

# Town Fathers and Urban Continuity: The Roots of Community Power and Physical Form in Hamilton, Upper Canada in the 1830s

Michael Doucet et John C. Weaver

Volume 13, numéro 2, octobre 1984

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018120ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018120ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

## Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

## ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)  
1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

## Citer cet article

Doucet, M. & Weaver, J. C. (1984). Town Fathers and Urban Continuity: The Roots of Community Power and Physical Form in Hamilton, Upper Canada in the 1830s. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 13(2), 75–90.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1018120ar>

## Résumé de l'article

Cet article constitue à la fois une recherche empirique et une déclaration théorique. En opposition à une vision de l'histoire urbaine morcelée en périodes distinctes, il insiste sur le fait qu'il existe au contraire des éléments de continuité très importants. En effet, la continuité semble être l'élément fondamental de l'expérience urbaine au Canada, spécialement au cours des 19<sup>e</sup> et 20<sup>e</sup> siècles. L'aménagement de la ville, le rôle moteur des élites municipales, la concentration de la richesse et l'expression spatiale des caractéristiques économiques et sociales possèdent tous des racines profondes, allant même jusqu'aux premières décades dans le cas d'Hamilton, objet particulier de cette étude.

Au niveau des sources matérielles, cet article utilise le rôle d'évaluation de 1839; cependant il met en garde contre des interprétations abusives ou erronées de ce document. Il soulève des questions à propos d'études américaines qui ont tenté des comparaisons sur la concentration des richesses à travers le temps. Cet article soutient que le facteur intangible d'accès au crédit était et demeure l'ingrédient vital de la richesse et du pouvoir. Cet accès caractérise le Métropolitisme, un thème historiographique qui fait ressortir la notion de continuité dans l'histoire urbaine canadienne.

## Articles

# Town Fathers and Urban Continuity: The Roots of Community Power and Physical Form in Hamilton, Upper Canada in the 1830s

Michael Doucet and John C. Weaver

### Résumé/Abstract

*Cet article constitue à la fois une recherche empirique et une déclaration théorique. En opposition à une vision de l'histoire urbaine morcelée en périodes distinctes, il insiste sur le fait qu'il existe au contraire des éléments de continuité très importants. En effet, la continuité semble être l'élément fondamental de l'expérience urbaine au Canada, spécialement au cours des 19<sup>e</sup> et 20<sup>e</sup> siècles. L'aménagement de la ville, le rôle moteur des élites municipales, la concentration de la richesse et l'expression spatiale des caractéristiques économiques et sociales possèdent tous des racines profondes, allant même jusqu'aux premières décades dans le cas d'Hamilton, objet particulier de cette étude.*

*Au niveau des sources matérielles, cet article utilise le rôle d'évaluation de 1839; cependant il met en garde contre des interprétations abusives ou erronées de ce document. Il soulève des questions à propos d'études américaines qui ont tenté des comparaisons sur la concentration des richesses à travers le temps. Cet article soutient que le facteur intangible d'accès au crédit était et demeure l'ingrédient vital de la richesse et du pouvoir. Cet accès caractérise le Métropolitainisme, un thème historiographique qui fait ressortir la notion de continuité dans l'histoire urbaine canadienne.*

*This article is both an empirical inquiry and a theoretical declaration. It stresses, in opposition to a view of urban history that presents fairly distinct periods, that there are very important elements of continuity. Indeed, continuity may be the essence of the urban experience in Canada, especially across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The layout of the city, the vital promotional actions of the civic elite, a concentration of wealth, and the spatial expression of economic and social traits all have deep roots — extending to the earliest decades in the case of Hamilton, which is the site for this study.*

*In terms of source materials, this article employs an 1839 assessment manuscript, but warns that such material can be abused or misunderstood. Indeed, it raises questions about American studies that have attempted comparisons of concentrations of property wealth over time. The article argues that a vital ingredient of wealth and power was and is the intangible factor of access to credit. That access is a feature of metropolitanism, an historiographic theme which too indicates continuity in the history of urban Canada.*

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, real estate promoters and merchants created urban sites on the North American settlement frontier.<sup>1</sup> These town fathers

implanted spatial arrangements and initiated fortunes that endured behind the changing stage sets of the commercial city, industrial city and metropolis. In his classic formulation of a chronology for urban history, Sam Bass Warner examined population growth, units of production, and occupational distributions to highlight change.<sup>2</sup> Following Warner's notion of stages, but employing a more impressionistic and tradi-

tionally based historical method, Gilbert Stelter has described the following phases for urban Canada: mercantile, commercial, and industrial.<sup>3</sup> The current study takes different indicators — ones more directly associated with urban form and power — and arrives at conclusions contrary to those of Warner. Continuities in land use forms and the social power behind them can advance a chronological scheme for urban history in which, at certain levels, to focus on changes would be to by-pass important truths. To illustrate continuity, the following account examines the much-studied town of Hamilton, Upper Canada. It concentrates on the boom town era nearly two decades before the period of social history investigation undertaken by Michael Katz and his associates.<sup>4</sup>

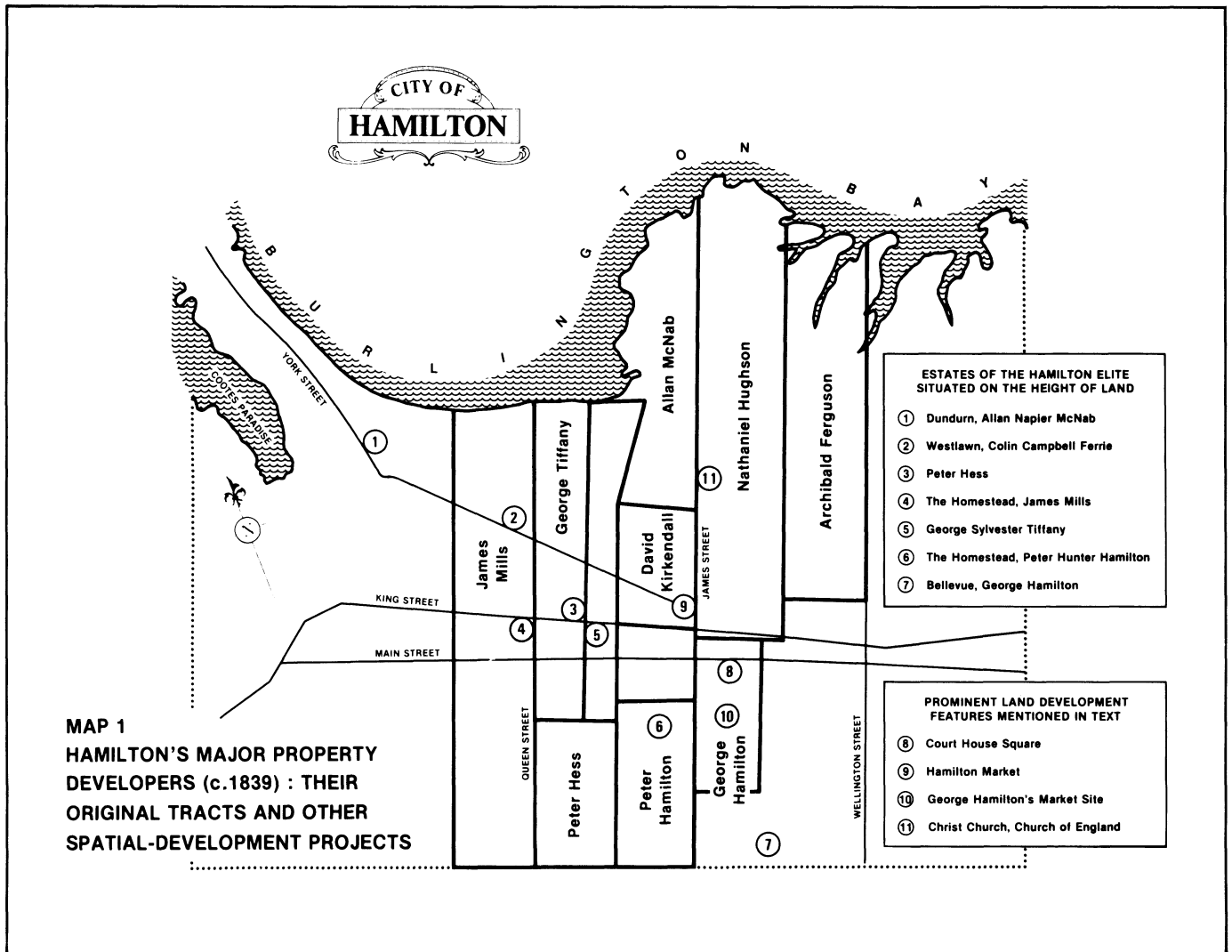
Urban layout represents the most tangible and least controversial feature supporting a theme of continuity.<sup>5</sup> The town founders and promoters of Hamilton followed the concession and lot arrangement of the 1793 survey of the area in laying out the new community. Although they worked within this basic condition, the town fathers also functioned much like later generations of property-industry specialists. They assessed growth prospects; within the lot and concession lines they surveyed and subdivided according to calculations about current and future land markets; they advertised and sold on credit.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, founder George Hamilton, was a prototype of the urban land developer. Son of the very rich and influential Robert Hamilton, a Queenston merchant well connected with the colonial administration, George and his neighbour Nathaniel Hughson attracted the judicial capital for the Gore District to George's land. George had promised land grants for two town squares to the Crown. Later George granted land to the town for use as a market, recognizing that it could enhance adjacent property values and attract shops and inns. The marketplace ploy actually led a conflict in which other propertied interests defeated his plan. As a Member of the Legislative Assembly (1820-1830), George Hamilton stood for a *laissez-faire* approach to colonial development; he opposed any policy that impeded immigration and advocated liberal land grants to businessmen who might undertake the development of entire townships in Upper Canada. If Hamilton may properly be considered the first Canadian townsite of eventual significance in scale to emerge from real estate promotion, then George Hamilton was the progenitor of hordes of land developers.<sup>7</sup>

