twp side opp road Post Card 219*. [1910]. Collection of glass negatives taken by Stephen Sylvester Main, Sheffield, Ont. XA1 MS A230. University of Guelph Archives (henceforth UGA); J.H. Black. Photograph. *Untitled*. [n.d.]. 15828-23. J.H. Black Collection. AO.

55. Charles MacNamara. Manuscript. *Life in the Lumber Camps of the McLachlin Brothers Arnprior, Ontario*. [c. 1940]. Charles MacNamara Fonds. C 120. AO; W.C.H. Dowson. Photograph. *Untitled*. [n.d.]. F4387-0-0-0-21. W.C.H. Dowson Fonds. F 4387. AO; J.J. Kerfoot. Photograph. *Untitled*. [c. 1920]. Glenn J. Lockwood collection. R-8251-0-7-E. Acc. 1977-199: 52. LAC.

*Figure 2. Men Posed on Logs, ca. 1914-1927.*



*Source: Courtesy of the Archives of Ontario. William C.H. Dowson, [photograph], W.C.H. Dowson Fonds, F 4387-0-0-39.*

Photographing crops, fields, and rural landscapes was also popular. Unlike family and farm photographs, which seem to have been strictly documentary, landscape photographs could serve both documentary and artistic purposes. Some rural inhabitants saw great commemorative value in landscapes, sometimes seeking a specific place or view that best captured their relationship with the land. John Connon, a commercial

photographer from Elora, was one such photographer. He visited his grandfather's former house for documentary purposes and noted that the photograph he took displayed "the Irvine Valley from Grandpa's old house."<sup>56</sup> This landscape was invested with familial meaning and was therefore worth documenting. Connon's wider collection reveals a photographer fascinated by changing landscapes, so his interest in the view from his grandfather's former residence was almost certainly a result of his desire to visually preserve local landscapes before they became unrecognizable. For photographers like Connon, the camera facilitated landscape commemoration.

The significance of visually documenting family, land, and possessions was recognized throughout Ontario's countryside as many commercial photographers were hired to take these kinds of photographs for rural clients. Almost every small-town commercial photographer offered this service to his or her clients and, next to portraits, farm and family pictures were the most solicited kind of photographs. Despite being taken across the province, these photographs included the same elements of rural life: the family, barn, livestock, and land. The Bartle Brothers, who participated in such mobile practices, for example, took the photograph in figure 3. Here, the family displayed their barn, livestock, and land – their most important possessions and therefore worth the price of a hired photographer. Similarly, some small-town commercial photographers were hired to photograph the fields and crops of their clients. A considerable amount of money could be made from both farm and family photographs and field photographs, E.S.B. Moore, for example, collected \$18.15 between 20 May 1912 and 16 July 1912 and an additional \$17.75 between 28 July 1913 and 29 September 1913 for photographing the fields of one client alone,<sup>57</sup> while Thomas H. Scott also travelled to various farms in the St. Thomas area to photograph his clients' fields and crops.<sup>58</sup>

---

56. John Connon. Photograph. *The Irvine Valley from Grandpa's Old House*. See *Dam and Sawmill with Mr. Watt's House in Distance*. [n.d.] Connon Family Fonds. C286 1-0-9-1. AO.

57. Moore. Studio Register of E.S.B. Moore's Studio, no. 4, January 1913 – 30 January 1917.

58. Thomas H. Scott. Photograph. *Tobacco Field*. [n.d.] Scott Studio Fonds. Box 519, 98095. Elgin County Archives (henceforth ECA); Scott. Photograph. *Tobacco Field with Farmer*. [n.d.] Box 504 A, 953, 2/3; Scott. Photograph. *Farm Field with Barn and House in Background*. [n.d.] Box 504 B, 97213.

