

Rural Reconstruction

Towards a New Synthesis in Canadian History

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Recent works in the field of rural history are offering a critical challenge to the historiography of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada. The first part of this article draws on a variety of rural studies to outline some problems that arise in the growing discord between recent literature on rural Canada and traditional Canadian historiography. These anomalies are linked to an historical discourse that trivializes and obscures what is arguably the most important institution of rural society: the household. Finally, the author reviews some recent rural studies that explicitly search for ways to give the pre- and post-industrial rural household a conceptual depth that it lacks within the constraints of neoclassical and Marxist 'evolutionist' constructions of the political economy.

Les travaux récents dans le domaine de l'histoire rurale mettent en doute l'historiographie du Canada du 19^e siècle et du début du 20^e siècle. La première partie de l'article est fondée sur diverses études rurales et souligne quelques-uns des problèmes causés par l'écart qui s'agrandit sans cesse entre les ouvrages récents sur le Canada rural et l'historiographie canadienne traditionnelle. Ces anomalies sont reliées à un discours historique qui rend banale et obscure l'institution qui est probablement la plus importante de la société rurale, soit le foyer. Enfin, l'auteur examine certaines études rurales récentes dans lesquelles on cherche explicitement des moyens de donner aux foyers canadiens remontant aux périodes pré-industrielle et post-industrielle, la profondeur conceptuelle qui leur manque, compte tenu des contraintes imposées par les interprétations évolutionnistes néoclassiques et marxistes de l'économie politique.

UNTIL QUITE RECENTLY most Canadians were born, went to school, worked, married, had their children, and died in rural areas. Although the majority of British families had made their move to the city by 1850, it was still rural and not urban society that provided the social and economic

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environment for most Canadians more than half a century later.¹ While the peoples of Europe were experiencing the massive dislocations associated with industrialization from the eighteenth century onwards, more Canadian men were employed in agriculture in 1931 than in any other single occupation.² Variations in the rate and even the extent of social change have been well documented in the international literature, suggesting that the persistence of a large rural population in a 'modern' society is not unique to Canada.³ What is remarkable, however, is the reluctance of Canadian historians until the late 1970s to notice, let alone examine, the significance of Canada's rural past.

Before *Canadian Papers in Rural History* first appeared in 1978, aside from the viewpoints presented by a handful of specialized works on the history of agriculture, the society, economy, and culture of rural Canadians tended to appear as the flat, undifferentiated backdrop of either 'pioneer society' or 'market agriculture'. Either way, what happened in the countryside was most often dismissed as marginal to – or at best transitional towards – the important changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since 1978, however, more historians have been looking closely at the details of rural life in Canada, and their findings suggest that a varied, complex, and dynamic rural society was created in the later nineteenth century that differed both from the rural subsistence economy associated with the traditional peasantry of Europe or frontier America and from the wheat monoculture widely believed to typify the Canadian rural experience. Historians are providing new evidence on the 'progress' of agriculture, the nature of rural society, and the relation of both to urban industrialization.

Taken together, these works offer a critical challenge to our understanding of Canadian history, particularly of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What follows is an attempt to bring this rural challenge within the

1 In 1921, the urban/rural balance was virtually equal for the first time, providing Canada with 49.53% urban and 50.48% rural population. At this time, however, only three of the provinces (Quebec, Ontario, and New Brunswick) had a clear urban majority, leaving rural majorities in the rest. See *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*, vol. 1, Tables 18, 19, and 20, pp. 345–348.

2 In 1931, Canadian occupations were still dominated by agriculture. More men were employed in agriculture than in any other single occupational area: a full third of the adult male workforce (1.1 million of the 3.2 million 'occupied' men) and, when combined with logging and fishing, close to twice as many men as manufacturing. Fishing and logging, manufacturing jobs in vegetable, animal, and wood products, and the transportation and communication sectors provided additional or alternative employment for rural populations, placing agriculture and rural employment at the centre of the Canadian economy until well into the twentieth century. See *The Seventh Census of Canada, 1931*, vol. 7, Tables 20 and 27, pp. 30 and 38.