Occasionally, the town fathers invested in housing and commercial structures; sometimes they reaped windfall gains. Possessing fewer legal and technological instruments than later generations, they nevertheless initiated rudimentary town planning measures to enhance private gain and, in so doing, established forms that, for a very long time, affected the physical and human geography of a growing city. "The city centre," Hans Blumenfeld reminds us, "remains in most, though not in all cases, in its original location, strengthened by one transportation system after another."<sup>8</sup> No more than

ten men (George Hamilton, Peter Hunter Hamilton, George Tiffany, David Kirkendall, Samuel Mills, James Mills, Nathaniel Hughson, Andrew Miller, Allan McNab, Peter Hess) converted agricultural land into platted tracts of the town (chartered in 1833) and city (1846) (Map 1). Other men purchased blocks belonging to the early developers and created their own subdivisions, but these late comers of the 1830s basically filled in the interstices. The promoters of land in the 1820s put in place major urban features: the situation of a townsite two miles from the bay, the courthouse square, the general focus of business around the square, the unusual wedge of land — the Gore — on King Street, the grid layout of streets, the major street axes, and even many street names. In the 1830s, the town founders and promoters added the marketplace to their urban creations. These physical features endured for generations and, along with the topography of the town, they sorted out land-use features, confirming Blumenfeld's accent on continuity in urban form.

In addition to laying out the basic form of the future city, the town fathers of Hamilton endeavoured to secure population growth; they undertook civic booster activities that hitherto have been associated in the Canadian literature with the late nineteenth century. Their local measures included the Burlington Canal in the 1820s, a steamboat company and bank in the early 1830s, a railway company chartered in the late 1830s, and the dispatch of an immigration agent to the United Kingdom in the early 1840s. The early business elite was able to identify common interests and to pursue development policy.<sup>9</sup>

But who exactly were the men who moulded and propelled early Hamilton? To have attained affluence and city-building influence in the bustling urban economy of the frontier town required either an early stake in local land or backing by metropolitan patrons. Many skilled and ambitious men were attracted to Hamilton in the boom years of the 1830s, but few if any realized enormous material success without prior social advantage or fortune. The town was probably as closed to the unsupported accumulation of assets as at any later era, although precise gauging of opportunity or even wealth is fundamentally beyond the ken of historians or social scientists; it only may be measured indirectly and very crudely through the documented experiences of a few individuals and the distribution of taxed wealth. The resulting analysis favours Michael Katz's two class model of urban society.<sup>10</sup> However, rather than taking the approach that the class division was defined only by the private ownership of capital, our discussion indicates class division along the lines of this definition when capital is taken to include access to credit. A blend of land holdings and metropolitan connections enabled a few men to weather economic crisis or to exploit economic boom because of their superior credit linkages.



The obverse of credit-based power is witnessed in the case of a young artisan. Twenty-three year old George Martin, a carpenter from Kent who emigrated to North America in 1834, illustrates the hazards faced by an artisan entering the comparatively young urban economy of Upper Canada and western New York. He went first to Cobourg where an employer cheated him and a son died from cholera. Martin proceeded west to Hamilton where he resided in 1837. The building boom provided steady work even in winter — “all indoors work pretty much; I could not save any thing though for provisions have been so high.”<sup>11</sup> However, he had purchased a lot on credit and had paid for the makings of his house and furniture through labour barter. A man who treasured the prospect of owning land and securing the right to vote, George Martin would fail in the economic collapse of the late 1830s and would migrate to Rochester. At the peak of the boom (1837), Martin believed he could have sold out for £ 150. Instead, he held back and lost. The civic elite also suffered from a deflation of property values. Their cred-

itors squeezed, but by seeking other credit sources, pleading for extensions, and by sacrifice liquidations they held on in the crisis of 1837-1840.

The vignette of dashed hopes dovetails with the more general condition of inequality revealed in the distribution of assessed real property. Used with an understanding of what was measured, assessments can confirm a concentration of economic might. Hamilton's assessment rolls are virtually complete from the year of the town charter (1833) to the present. Prior to 1847, local taxes in Upper Canada were assessed on the basis of fixed values assigned to nominal categories of real and personal property (lots, buildings, livestock, and carriages) (Table 1). Assessments also served as household enumerations reporting the number in the household, males and females over 16 years, under 16 years, and the number of residents affiliated with a given set of religious denominations.

**TABLE 1**  
**Assessment Categories and Census**  
**Information Collected for Hamilton, 1839**

Assessment Categories	Categorical Values
Town lots	£ 25 each
Cultivated land	£ 1 per acre
Houses:	
Squared or hewed timber	£ 20
With additional fireplace	£ 25
Frame, single story	£ 35
With additional fireplace	£ 40
Brick or stone, single story	£ 40
With additional fireplace	£ 45
Two story, all materials	£ 60
With additional fireplace	£ 65
Merchant shops	£ 200
Storehouses	£ 200
Assorted categories of livestock	varied
Assorted categories of vehicles	varied
Census Heading	Categories
Number of males under 16	
Number of males over 16	
Number of females under 16	
Number of females over 16	
Number in household by religious denomination	Church of England Church of Scotland Scottish Dissenters American Presbyterian British Wesleyan Canadian Wesleyan Roman Catholic Other Unbaptized
Total in household	

Assessments did not measure wealth; they certainly did not touch the invisible capital of credit. In 1839, merchant John Young's real property was assessed at £ 515. The next year he brought £ 7000 into a partnership with Isaac Buchanan. Peter Hunter Hamilton's 1839 assessment was £ 200. However, in June 1835 his real and personal property were estimated as having a market value of £ 14,000: £ 3070 for 58 town lots, £ 5000 for his house and 104 acres of estate in town, £ 3467 for properties outside Hamilton, and £ 2995 in mortgages and accounts due. The very facts that assessment of real property was so ridiculously biased and that

assessment wholly ignored personal property are indicative of advantages town fathers heaped upon themselves.<sup>12</sup>

A pyramid of wealth is usual in the annals of urban society. Even though tax assessment methods have varied according to place and time, systematic social investigation using such assessments invariably shows a concentration, but the interpretation of patterns of inequality has raised controversy. Did communities move from early periods of relative openness to conditions of greater concentration of wealth at later times? That has been the burden of argument in a number of studies. James Henretta has argued that the 1687 taxroll for Boston displayed greater distribution of assessed wealth than that of 1771. Other studies followed. In Boston 4% of households were taxed for 59% of taxable property in 1833 and for 64% by 1848. The heaviest taxed 4% in New York in 1828 held 49% of taxable property and 66% in 1845. An examination of Chicago's mid-century tax rolls explodes the myth of opportunity near the western frontier. With the richest 1% owning 52% of taxable property, Chicago had "time to evolve to eastern levels of inequality." At Yerba Buena on the Pacific coast, the American takeover of July 1846 initiated the upset of Mexican law which prohibited a concentration of lots. By March 1848, four men and two firms held title to nearly 30% of the lots of what was to become San Francisco. The highly unequal distribution of urban property was a continental fact. But was it increasing in severity? Or was it essentially present from the beginning?<sup>13</sup>

Using a 1774 tax list for Philadelphia, Sam Bass Warner Jr. found that the "upper tenth of the taxpaying households owned 89 per cent of the taxable property." Despite such a dramatic concentration, Warner advanced the purely impressionistic view that others shared in "the general prosperity." Flawed by an excessive nostalgia for the supposedly intimate community of colonial Philadelphia, Warner's work ignored the logic of its bare empirical threads. Others have accepted the same hypothesis. On slender evidence drawn from problematic source material, American historians have pursued the theme of an increasing concentration of assessed wealth, underlining it as a basic finding.

The peculiar nature of assessment rolls and the complexity of credit arrangements make wealth an altogether slippery subject. Nevertheless, the assessment categories used in Upper Canada and the relative proportions of assessed value for real property help isolate the privileged and the poor. For reasons that pertain to the spatial dimensions of this study, only the 1839 assessment roll was made machine readable. That year, in the midst of a depression, found Hamilton at a low point in its fortunes. The town had lost 9 per cent of the 3,188 people enumerated in 1837. The Hamilton assessment of 1839 came at a time when the town was close to its origins — about 20 years after its founding, 10 years after its commercial prospects had brightened, and 6 years after incorporation.<sup>14</sup>

**TABLE 2**  
**Concentration of Assessed Real Property in Hamilton, 1839**

	Households		Total Assessed Value		Town Lots		Shops		Two Story Dwellings	
	Number	Percentage	Value	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Households with Assessments Totalling over £ 200	57	10.0%	16,571	39.7%	156	36.1%	33	100.0%	33	55.9%
Households with Assessments Totalling £ 200 or less and excluding Roman Catholics	427	75.2	22,316	53.5	253	58.6	0	0.0	23	39.0
Roman Catholic Households	84	14.8	2,821	6.8	23	5.3	0	0.0	3	5.1
Total	528	100.0	41,708	100.0	432	100.0	33	100.0	59	100.0

SOURCE: Hamilton Public Library, Hamilton Collection, Hamilton Assessment Roll 1839.