*Figure 3. Men Posing with Horses in Front of a Barn, ca. 1895-1910*



*Source: Courtesy of the Archives of Ontario. Bartle Brothers, [photograph], [Bartle Brothers Fonds, C 2, 10232-1732].*

Commercial photographers' production of farm and family or landscape photographs implies that even rural residents who did not directly participate in photography valued possessing a visual commemoration of their rural lives. Not only does this extend the cultural relevance of these images, but it also suggests that the recreational photographers who took

photographs of their farm, family, and property did so because they saw them as important, not simply convenient. Moreover, the frequency with which recreational and commercial photographers took these kinds of photographs indicates their perceived social worth. Additionally, rural inhabitants' willingness to pay for photographs depicting specific scenes and subjects suggests that these images acquired enough cultural currency to be worth purchasing. Rural photographers' emphasis on the land is consistent with previous understandings of rural culture.

At the same time, the constructed nature of these photographs questions their representational merit, as there could be a difference between how the subjects wanted to be documented and how they actually lived their lives. However, due to technological limitations of glass plates and social conventions, almost every photographic act at this time was the result of a conscious editorial and documentary decision,<sup>59</sup> meaning that the resulting images represent how the subjects saw themselves. While the accuracy of rural life presented in such photographs is debatable, their self-reflective qualities are not. That so many individuals valued the same kinds of scenes adds weight to their personal evaluations of what was photo-worthy while at the same time suggesting that a relatively consistent valuation system was pervasive through Ontario's rural regions at that time. Rural culture dictated the personal use of cameras in rural areas, including who used cameras, how they spent money on photography, and what they photographed.

### **Occupational Pluralism**

Although most rural photographers initially purchased their cameras for recreational purposes, some found ways to use it as a source of income. Not everyone who could operate a camera tried to profit from his or her skill, but that some could garnish their household's income through their knowledge placed photography at a unique intersection between hobby and occupation. As a skill that was both a pastime and a profession, photography could fit into a multitude of lifestyles depending on the amount of time the photographer wanted to devote to this craft and if they wanted to generate any income from it. This flexibility was invaluable for rural and small-town recreational photographers since it allowed the user to prioritize photography within their daily life when needed while at the same time not demanding that this attention be ongoing. Photography, as a moneymaking venture, could function in a similar fashion to other forms of casual labour or occupational diversity found throughout rural

---

59. David Mattison, *Eyes of a City: Early Vancouver Photographers, 1868-1900* (Vancouver: Vancouver City Archives, 1986), 9.

Canada during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Similar to activities such as taking in sewing or washing, working in a neighbour's field for wages, or casually participating in the timber trade, photography work could be sporadic but was flexible enough to permit its users to devote as much or as little time to it as they desired.

Farmers, farm labourers, and loggers participated in this form of income production and were commissioned by their friends, neighbours, and family members. Unfortunately, of the few rural Ontario photographers who kept diaries, fewer still kept accounts of their finances, making it a challenge to determine exactly how much money recreational photographers earned from their hobby. Nevertheless, the large number of portraits and semi-official group photographs taken by photographers whose primary occupation was unrelated to photography indicates that their skill was known throughout small towns and their services occasionally commissioned. This shows the camera's important financial function and further demonstrates the extent to which many rural residents wished to visually document their lives.

Rural inhabitants' casual use of their cameras for profit is consistent with other labour diversification strategies already employed by many individuals throughout Canada's countryside. Occupational pluralism was an integral component of rural inhabitants' lives even beyond times of constrained family finances and was used by rural dwellers to acquire land and establish their families.<sup>60</sup> Most farmers and other rural inhabitants had to be innovative in their approach to income production and utilized whatever resources benefited them the most.<sup>61</sup> Like other forms of supplementary income generation, rural inhabitants augmented the money they made from their primary occupation with their photography-based earnings, thereby recognizing photography as another form of occupational pluralism. Conversely, even when used as a primary source of income, photography was generally acknowledged as allowing time for other occupations. Some commercial photographers across Ontario worked as druggists, watchmakers, jewellers, grocers, or book dealers even while prioritizing their photography business,<sup>62</sup> further establishing the medium as a flexible form of revenue that could allow photographers to engage in other forms of employment. This pattern suggests that photography could function as an adaptable source of income regardless of how actively the photographer utilized their camera for profit.

---

60. Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists*, 10; Ruth Sandwell, "Rural Reconstruction," 14, 20.