3 For a revision of the monolithic nature of urbanization and industrialization, see for example Ronald Aminzade, "Reinterpreting Industrialization: A Study of Nineteenth Century France" in S. Kaplan and C. Koepf, eds., *Work in France: Representations, Meanings, Organization and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); and Stuart Woolf, ed., *Domestic Strategies: Work and Family in France and Italy, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

broader context of Canadian social, economic, and cultural history. Part I outlines some anomalies that emerge from the growing discord between recent studies of rural Canada and traditional Canadian historiography. In Part II, we explore this problem by looking at the particular limitations imposed on the study of rural society by the categories we habitually use to understand the past (or, in post-structuralist parlance, by the terms of the dominant historical discourse). Finally, we focus on the works of some historians who are drawing on the insights of 'pre-industrial' rural studies to establish new frameworks of analysis, ones that offer more conceptual room for their examinations of rural populations during this period.

Part I: The Anomalies

The Problem of Urban Industrialization

In spite of the dominance of rural populations in Canada until the twentieth century, the 'progress' of society towards urban industrialization via the capitalization of agriculture has long been a mainstay of later nineteenth-century Canadian historiography. The unproblematic conceptualization of Canadian rural society during this period "as the first stages in the unfolding of the industrial future"⁴ has been articulated most coherently by Clare Pentland and Leo Johnson. Their work was based largely on evidence of massive immigration into Canadian cities after the Irish famine, the declining availability of land, and anti-settlement land policies, all of which, they argued, forced the population off the land and into factories. As a result, rapid urbanization, industrialization, and proletarianization came to define Canadian society in the latter half of the century.⁵ Within this model, the countryside appears, as Rusty Bitterman complains, "primarily static":

To discern the currents inducing transformation, one looks to the economic, social and intellectual forces arising in urban and industrial centres. Change

4 Gordon Darroch, "Class in Nineteenth-Century Central Ontario: A Re-Assessment of the Crisis and Demise of Small Producers During Early Industrialization 1861-71" in G. Kealey, ed., *Class, Gender and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology* (St. John's: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1988), p. 51.

5 Clare Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981); and Leo Johnson, "Land Policy, Population Growth, and Social Structure in the Home District, 1793-1851", *Ontario History*, 3 (1971), pp. 41-60. The privileging of the urban industrial experience is evident in the work of Bryan Palmer, "Labour in Nineteenth Century Canada" in Cherwinski and Kealey, eds., *Lectures in Canadian and Working Class History* (St. John's: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1985), pp. 51-57, and *Working Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto: Butterworth, 1983). Michael Cross and Greg Kealey, eds., entitle vol. 3 of their *Studies in Canadian Social History 1850-1900 as Industrializing Canada*. In spite of their excellent work on urban and industrial developments, these historians may be overemphasizing its significance in nineteenth-century Canada. The significance of this urban predisposition in the context of educational history is explored more fully in Chad Gaffield, "Children, Schooling and Family Reproduction in Nineteenth Century Ontario", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. LXXII, no. 2 (1991), pp. 157-191.

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in all its guises – markets included – originates here and ‘penetrates’ the countryside.⁶

Recently, however, some historians have been re-examining the soundness of this theoretical construction and undermining its conceptual foundations with empirical evidence that addresses the continuing ‘ruralness’ of the Canadian population until the 1920s. Specifically, historians have been questioning the extent, significance and uniformity of urbanization, industrialization, and proletarianization in late nineteenth-century Canada.⁷

New evidence about the progress of Canadian society is being offered in a number of important studies of Pentland’s quintessential urban proletariat, the Irish. Works by Akenson, Elliott, and Houston and Smythe have been important in revising earlier assumptions about the role of an urban Catholic proletariat growing out of Irish famine immigration in mid-century Canada. These works suggest that, contrary to popular belief, the majority of Irish immigrants were not urban, Catholic, or proletarian, but became rural dwellers working on their own land.⁸ As these historians are indicating that Canadian cities were not being glutted by Irish proletarians, others are reassessing another important ingredient of urbanization, the declining availability of farm land. While historians like Gagan, Mays, Pentland, and Johnson have argued for the revolutionary impact of decreasing land availability in nineteenth-century Ontario,⁹ Darroch and Ornstein have examined geographic and occupational mobility in the 1860–1870 period and concluded that farmers and artisans were *not* being replaced by urban proletarians. Instead, farmers provided the largest and most rapidly growing occupational field until late in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ As Gavin Wright argues in his

6 Rusty Bitterman, “The Hierarchy of the Soil: Land and Labour in a Nineteenth Century Cape Breton Community”, *Acadiensis*, vol. XVIII, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), p. 52.