At first glance, the fact that the most heavily assessed 10% in 1839 were assessed for only about 40% of the town's assessed property value (Table 2) could support the impression that relatively new urban centres were comparatively open, for 40% is substantially less than the 89% observed in the mature port of Philadelphia in 1774. Unfortunately, mere statistical comparisons with other centres or even with later periods in Hamilton, such as the decades studied by Michael Katz (5% held 47% and 50% of assessed wealth in 1851 and 1861 respectively), would rest on sand, because the Upper Canadian assessment rolls were based on an arbitrary and inflexibly nominal arrangement that undervalued many forms of property in relation to others. All town lots, regardless of size and location were assessed at £ 25; all merchant shops were assessed at £ 200 while artisan establishments appear to have been assessed at the rate of dwellings. If anything the 1839 roll underassessed the holders of landed wealth even more than in better times. Town lots assessed at £ 25 each were sometimes assessed as cultivated land at £ 1 an acre to provide relief for their owners. Moreover, the flight of transient labourers at the termination of a construction boom reduced the number of households without real property and mitigated the statistical portrait of inequality. In sum, methodological flaws run firmly and wholly in the direction of underestimating the concentration of assessed wealth in the 1830s. We are skeptical, however, about reading too much into alleged patterns of increased concentration of wealth.

Our study has benefitted from conventional sources that emphasize the town-shaping actions, the networks of influ-

ence, and lines of credit that were dominated by a few. In sum, we do not feel that the work of others has been well enough based in an understanding of the tax records or conventional sources to support a notion of an early stage in a community's history when there was less concentration of wealth and more broadly based prosperity. Continuity is our preferred bias. To split hairs over the meaning of a few percentage points of variation between tables of assessed property, especially when these are not precisely comparable, is less significant than to note the basic feature — concentration from the beginning.

Examined by criteria other than just assessed value, property in early Hamilton was quite concentrated. In the 1839 assessment, only 57 households had assessed property totalling £ 200 or greater; the range within these households was £ 200 to £ 750. For the 57 households, amounting to 10% of all households (568), the mean value of assessed property was £ 290 while the mean for all other households in town was £ 49. The most heavily assessed 10% held all the merchant shops, 36% of vacant town lots, 76% of the assessment entries for cultivated land, and 56% of the town's largest dwellings — two story houses with extra fireplaces (Table 2). As well, they were assessed for a total of 132 dwellings or 2.3 houses per household. Their actual holdings of rental dwellings may have been under-enumerated because tenants sometimes agreed to pay both rents and taxes; the records do not indicate whether or not this type of arrangement meant that the tenants' names appeared in association with the rented property. It seems plausible, hence the possible under-enumeration of rental houses owned by the elite.

**TABLE 3**  
**Origins of Hamilton Residents with a**  
**Total Property Assessment of**  
**£ 200 or More in 1839**

Background	Number	Percentage
Settlers in Area before 1825	14	24.6%
Merchants and Hostlers whose Status Included Established Credit Links, Private Fortunes, or Patronage on Arrival after 1825	6	10.5
Professionals: Druggists and Lawyers who Arrived after 1825	6	10.5
Merchants and Hostlers who Arrived after 1825 and whose Background is Unknown	8	14.0
Trade and Background Unknown	23	40.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.0</b>

SOURCE: *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography*, vol. I (Hamilton: Dictionary of Hamilton Biography, 1981).

Rich biographical sources for Hamilton and peculiarities of assessment permit a subdivision of the elite according to the source of wealth.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, the town's elite consisted of two groups: landowners and merchants (Table 3). The first group consisted of multiple property owners, the men of landed wealth who had inherited or purchased land in the

town before it began to flourish as a lakeport in the late 1820s. Landowners who held large tracts before the completion of the Burlington Canal were to unload hundreds of lots during the 1830s. The *Western Mercury* estimated in June 1834 that Peter Hunter Hamilton, Allan McNab, Peter Hess, David Kirkendall, Andrew Miller, and James Mills had sold 400 building lots over a recent but unspecified period.<sup>16</sup> McNab was a relatively new operator in the property industry, having opened his law and land office in 1826. All of the others had owned major tracts since at least 1820. Typically, the assessed real property of these and other land developers had a quite distinctive feature: a considerable spread between total and mean (Table 4). This trait conveyed the fact that they held many parcels of land and/or small rental dwellings. In addition to the six men mentioned above, in 1839 the other major owners of town lots or of cultivated land included Nathaniel Hughson, George Tiffany, John Gage, Michael Aikman, and Robert Jarvis Hamilton.

Basically, the ten original town creators or their children dominated the land market roughly twenty years after their original land acquisitions. Often, their affluence endured for many more decades. According to the memoirs of an early town clerk, it was during the 1830s that Samuel Mills a son of James Mills began to lay the basis of a fortune that would make him one of the three richest men in Hamilton when he died in 1872. "Samuel Mills began to be a great man and to own a score or two of wooden houses."<sup>17</sup> Merchant Richard Juson retired to England, while John Young established a local dynasty that would run textile mills for three generations. The Hamiltons fared less well. Robert Jarvis Hamilton's private banking business collapsed in the panic

**TABLE 4**  
**Examples of the Land Owning and Merchantile Elite of Hamilton, 1839**

Name	Total Assessment of Real Property	Mean Assessment of Real Property	Occupation	Arrival
Peter Hess	£ 749	£ 37	Farmer/Speculator	1816
John Gage	410	34	Farmer/Speculator	?
R.J. Hamilton	360	36	Speculator/son of founder	1816
Nathaniel Hughson	210	52	Farmer/Speculator	1790s
John Applegarth	205	41	Miller	1820s
Peter H. Hamilton	200	12	Speculator/son of founder	1816
Daniel Gunn	265	88	Wharfinger	?
John Young	515	128	Merchant	1832
Alexander Kerr	225	112	Merchant	1836
Richard Juson	200	200	Merchant	1835
William McLaren	200	200	Merchant	183?
Jacob Winer	200	200	Merchant	1829

SOURCE: Hamilton Assessment Roll 1839.

of the early 1860s. Andrew Miller left a sizeable estate, sufficient to warrant professional management by a real estate firm for his heirs in the 1860s and 1870s. Tiffany and McNab lived very comfortable lives, but McNab died a virtual bankrupt. Wealth generated by early acquisition of land founded fortunes, supported a grand style of living, and failed to insulate some men against their excesses or bad luck.

The Hamilton scene verifies themes raised by Paul-André Linteau and Jean-Claude Robert about Montreal in the early nineteenth century. They noted an over-representation of French Canadians among holders of landed wealth. Established property holdings and knowledge of local land-tenure arrangements gave French Canadians an advantage of prior involvement.<sup>18</sup> In like fashion, the pre-1825 settlers around Hamilton's court house had a positional advantage. Furthermore, Linteau and Robert proposed that a land owner worked to create "the conditions that would drive up the value of his properties."<sup>19</sup> The very founding of Hamilton and the concerns of its Board of Police confirm the same view. With the exception of Archibald Ferguson, all the major land holders endeavoured to shape the town's development in advantageous ways. Ferguson annoyed the Board of Police for his failure to open a street and he had a mere seven people dwelling on his 200 acres in 1839.<sup>20</sup> A pioneer agrarian with a low lying farm, he was not an assertive developer with a desirable tract. Even his inertia, however, influenced the course of town development. With the Ferguson Tract and Corktown on the eastern boundary, the pattern of residential segregation had formative roots. The town already was roughly broken into preferred and less preferred tracts from which, in subsequent decades, it would evolve into a city with a working class east end and south western bourgeois areas (Maps 1 and 3).

Initial moves into the land business usually had to have had the force of personal assets or patronage, a line of credit or political influence. George Hamilton's father had been one of the richest men in Upper Canada. Allan McNab's father was impecunious, but eventually appointed as Sergeant at Arms for the House of Assembly he had a respectable position and Allan earned further friends as a boy hero during the War of 1812. He learned his craft in law and land when he articulated in the law office of Attorney General D'Arcy Boulton of York. The precise supports for James Mills and Peter Hess are unknown, but in 1816 they had paid the considerable sum of £ 750 for widow Margaret Rousseaux's 500 acres.<sup>21</sup>

Merchants had significant advantages of their own. As a group, they could be identified on the 1839 assessment rolls from their flat assessment of £ 200; the spread between their total assessed real property and the mean values for their assessed real property was far less than for households based on landed wealth. Merchant property tended to be concentrated. A few merchants held extra town lots, but most were assessed only for a shop and a house or merely a shop. The

merchant's shops and household enumerations frequently occurred on the same line on the assessment sheets (14 out of 33 entries); it is possible that these single entry merchants used their business establishments as domiciles for themselves and their clerks. But there were further distinctions. The successful land agent or speculator tended to have been born in North America and had exercised patience and some promotion as well as experiencing good fortune before reaping the benefits of urban growth. Most merchants whose birthplace is known came from the United Kingdom: John Young (Ayrshire), Richard Juson (Salisbury), William McLaren (Stirling), John Bickle (Devon), Archibald Kerr (Paisley), Colin Cambell Ferrie (Glasgow), Jacob Winer (Durham, New York). Merchants usually brought experience earned in the family business or as a trusted clerk encouraged by a patron.