61. *Ibid.*; McCalla, *Planting the Province*, 93.

62. Glen C. Phillips, *The Ontario Photographer's List, 1851-1900*, vi.

The experiences of two photographers, Alfred Arner and Stephen Sylvester Main, demonstrate how the camera could be used for additional income. Alfred Arner of Arner was a recreational photographer who profited from his photographic skills. Arner was born in 1882 and kept a relatively comprehensive account of his spending and daily activities in his journals. He was a farmer but also occasionally worked as a farm labourer for other farmers in his community, including his extended family and friends. Arner primarily grew tobacco but also grew and sold pumpkins and corn. Additionally, he sometimes sold muskrat, minks, and skunks for their hides.<sup>63</sup> Arner was, above all else, a farmer who sought earning opportunities from a variety of sources, including photography.

By 1907, photography was an important aspect of Arner's life.<sup>64</sup> Arner's daughter recalls her father's "fascinating hobby of photography, with the equipment of camera, tripod and solutions for film development in his dark room," but describes it as "far from profitable."<sup>65</sup> In many respects, her assessment was correct—Arner never relied upon photography to support his family. However, he did earn enough to cover the cost of his hobby, plus a small profit. For example, between 1 January 1908 and 19 August 1908, Arner received \$18.75 for his photographic work. His two largest orders were from a Sunday School, which ordered 21 pictures for \$5.25, and by D. Ritchie, who spent \$5.00 on 8 dozen prints. Arner appears to have charged between 5¢ and 25¢ per print, presumably depending on the size and quantity of each image, and 50¢ per dozen post cards or postals.<sup>66</sup> During the same time, Arner recorded earning \$149.84 from selling his produce and labour, but it seems likely that he earned more than this because there are several times he mentions selling produce in a town, but records no cash received in his accounts.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, during this period, approximately 13% of Arner's recorded earnings came from photography.

Also recorded in Arner's accounts is the money he spent on farm necessities and household items, including photographic supplies. Between 1 January 1908 and 19 August 1908, Arner spent \$4.65 on photographic supplies, the most expensive purchase being a new camera, which cost \$4.50.<sup>68</sup> Arner does not appear to have bought photography

---

63. Arner. Diary, 1908. "Cash a/c received."

64. Arner. Diary 1908, "Cash Paid Out"; Arner. Diary 1909. 30 January 1909.

65. Arner. Diary 1907. "Introduction."

66. Arner. Diary 1908. "Photo Cash." Arner only kept detailed records of his earning from photography between 1 January 1908 and 19 August 1908, although he mentions taking photographs for individuals at other points in his journals.

67. Arner. Diary 1908. "Cash a/c Received."

68. Arner. Diary 1908. "Cash Paid Out."

paper or glass plates during this time; however, between 1 January 1907 and 19 August 1907, he spent \$3.00 on chemicals, corners, glass plates, and Solio paper, which gives some indication of the cost of maintaining photography as a hobby and side business over nearly nine months.

After subtracting the cost of the materials he purchased during this time, Arner earned \$14.10 from his photography between 1 January 1908 and 19 August 1908. That his records are only comprehensive for short amounts of time limits the extent to which a textually supported conclusion regarding his total amount earned through photography. His photograph collection helps here by giving more insight into the kind of work he did. While this collection, like many other glass plate collections, is certainly incomplete, its contents reveal a photographer who used this medium for recreation and for profit. Many of his photographs appear to have been taken for pleasure, but those of houses, family or individual portraits, and important community events would have been purchased by friends, family, and neighbours. Although Arner primarily worked as a farmer, it is clear that the money he earned through his photographs contributed to the household's total income slightly beyond what was necessary to cover the cost of his hobby.