Most important, merchants had the benefit of metropolitan connections of various types. They were not simply eager young men who had pulled themselves up by their bootstraps after having arrived in Hamilton. Years before the founding of Hamilton, the society and economy of the Burlington Bay region was dominated by millers and merchants with metropolitan connections. Dundas' founder Richard Hatt made several trips a year to confer with his connections in Montreal.<sup>22</sup> Richard Beasley was linked by family and business to the powerful Cartwrights of Kingston. Merchant James Durand had come to Upper Canada as agent for a London mercer. Children of all three men married into families of Hamilton's town fathers active in the formative 1830s. Merchant, land speculator, and mortgage broker Thomas Stinson came from the Welland Canal where he had been a contractor and supplier for the canal construction of the 1820s and where he had married the daughter of contractor Adam Zimmerman. Charles Magill opened a Hamilton shop for Isaac Buchanan of York whose credit line extended back to the Buchanans of Glasgow. Colin Ferrie's credit base was seated in the same city as Buchanan's. John Watkins of Kingston had sponsored Hamilton hardware merchant Richard Juson. It appears that metropolitanism, that influential theme in Canadian political economy, or what American geographer James Vance described as *The Merchant's World*, can embrace social structure as well as urban economic systems.<sup>23</sup>

Nuances of origin and of the specific bases of wealth are not significant for an understanding of class structure. Background differences did not produce great rifts in emergent capitalism; landed wealth, mercantile capital, and industrial capital were not mutually hostile; at times they blended. Moreover, the town's merchants and land owners combined into a single class that commanded civic power. They jointly promoted the town, assembled purposefully in fraternal associations, intermarried, endorsed and circulated each others promissory notes, and generally guided the town's economic and physical development. Of the 35 positions on the Board of Police (the body created by the 1833 town charter)



open from 1833 to 1839, 23 were held by members of the 57 elite households.<sup>24</sup> Leading merchant Colin Campbell Ferrie was the first chairman of the board and was joined by Peter Hunter Hamilton and three other men, all of whom were among the 57. In 1846, Ferrie would return as the city's first mayor. Of the 12 Hamilton men who committed individuals to the jail for criminal misdemeanors or town by-law infractions during the 1830s and early 1840s, 10 were from the most heavily assessed cadre (landowners George Hamilton, Peter Hunter Hamilton, Andrew Miller, Samuel Mills; merchants Colin Campbell Ferrie, Edward Ritchie; attorneys John Law, Miles O'Reilly; land-owning artisan Michael Aikman, Alexander Carpenter).<sup>25</sup> Many prisoners had been committed by authority of the Board of Police and not by any particular individual. As magistrates by virtue of their presence on the Board of Police or as Justices of the Peace, the elite possessed the ultimate power in a community. Moreover, they could and did incarcerate others for indebtedness. During 1839, 8 of the 57 had committed debtors to jail (landowners Robert J. Hamilton, James Gage, Nathaniel Hughson; merchants Colin Campbell Ferrie, John Young, Archibald Kerr; land-owning artisan Alexander Carpenter) (Table 5).

These committals amounted to an unproductive measure of last resort; but as a latent power expressing the vast realm of debt relationships, the threat of committal registered dread. Many town residents and rural debtors fled the prospect by hasty nocturnal exodus. It is important to note that in terms of social stratification a dichotomy between debtors and creditors was not the relevant issue then and remained unimportant for many decades. Rather, the important distinction concerned people who could mobilize capital in the credit market and those who could not. We have observed

already the failure of George Martin and the contrasting ability of Peter Hunter Hamilton to stay afloat. Allan McNab pursued survival by borrowing as a life-time vocation. Few resources in the urban economy — then or now — are highly liquid, but many basic ones were and are convertible to credit: real property and merchandize. The relevant dimension in the urban economy and in the social stratification of the community was and still remains the degree of participation in credit-based financial transactions.

No one can deny the existence of tension and open conflict within the group that dominated the town. That too recommends urban continuity. A few leading citizens had been ardent reformers. Merchant John Parker, town clerk Charles Durand, and James Mills' son Michael fled or were forced into exile in the United States after the rebellions of 1837. Significantly, the Mills family retained local power and traded on Michael's martyrdom; George S. Tiffany, a reformer and confidant of the Mills, continued to transact business with fellow attorney Allan McNab. The trauma of rebellion briefly distressed the business community, but did not shake the social structure.

The elite families also disputed local development issues, specifically which wards would benefit from public expenditures. However, they united in advancing their region within Upper Canada. Land owner Peter Hess, former British West Indian planter and local capitalist James Whyte, and Colin Campbell Ferrie led the movement to found the Gore Bank. The institution served the elite in its all important quest for lines of credit. Indeed, it was so much a vehicle for their own convenience that James Whyte resigned as president in 1839 protesting over the bank's loans to its other directors. Ferrie, who treated the bank as a private source of capital, became

**TABLE 5**  
**Jail Committals for Indebtedness in 1839**

Creditor Initiating Committal	Name of Prisoner	Debt	Duration in Jail
Edward Ritchie	James Blythe	£ 91	24 January — 29 January
Edward Ritchie	James Blythe	36	29 January — 31 January
Nathaniel Hughson	John Dunn	38	17 April — 17 May
Alexander Carpenter	William Nevills	24	17 April — 22 April
John Young	Hiram Newcombe	264	21 May — 29 October
Edward Ritchie	Hiram Newcombe	271	28 August — 29 October
Colin Campbell Ferrie	Robert Murray	24	29 May — 17 July
Robert J. Hamilton	William Phin (?)	22	10 August — ?
James Gage	James Henderson	110	27 November — 24 February 1840
Archibald Kerr			

SOURCE: Mills Library, McMaster University, Gore District Jail records (microfilm).

president. Meanwhile, established landowners were prominent in organizing a venture meant to enhance the commercial hinterland of Hamilton. Land owners George S. Tiffany, Andrew Miller, Nathaniel Hughson, and Samuel Mills served as directors of the still-born London and Gore Railroad in 1836. Although the 1830s were not the years for substantial industrial development, the alleged boundaries separating landed, mercantile, and industrial capital had no practical meaning. Sponsorship of the initial iron foundries involved wealth drawn from land and commerce. Real estate speculator Peter Hunter Hamilton had invested heavily in an iron furnace at Norwich; iron founder John Fisher operated in Hamilton with the financial backing of his merchant druggist cousin, Calvin McQuesten of Brockport, New York. Fisher himself dabbled in real estate. In 1839, tinsmith and eventual foundry operator Alexander Carpenter held 6 lots and 4 houses; pattern carver and future foundry operator Edward Jackson was assessed for 4 lots in addition to his home. The town assessed wharfinger and merchant Daniel Gunn for 5 lots and 4 houses. In the early 1850s, he would head an enterprise that constructed locomotives for the Great Western Railway. Richard Juson's hardware business led him to operate a spike manufacturing enterprise, also to service the Great Western Railway.

Social and family connections bound many of the elite households. The rich acted, for example, as lay leaders of their respective denominations. The very affluent merchant John Young was a founder of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. As the established church of the imperial centre, the Church of England conferred a veneer of prestige that might explain the fact that elite families were slightly over-represented as Anglican adherents. Forty-five per cent of the elite and 37% of all households were recorded as Anglicans. A very few individuals, prominent in local development and land transactions, vied for lay leadership positions. In the summer of 1835, Hamilton Anglicans decided to erect their own place of worship. Two great landowners whose tracts dominated the north (Nathaniel Hughson) and south (George Hamilton) sides of town competed for the privilege of conveying a site to the church. In a vigorously waged contest, Hughson won and gained upgraded tone for his section of town (Map 1). The building committee, all elite gentlemen, consisted of George Hamilton, Daniel Gunn, Miles O'Reilly, Allan McNab, and merchant Edward Ritchie.<sup>26</sup> To finance the construction, these and other prominent community figures were invited to purchase pews. In a modest way, the trade in pews resembled the exchange of urban real estate as pews too were leased and sold. Six men played a major part in the marketing of pews. Allan McNab purchased 16, Daniel Gunn 10, Edward Ritchie 8, George S. Tiffany 6, Miles O'Reilly 5.<sup>27</sup> Tiffany had crossed from St. Andrew's and, as a political reformer, may have done so to establish his loyalty. His actions also placed him in a hierarchically arranged space in an orderly microcosm of the society found beyond the church walls. Unquestionably, the purchase of pews in the economically troubled late-1830s

was an act of benevolence; the purchase also secured a mark of status. Like the town itself, the church layout expressed social segregation based on one's ability to buy property. Indeed, the building committee and the elite recognized three types of pews — first, second, and third class. Rank varied directly with proximity to the pulpit. Of the roughly 30 first class pews open to purchase from 1837 to 1840, between 14 and 18 were occupied by elite households and many more appear to have been owned by the elite and leased to others. At the front left, sat the families of Allan McNab and his brother-in-law, John Ogilvie Hatt. Knighted in 1838, McNab at times may have imagined himself a Scottish laird but he also aped the English gentry, building his seat, spreading largesse at the parish church, and literally placing himself at the right hand of the clergy of the Church of England. Only two elite families could be found among the second class pews.<sup>28</sup>

Family and business associations overlapped. The exact frequency and intimacy of contact cannot be recaptured for this period, but the surviving information is suggestive. Peter Hess was the uncle of Samuel Mills whose legal affairs were handled by George S. Tiffany. Tiffany and Sir Allan McNab co-operated for North End land deals. McNab's sister Lucy had married John Ogilvie Hatt of the affluent Dundas milling and real estate family. McNab had been Hatt's law partner. Originally, McNab's estate had belonged to pioneer merchant and land speculator Richard Beasley whose merchant son-in-law Colin Campbell Ferrie erected an estate adjacent to McNab's "Dundurn." Merchants William McLaren, Richard Juson, and Adam Brown eventually married three sisters; merchant Archibald Kerr married McLaren's sister in March 1839. The town's elite, similar to elites throughout the urban centres of North America, inter-married, in the words of Edward Pessen, "by a rule of social endogamy."<sup>29</sup> They consorted formally and informally alone with persons of their own sort.

Of a more tangential character, the structure of the upper 10% of households differed from that of the town's other households. The former had a mean size of 6.9 and a mode of 7; the latter had a mean size of 4.7 and a mode of 4. This distribution of household size presents a further contrast in the social consequences of class (Table 6). What is more, the 57 most heavily assessed households included a disproportionate percentage with a presence of two religious affiliations per household; constituting 10% of all households in town they accounted for just over 25% of those with two religious denominations. In most instances, it is reasonable to infer that the households of the elite included servants (usually Irish Catholics) and/or an extended family. However, there were other arrangements. Hostlers Plumer Burley and John Bradley had 16 and 11 under their roofs; these individuals could have included employees and/or guests. The 7 in Alexander Carpenter's house might have included an apprentice pattern maker. Whatever the specific arrangement, it is evident that the household-based economic

**TABLE 6**  
**The Size of Elite and Non-Elite**  
**Households in Hamilton in 1839**

Household Size	Proportion of Elite Households with the Given Size	Proportion of None-Elite Households with the Given Size
1 – 5	33.5%	67.5%
6 – 8	42.6%	26.3%
8 or more	23.9%	6.2%

	Elite Households	Non-Elite Households
mean	6.9	4.7
mode	7.0	4.0

SOURCE: Hamilton Assessment Roll 1839.

activities of the town in its initial decades contributed to large elite households.

At the bottom of the social hierarchy, the town's Roman Catholic community demonstrates the disadvantages of having arrived too late to have seized ground-floor opportunities and to have landed without material assets or metropolitan connections sufficient to launch enterprises in self-employment. The Roman Catholic population was an Irish population. The assessment rolls did not record ethnicity, but the names were as good as a shamrock in the lapel on St. Patrick's Day — Patrick Duffy, Patrick Sullivan, Patrick McCluskey, Patrick Brady, Patrick Murray, Michael Doyle, Michael Hogan, Michael Clarke. Timothy, John, or Brian and a number of equally distinctive surnames strongly suggested the Irish character of the Catholic population. Combined with the concentration of Roman Catholics in a part of town designated as Corktown on an 1842 map, names leave little doubt as to Irish origins. To speak of Hamilton's early Roman Catholics, therefore, is to speak of the Irish who had fled an occupied and rural community quite unlike the imperial mercantile urban society left behind by Scottish clerks and merchants. Accounts of the landings of Irish immigrants on the Hamilton waterfront during the 1830s describe destitution. Few Irishmen had the wherewithal or metropolitan backing to embark on land speculation, trade, artisan manufacturing, or hostelry. Dublin born John Bradley and Michael Hogan were exceptions. In 1839 Hogan owned four dwellings and two lots; little else is known about him. Bradley had arrived in 1839 via the United States, ran the Court House Hotel, and assumed early lay leadership in the Roman Catholic community. On 12 July 1834, he sponsored a meeting in his hotel to found a building fund for a church. Altogether 84 Roman Catholic households had been enumerated in 1839, comprising 14.8% of the town's households. These households were assessed for only 5.3% of

Hamilton's lots, none of the uncultivated land, merely 3 of 59 two story dwellings with extra fireplaces, and no shops. Summary expression for their great under representation among holders of the assessed properties is obtained by noting that the mean value for assessed properties held by Roman Catholic households was two thirds of that for all other non-elite households (£ 34 as opposed to £ 52). This condition captured the social fact that a considerable number (37 out of 84) of Roman Catholic households were not assessed — presumably tenants whose rent agreement did not include the payment of municipal taxes.

Shelter reflects social structure. The physical and spatial elements of Hamilton gave tangible expression to social stratification (Table 7). The actual conditions of social, economic, and environmental inequality were present from the start. It will remain to be seen in sequel studies whether these conditions grew more accentuated. However, the prudent scholar admits from the outset that the standards of spatial segregation are not readily reconstructed without a fairly subtle understanding of the ingredients of the natural and man-made surroundings: drainage, views, street traffic, garden plots, commercial centres, and the like. Using the crude device of segregation by wards, Sam Bass Warner's rosy impression of the economy of colonial Philadelphia carried over into his discussion of segregation. He claimed only an ethnic clustering with none of the intensity of "later twentieth-century ethnic and racial ghettos."<sup>30</sup> Seeking to emphasize transformations — a scaffolding he called it — Warner may well have missed the finer patterns of persistent segregation.

Geographer David Ward has argued that ethnic concentration of any kind was impossible until the late nineteenth century when changes in the scale of employment and the introduction of mass transit permitted the development of purely residential and segregated neighbourhoods for the first time.<sup>31</sup> The dimensions of early nineteenth-century segregation were certainly small in absolute terms — only a few blocks in Hamilton's case. However, in relative terms they seem significant enough to shake Ward's conclusion. By basing the explanation for segregation on an understanding of how contemporaries viewed and experienced the physical qualities of the urban site as well as on an understanding of class inequality, Warner's or Ward's emphasis on industrialization and the streetcar is challenged. Studying the processes of making land undesirable by industrial concentration or tracing the impact of transportation technologies seem unsatisfactory or mechanical. Already American historians David Gordon and Betsey Blackmar have revisited the preindustrial walking city and have refined the study of spatial and economic stratification.<sup>32</sup> Canadian geographer Richard Harris likewise has reviewed the issue of what comprises a significant scale of segregation recommending sensitivity to "historical and geographic circumstances . . . the unique configurations of residential space in the local

**TABLE 7**  
**Hamilton's Land Use (by Selected Assessment Categories) According to Town Tracts and Aggregated Tracts, 1839**

Tracts	Cultivated Lands as % of Entries for Tracts	Town Lots as % of Entries for Tracts	Two Story Houses with extra Fireplaces as % of Entries for Tract	Shanties as % of Entries for Tract	Shops as % of Entries for Tract
<b>Central Town</b>					
Original Town	0.8	32.8	7.6	1.5	11.5
Market Area	4.1	32.4	3.2	1.8	3.2
King Axis	1.0	35.0	3.0	2.0	4.0
<b>Adjacent to Central Town and Market</b>					
York Axis	0.0	60.0	6.0	0.0	0.0
Hughson Tract	1.5	31.2	7.5	1.5	0.5
<b>Extreme Eastern Fringe</b>					
Ferguson Tract	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Low Lying Fringe</b>					
North End	28.6	22.9	0.0	4.3	0.0
Corktown	6.7	30.5	1.0	20.0	0.0
<b>High Southern Fringe</b>					
Main West Axis	4.3	45.7	7.1	0.0	0.0
Bellevue	11.1	48.9	6.7	0.0	2.2
Peter Hunter Hamilton Tract	<u>42.4</u>	<u>24.2</u>	<u>15.2</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>3.0</u>
Town	5.4	35.1	4.8	3.4	2.7