Like Arner, Stephen Sylvester Main, from Sheffield also supplemented his income through his hobby. Main was born in 1872 and had many occupations, ranging from farm labourer, to carpenter, and even as a cheese maker.<sup>69</sup> Despite his occupational variety, Main's passion was certainly photography; he was active from 1898 to 1920 and his collection contains over 640 negatives. He also owned at least two cameras, the second of which he bought in 1898 for \$9.00.<sup>70</sup>

Main's journal is considerably different from Arner's. Both are characteristic farm diaries from this period, but whereas Arner made note of his photography-related income and expenditures, Main seldom gives precise amounts.<sup>71</sup> However, his diary is more detailed with regards to his photography and he usually distinguishes between taking photographs for his own pleasure and taking photographs for someone else. Main saw photography as an income opportunity, and on 9 April 1895 reported going to Port Huron to "learn the photography business,"<sup>72</sup> suggesting that he intended to supplement his income through this skill. Moreover, while never mentioning paid amounts, he does often note that that he

---

69. Pullin, *Life in the Country*, 2.

70. Main. Diary, 1897-8.

71. Turn of the century farm diaries are characterized by a minimalist writing style, usually noting events that pertained to farming, deaths, religion, or community events, but almost always mentioning the weather.

72. Main. Diary, 9 April 1895.



took photographs *for* an individual, whereas as on many other occasions, he describes taking pictures *of* somebody or something, indicating that he was providing a service for some individuals while simply practicing his hobby with others. Main talked about his photography jobs in the same way that he described the casual labour he performed for other individuals, indicating that these were tasks for which he was almost certainly commissioned.

Main's photograph collection offers some guidance with regards to the extent to which he took photographs for others. While some are of local agricultural activities for personal enjoyment, those that were commissioned are of subjects that appeared frequently in professional photographers' collections, and are significantly more formal and formulaic than his other pieces. Because he kept no written record of the earnings he generated through photography, it is impossible to determine the extent to which his skill contributed to his total cash earnings. However, studying his collection within the context of turn of the century photographic trends allows for some insight into how profitable photography was for Main. In this sense, his image collection takes on a text-like quality since, in the absence of significant written records, the photographs Main produced can be read as evidence of his photography-based income.

Studio portraits became increasingly more popular in the late nineteenth century and rural Ontario residents participated in this trend. Sheffield, a town of 385 in 1911,<sup>73</sup> had no professional photographer and therefore no established studio. Main appears to have filled this void by establishing makeshift studio settings in his home and beside his barn. Sheets, blankets, and rugs were used as backdrops, and furniture was strategically arranged to create a functioning, albeit informal studio. Two photographs in particular demonstrate how Main used the resources available to make a studio for potential clients. The first depicts a young man against a white backdrop. The white backdrop is clearly creased, something that Main could have removed while developing the print, but was captured on the negative.<sup>74</sup> Most professional studios at the time had similar backgrounds, but never so noticeably makeshift. Likewise, a photograph of a large group in front of several different sheets and blankets serving as backdrops would seldom have been used in a professional studio, indicating Main's reliance on the materials at hand to provide a sufficient studio setting (fig. 4). In this same photograph, in what appears to have been an accident, Main partially captured the side of a barn from which

---

73. Census of Canada, 1911. Wentworth district, Sheffield, 8.

74. Main. Photograph. *Man before white background 41*. [n.d.].

backdrops were suspended, suggesting that instead of relying on expensive lighting equipment or buying a faster, and therefore costly, camera, he simply used natural light by making the outdoors look like indoors. Main took over 30 such photographs, and given the popularity of portrait photography at the time and the effort he expended in an attempt to make his photographs conform to photography trends, it is certainly plausible, if not likely, that he was paid for these images.

*Figure 4. Stephen, Rose, and Irene Main, on Rosetta Main's Lap, n.d.*



*Source: Courtesy of the Archival and Special Collections, University of Guelph Library. Stephen Sylvester Main, [photograph], Stephen Sylvester Main Negative Collection, XA1 MS A230-267.*

Although the amount these two photographers earned from their hobby is cannot be determined, it is clear that both profited from their knowledge of photography. Textual records are scarce, but several other small-town Ontario photographers' collections are stylistically and

compositionally identical to those of Arner and Main; occasional studio or mock-studio portraits, groups of different people in front of different houses, and school or church groups can all be found in several other collections, indicating other recreational photographers in rural Ontario could also have used photography as a form of occupational pluralism.<sup>75</sup> It is impossible to determine exactly how common this practice was among small-town and rural Ontario photographers, but it is clear that, at least in some cases, recreational photographers were able to turn their hobby into another avenue of income.