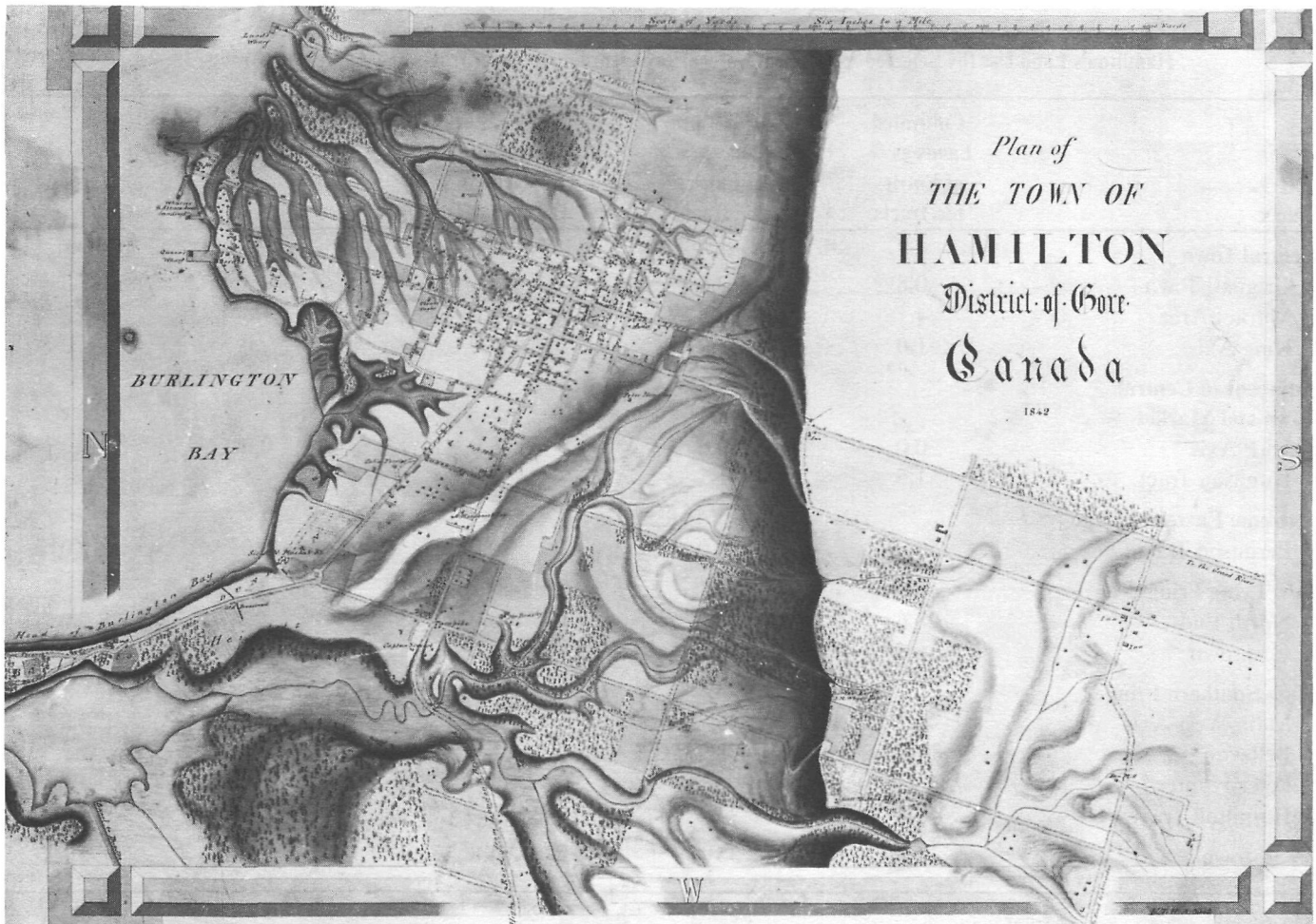
SOURCE: Hamilton Assessment Roll 1839.

setting."<sup>33</sup> Instead of purely fracturing urban chronology into an implied model of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, it seems important to assert continuity in the form of prejudices and preferences, differentiation of land values, and the clustering of classes and ethnic groups.

If strong segregation existed in a town of the interior in its formative years, a segregation found in spatial units smaller than wards, then it calls into question one of Warner's measures of change. In her sophisticated analysis of mid-nineteenth century Milwaukee, Kathleen Conzen demonstrated the patterns of segregation more clearly than early studies because of her use of more refined areal units than had been employed formerly. Conzen specifically detected the segregation of the poor Irish in low lying portions of the city. The same arrangement was evident in Hamilton. An 1842 map actually had designated a Corktown and placed it in an area that early maps had shown as cut by streams carrying run off from the escarpment and drainage from the prominent ridge that ran into the escarpment just west of the eventual Corktown site.<sup>34</sup>

Testing the hypothesis of economic and religious segregation by elevation presents a methodological problem

because assessment rolls for Hamilton in the 1830s and 1840s normally failed to attach locational tags to properties and households. However, in 1839 the rolls listed entries by street segments. These listings conveyed no discernible system of describing precise block faces. However, many streets in the town only extended a few blocks before terminating or assuming another name. Many names remained in use long enough to appear on the 1851-2 Marcus Smith map of Hamilton, a detailed research aid. Two original maps drafted around 1830, one by Lewis Burwell and both probably prepared for the land development activities of the Hamiltons, have survived and indicate major property owners.<sup>35</sup> These maps, local history sources, the advertisements in the *Western Mercury*, and descriptions of Hamilton in the 1830s appearing in the *Reminiscences of Charles Durand* have made it possible to place all but 196 (15.9%) of the 1231 assessment entries into 11 tracts created for the purpose of a spatial inquiry. Assigning entries listed under the longer streets like King, Main, James, and John presented the greater challenge. However, in Corktown the streets were quite short and assignment of a tract designation for a specific assessment entry was certain. Five of the 11 tracts conformed roughly to surveys marketed by major land holders: The Original Town (George Hamilton), Bellevue



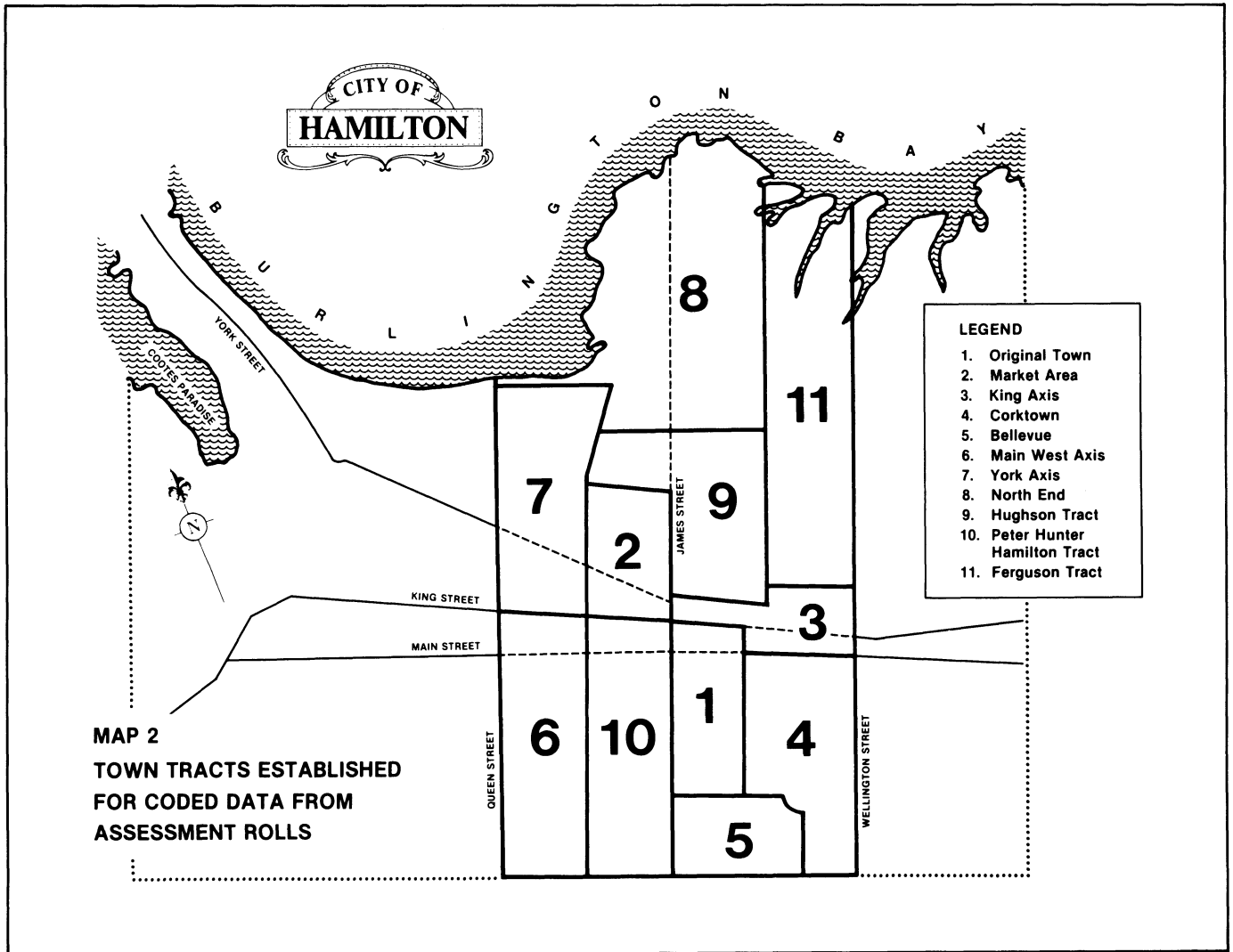
**FIGURE 1.** Town of Hamilton, 1842. On this map it is possible to read some of the interaction of topography, land development, and society. A largely grid layout is evident as is the low lying area of Corktown and the ridge (running diagonally) upon which the elite had begun to build homes.

SOURCE: Hamilton Collection, Hamilton Public Library

(George Hamilton), the Hughson Tract (Nathaniel Hughson), the Ferguson Tract (Archibald Ferguson), and the Peter Hunter Hamilton Survey. Three other tracts followed the longer streets: the King East Axis, the Main West Axis, and the York Road Axis. The North End and Corktown were defined by topography and recognized as distinct areas by contemporaries. Finally, a number of short streets and noted mercantile establishments defined the Market Area (Map 2).

At the urban core — the Original Town, the Market Area, and the King East Axis — assessment categories describe an area that held most of the town's shops. The core also supported the heaviest population densities; the core's higher proportion of two story dwellings, inns, shops, artisan establishments, and the trend in young commercial centres for merchants and artisans to have large households combining residence and business explain the phenomenon. A few merchants located outside the core, along James South and John

South, conceivably a result of George Hamilton's efforts around 1830 to establish a marketplace on his survey between the courthouse and his estate of Bellevue. His scheme was thrown over in 1833-4 by the Board of Police's selection of a market site on land belonging to Andrew Miller at the intersection of York Road and James Street. The town market endured on the same site until urban renewal in the 1960s. Consequently, the focal point for inns and shops shifted northward away from the older courthouse square. In 1839, the Market Area had approximately twice the population density of the Old Town Tract and five times that for the entire town. Already, there was a functional division of activity in the urban core. Lawyers, hostlers, and land agents were arrayed near the courthouse. To the south, a small cluster of shops had opened near George Hamilton's projected market place which had evolved as the town's haymarket. To the north, the town market drew commercial activity. In the distant North End, Daniel Gunn operated his wharf; here was the basis for the town's later port development and

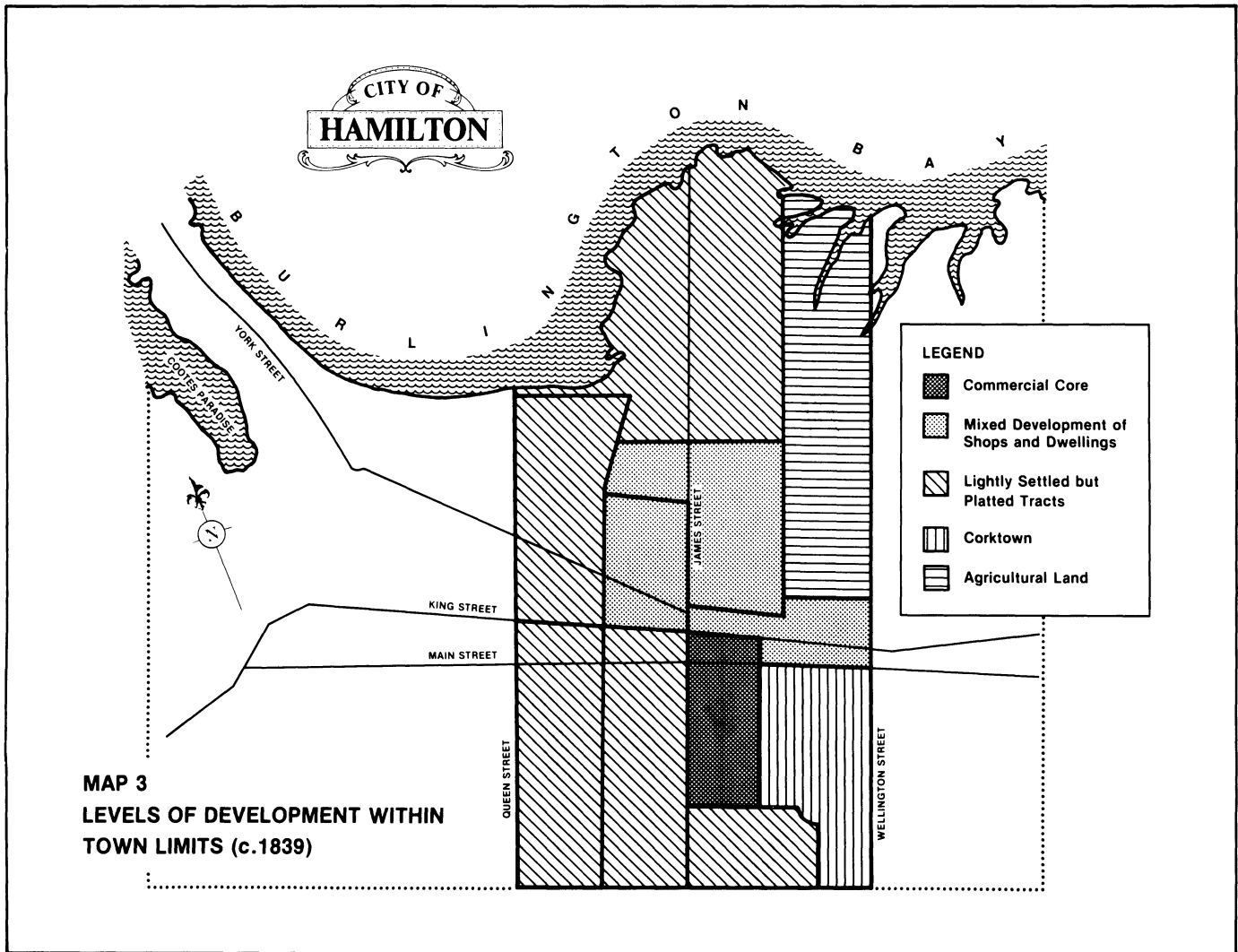


railway activity. Already the North End was a rudimentary transshipment centre.

Elsewhere the town had land-use characteristics readily associated with features taken as commonplace in later periods. The urban fringe was underdeveloped and had a low population density (Map 3). However, in regard to vacant properties, the clearest expression of the town's youth was the persistence of town lots — about one third of the assessment entries — in the central core.

Taking eight categories of dwellings (Table 1) as surrogates of housing quality, there were the unmistakable earmarks of segregation of land use according to residential tone and, presumably, economic class. The early identification of the southwest with exclusivity and of the east with relative inferiority would linger for over a century. The higher elevated fringe tracts, the Bellevue Tract, the Peter Hunter Hamilton Tract, and the Main West Axis benefitted from superior drainage and vistas of the bay. On land with an

elevation of from 340 to 420 feet above sea level, a disproportionate number of better homes had been erected. Actually, the most 57 heavily assessed households were scattered around the city since it appears that many merchants lived in or near their establishments and the land owners lived in their development areas. Nonetheless, the elevated urban fringe had a greater proportion of the two story dwellings with extra fireplaces relative to other types of assessed property (Map 1). Moreover, the relatively high proportion of assessment entries that described town lots and especially cultivated land actually captured the existence of the speculative estates of the Hamilton family. Over the course of the next two decades the merchant elite would leave the core and, with independent fortunes established, they would locate near the Bellevue area. Juson, Kerr and, Young all situated themselves on the heights. Just beyond the western town limits, on the same ridge that defined the high fringe tracts, Sir Allan McNab had erected Dundurn Castle, Colin Campbell Ferrie, his "Westlawn," and the Mills family its enclave. The latter had recognized as early as 1834 the preferred quality of its elevated land and had advertized 100



building lots “sufficiently elevated to command a fine view of the built up portion of the town.”<sup>36</sup>

There had been no such boosting of Corktown lots in the east. Elevation here ranged from 320 to 300 feet. Located in a sheltered depression backed against the Niagara escarpment Corktown had one alleged advantage. Gardens and fruit trees had greater immunity from frost than elsewhere in the town. Corktown housing evolved as the poorest in town. Shanties were not a category of dwelling formally recognized by the assessment laws, but they definitely existed and their presence can be reconstructed from the rolls. The Hamilton Police Village minutes indicated that only if a shelter had a dirt floor and lacked a shingle roof would it receive exemption from assessment as a frame house.<sup>37</sup> Occupants of shanties still could be assessed for the lots they occupied. Therefore, it seems fairly certain that when a household, usually a Roman Catholic household, was assessed for a lot but no specified shelter and they could not be found elsewhere on the rolls then they surely inhabited a particularly mean dwelling. Half of Hamilton’s dwellings

consisted of one-story frame houses with no extra fireplaces and a smattering of likely shanties (254 of 501 dwellings). These two lowest forms of shelter comprised 90% of the houses in Corktown. Shanties appeared in 6 of the town’s 11 regions, but Corktown had half of them (21 of 42). Corktown also had the highest population density of a non-core tract. Unquestionably the most miserable part of town, Corktown had more Roman Catholic households in absolute and relative terms than any other region. Overall it accounted for a quarter of Hamilton’s Roman Catholic population. In the late 1830s (1837, 38, 39) it returned John Bradley as its representative on the Police board. Miles O’Reilly’s estate, “The Willows,” was located in the midst of Corktown and, although he was not Roman Catholic, he evidently courted Corktown political support.<sup>38</sup>

An odd dynamic of isolation and calculated integration, reconstructed from fragmentary remarks and episodes, characterized the Irish Catholic situation. Irish Catholic labourers were recognized as useful. At times, it was prudent to keep on their right side and to mollify what was

believed to be their passionate attitude before it erupted into violence. At times, their cohesion and muscle were exploited in the rough and tumble of politics. Perhaps it was just this very mix of motives that brought out 40 gentlemen to the British Hotel on Saint Patrick's Day 1836. The speeches stressed "harmless glee and vivacity," harmony, unanimity, peace, and proof of a lie that Irishmen "could not *meet* in harmony and *part* in peace."<sup>39</sup> In fact, only two years before in neighbouring Dundas insults traded on Saint Patrick's Day had escalated into tumult and had ended in a homicide and a trial that pushed the Gore District to the brink of serious religious conflict.<sup>40</sup> The dissonance between social inequalities and the soothing platitudes of elite representatives like Ebenezer Stinson, vice chairman of the 1836 gathering, stand out in retrospect as a commonplace in class or race relations. Closed fists and clasped hands present social historians with their most dramatic, most perplexing, and most human symbols. Intimidation and manipulation inject emotion into the bare data of inequality. As would be the case in later decades, the social inequalities provoked protest and brought from the elite efforts to impose harmony and order. The town was small enough that even if the rich and the poor did not live in heterogeneous neighbourhoods, they at least were so close as to be acutely aware of one another. In that qualified sense, the Warner and Ward conception of social space in the pedestrian city retains some value, for it directs attention to the fact that segregation was not yet adequately supported by distance to buffer class contact. Of course, Warner's conception of contact emphasized social harmony among the various groups who lived in proximity to one another. The Hamilton situation indicates a more complex interaction comprising conflict and deference.