Both photographers found opportunities for occupational plurality throughout their working lives. Their jobs predominantly conformed to traditional forms of agricultural occupational diversity or took advantage of local industries, but the inclusion of photography in their economic strategy indicates a varied approach to maintaining home finances that extended beyond conventional agricultural methods of occupational plurality. While further demonstrating the variety of moneymaking possibilities rural residents could access, photography's occasional use for profit shows that, in some instances, specialized skills and a willingness to appropriate new technologies to fit and reflect rural lives resulted in financial gain. This underscores the works of earlier scholars who argued against the myth of Ontario's countryside as completely resistant to modernization.<sup>76</sup> Equally important is the financial success these recreational photographers found through photographing their friends, family, and neighbours because it reflects rural residents' desires to visually document important elements of their lives. The range of images that were important enough to warrant commissioning indicate what accomplishments, places, and people were widely regarded as 'photo-worthy,' which has significant implications surrounding rural culture's influence on the photographic act in the countryside.

---

75. Henry G. Hines. Photograph. *Untitled*. [n.d.]. PA 803110. Henry G Hines Fonds. R10218-0-6-E. Acc. 1971-081. LAC; J.J. Kerfoot. Photograph. *Untitled*. [n.d.]. 7; William Hampden Tenner. Photograph. *Farming Families with their Horse Team*. [n.d.]: C311-0-0-10-1. William Hampden Tenner Fonds. C 311. AO.

76. For example, see Paul Leonard Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*; Patricia Bowley, "Ontario Agriculture in the 1910s: The Move Toward Regional Specialization in Crop Production," *Scientia Canadensis* 20 (1996): 100-121; Darren Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good: The Construction of Collective Liberal Identities in Central Canada, 1830-1900* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

## Conclusions

As a consumer technology, dry plate negative cameras found a place within many rural households because of their accessibility, flexibility, and suitability to rural life. They were inexpensive, portable, and easier to use than any previous method of photography, all of which made this photographic medium more appropriate for rural inhabitants. While this technology was extending photography to many new practitioners, it was certainly the advance photography needed to be widely adapted within Ontario's countryside. Even though technological advances made photography a feasible activity in the countryside, rural culture dictated how the camera was to be used therein. Social ideologies guided every aspect of the camera's rural use, from who used them, to how the purchase was financially justified, to what the photographer chose to capture. These same ideologies were reflected in the images taken by recreational photographers and echoed in the pictures sold by professionals. Similarly, the camera's use in occupational pluralism strategies also fit within established rural income diversification initiatives. Here, however, photography was distinct from traditional forms of occupational pluralism because it was not a skill that was integral to rural life.

At the same time, rural culture and social values materialize while considering Ontario's recreational glass plate collections. Reoccurring people, family possessions, and the rewards of working with the land are all elements that define rural culture and feature extensively in these photographs. Consequently, discussions on rural culture should include a strong awareness of tangible life experiences and achievements.

Alongside the cultural influence on the act of taking a photograph, much of this discussion rests on the photographers and the visual records they left. As items with personal commemorative qualities, photographs show how the photographer saw the world around them, what they valued, and how they experienced rural life. Many of Ontario's rural glass plate collections have no diary associated with them, but the negatives that remain reveal the photographer's engagement with photography and the aspects of their lives they wanted to visually commemorate. In effect, seeing what these photographers saw brings us further to understanding how they experienced rural life.<sup>77</sup>

---

77. The author would gratefully like to acknowledge the valuable feedback provided by the attendees of the University of Guelph's *Rural History Roundtable Speaker Series Symposium* where an early portion of this article was presented, Alan Gordon, Catharine Wilson, Jodey Nurse, and the anonymous peer-reviewers who commented on this article. Travel grants were generously provided by the University of Guelph's College of Arts and History Department.