Hamilton had strong traits of social stratification, particularly evident in the contrast between the elite and the Irish Catholics. The possibility of a more fluid situation for the great majority, especially skilled artisans, the potential for upward mobility for self-employed producers, and the possibility of social tranquility cannot be ruled out. However, the current methods and sources cannot provide convincing answers — certainly not answers that support a portrait of an open society brimming with equal access to that nebulous commodity, prosperity, or to the very real and absolutely essential network of credit. Artisans cannot be identified from the assessment rolls because their establishments were not listed in a separate category. Because artisan manufacture was essentially perceived as a household activity, the workshops were not identified but were listed with houses. Biographical sources for the cabinet makers, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, tailors, and shoemakers who advertised in the town's newspapers are thin; however, their names are not prominent among the founders of industries in the 1840s and 1850s. On the whole, it seems doubtful that the town at any time fostered broad opportunities for riches and influence to any except the well connected. However, as a commercial and not an administrative or military town, Hamilton fostered an elite that contrasted with the fre-

quently-studied Family Compact of Upper Canada. The Hamilton elite had not risen through imperial service or colonial administration; they resided on the margins of colonial political power.

The foregoing analysis brings us to two sweeping hypotheses about urban history. First, we have imputed continuity. Fortune, class structure, and urban form — described for later decades by Michael Katz and his associates — had roots in the town's earliest years. Second, the concept of class structure moving into a site on the lines of metropolitan ties recommends the idea of urban as process rather than place. We certainly do not believe that all North American or Canadian cities, regardless of time or place, are essentially the same "underneath"; we do feel that all cities in the North-American setting are composed of the same elements in somewhat distinctive combinations. Unless one bears this research alternative in mind, it is easy to be seduced into first asking questions about change and the particular while neglecting the discovery of shared benchmark elements. Urban studies will not progress much beyond a glut of unrelated findings until it begins to develop methods of approaching the total design of urban space and to refine models that link findings from assorted times and places into a single framework. Continuity, seen through the long history of land development, the two class model, and metropolitanism, offers an essential path to the discovery of truths about urban North America.

#### NOTES

1. Richard Wade, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 30-35.
2. Sam Bass Warner Jr., "If All the World Were Philadelphia: A Scaffolding for Urban History, 1774-1930," *American Historical Review* 74 (October 1968): 26-43.
3. Gilbert Stelter, "The City-Building Process in Canada," in *Shaping the Urban Landscape: Aspects of the Canadian City-Building Process*, ed. Gilbert Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 1-29.
4. Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), concentrates on the 1850s.
5. Hans Blumenfeld, "Continuity and Change in Urban Form," *Journal of Urban History* 1 (February 1975): 131-47.
6. For a review of the North American literature on land development see Michael J. Doucet, "Urban Land Development in Nineteenth-Century North America: Themes in the Literature," *Journal of Urban History* 8 (May 1982): 299-342.
7. John Weaver, *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1983), 16-17.
8. Blumenfeld, "Continuity and Change," 147.
9. Public Archives of Canada (PAC), newspaper collection, *Hamilton Gazette*, 17 February 1836, 9 March 1836. John Weaver, "The Location of Manufacturing Enterprises: The Case of Hamilton's Attraction of Foundries, 1830-1890," in *Crucial Issues in the History of Canadian Science, Technology and Medicine*, ed. Richard A. Jarrell and Arnold E. Roos (Thornhill and Ottawa: HSTC Publications, 1983).
10. This analytic approach is discussed in Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Indus-*



- trial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 14-63.
11. George Martin to his father, 7 June 1837, quoted in Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Weindenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 285.
  12. PAC, MG24, D16, Isaac Buchanan Papers, vol. 64, Isaac Buchanan to \_\_\_\_\_, 22 October 1840; Public Archives of Ontario, Samuel Street Papers, "Statement of the Real and Personal Estate and Its Value Belonging," to Peter Hunter Hamilton, 18 June 1835. On the benefits of low assessments see Edward Pessen, "Who Has Power in the Democratic Capitalistic Community? Reflections on Antebellum New York City," *New York History* 58 (April 1977): 136, 149.
  13. James Henretta, "Economic Development and Social Structure in Colonial Boston," *William and Mary Quarterly* 22 (January 1965): 75-92; Howard Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 45; Craig Buettinger, "Economic Inequality in Early Chicago," *Journal of Social History* 11 (Spring 1978): 413-17; Bruno Fritzsche, "San Francisco 1846-1848: The Coming of the Land Speculator," *California Historical Quarterly* 51 (Spring 1972): 17-34.
  14. Weaver, *Hamilton*, 15-39.
  15. Unless otherwise stated all of the biographical information was supplied by T. Melville Bailey, Patricia Filer, Robert L. Fraser, and John Weaver editors, *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography*, vol. I (Hamilton: Dictionary of Hamilton Biography, 1981).
  16. *Western Mercury*, 26 June 1834.
  17. Charles Durand, *Reminiscences of Charles Durand of Toronto, Barrister* (Toronto: Hunter Rose, 1897), 219.
  18. Paul-André Linteau and Jean-Claude Robert, "Land Ownership and Society in Montreal: An Hypothesis," in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, ed. Gilbert Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 32.
  19. *Ibid.*, 31.
  20. McMaster University, Mills Library, Special Collections, Marjorie F. Campbell Collection, Typescript of Hamilton Police Village Minutes, 10 April 1837.
  21. Hamilton-Wentworth, Land Registry Records, Registered Memorials, #A-16, Margaret Rousseaux, Executrix, to James Mills and Peter Hess, dated 12 June 1816 and registered 13 July 1816.
  22. PAC, RG5, A1, Upper Canada Sundries, vol. 57, Richard Hatt to Lieutenant Colonel D. Cameron, 15 May 1816.
  23. James Vance, *The Merchant's World; The Geography of Wholesaling* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970).
  24. Mills Library, Special Collections, Marjorie F. Campbell Collection, Typescript of Hamilton Police Village Minutes, 1833 to 1840, passim.
  25. PAO, RG22, Gore District Jail Records, jail ledger, June 1832 to December 1851.
  26. The back pages of the above ledger contained the entries for the debtors.
  27. University of Toronto, Robarts Library, Sir Allan McNab Papers, Box 5, unlabeled package of church papers.
  28. *Ibid.*, undated map of seating plan (c. 1840).
  29. Edward Pessen, "Who Governed the Nation's Cities in the 'Era of the Common Man'?", *Political Science Quarterly* 87 (December 1972): 593.
  30. Sam Bass Warner Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 17.
  31. See the important review article by Kathleen Conzen, "Immigrants, Immigrant Neighborhoods, and Ethnic Identity: Historical Issues," *Journal of American History* 66 (December 1979): 603-15.
  32. David Gordon, "Capitalism and the Roots of Urban Crisis," in *The Fiscal Crisis and American Cities*, ed. Roger E. Alcala and David Mermelstein (New York, 1977), 99-100; Betsy Blackmar, "Re-walking the 'Walking City': Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1780-1840," *Radical History Review* 21 (Fall 1979): 131-48.
  33. Richard Harris, "Residential Segregation and Class Formation in Canadian Cities; A Critical Review" (unpublished paper, 1983), 23.
  34. Kathleen Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836-1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 142-43.
  35. Mills Library, Hamilton maps, accession number 7453, undated map (late 1820s); accession number 7677, 12 February 1830.
  36. *Western Mercury*, 26 June 1834.
  37. Mills Library, Marjorie F. Campbell Collection, Typescript of Hamilton Police Village Minutes, 27 August 1838.
  38. E.M.G. MacGill, *My Mother, The Judge* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1955), 6-20.
  39. PAC, *Hamilton Gazette*, 23 March 1836.
  40. PAC, RG5, A1, Upper Canada Fundries, 78467-9, J. Macauley to Col. Rowan, for August 1834; 81666 - 7, In the name and behalf of the R. Catholic Irishmen in the two parishes of Guelph and Dundas, January 20, 1835.