7 This is most clearly argued by Alan Greer, “Wage Labour and the Transition to Capitalism: A Critique of Pentland”, *Labour/le Travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), pp. 7–22; Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein, “Ethnicity and Class: Transitions over a Decade, Ontario 1861–71” in *Historical Papers* (1984), pp. 111–137; and Darroch, “Class in Nineteenth-Century Ontario”.

8 Darroch and Ornstein, “Ethnicity and Class”; Darroch, “Class in Nineteenth-Century Ontario”; Bruce Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988); Donald Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1984); Cecil Houston and William J. Smythe, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement: Patterns, Links and Letters* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

9 David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Herbert J. Mays, “A Place to Stand: Families, Land and Permanence in Toronto Gore Township, 1820–1890”, *Historical Papers* (1980), pp. 185–211.

10 Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein, “Family and Household in Nineteenth Century Canada: Regional Patterns and Regional Economics”, *Journal of Family History*, vol. 9, no. 2 (summer 1984), pp. 158–177; Darroch and Ornstein, “Ethnicity and Class”; Darroch, “Class in Nineteenth-Century Ontario”; Gaffield, “Children, Schooling and Family Reproduction”, p. 168. See Gordon Darroch and Lee Soltow, “Inequality in Landed Wealth in Nineteenth-Century Ontario: Structure

article “American Agriculture and the Labour Market: What Happened to Proletarianization?”, although farmers indeed felt increasing pressure from rising prices, mortgages, and technological change, they were “at pains to avoid proletarianization, and most of them succeeded in the struggle”.¹¹ The dominance of agricultural occupations in Canada, like the persistence of the rural population, demands closer examination.

The work of these historians is part of a growing body of research that challenges “both a general crisis of landed small holders at mid-century, and conventional wisdom regarding the availability of good, or at least workable, land in central Ontario after mid-century”.¹² As we will see in greater detail below, local and regional studies of nineteenth-century Canada by historians such as Jack Little, Royden Loewen, and Gérard Bouchard are furthermore arguing for the *continued* importance of this numerically dominant rural population after ‘industrialization’ with compelling descriptions and analyses of their vitality. As Chad Gaffield summarizes in his insightful review of the relationship between rural life, the family economy, and education in nineteenth-century Ontario, land-based rural communities continued to define Canadian society throughout the entire nineteenth century:

Instead of widespread rural crisis and a linear, quite sudden transition to industrial capitalism, the Ontario Ryerson knew was characterized by widespread property ownership and a rural and petit-bourgeois social formation coming to grips with capitalism and industrialization in the countryside. Throughout the different articulations of this process across the various townships, land remained the basis of most family economies.¹³

The appeal of urban industrialization as the dominant model of change in North America (outside Quebec) can be explained by referring to the widely perceived failure of rural societies to follow pre-industrial European patterns,

and Access”, *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 29, no. 2 (1992), pp. 167–190, for the persistence of farmers in the latter nineteenth century and for a further critique of the crisis in landed social formation.

11 Gavin Wright, “American Agriculture and the Labour Market: What Happened to Proletarianization”, *Agricultural History*, vol. 62, no. 3 (1988), p. 192.

12 Darroch, “Class in Nineteenth-Century Ontario”, p. 61.

13 Gaffield, “Children, Schooling and Family Reproduction”, p. 170. The continuing importance of the *petite bourgeoisie* in the nineteenth century is discussed by John Benson, “Working Class Capitalism in Great Britain and Canada, 1867–1914”, *Labour/le Travailleur*, 12 (1983), pp. 145–154, and “Penny Capitalism in the Canadian Labour Movement, 1867–1914”, *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1989), pp. 88–108; and in the twentieth century by Carl Cuneo, “Has the Traditional Bourgeoisie Persisted?”, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1984), pp. 269–318. Marjorie Cohen’s insightful analysis in *Women’s Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) will be discussed below.

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perceptions of a relatively brief period of time between settlement and urban industrialization, and the clear links between rural populations and agrarian capitalism.¹⁴ Theorists in many disciplines, however, are now emphasizing the important role that ideology plays in the ways social and economic change is understood. Many are noting how the work of Western historians, anthropologists, and sociologists has been informed by an “unconscious temporal map” that imposes on the past a “directional and evolutionary cultural progression from traditional to modern”.¹⁵ Canadian rural historians, like their British, European, and American counterparts, feel particularly limited by this evolutionist perspective because it superimposes a framework of analysis that allows neither the conceptual room nor the incentive to explore the details of rural societies, particularly those of the post-industrial period, whose ‘traditional’ composition was taken for granted and seldom explored.¹⁶

14 For the American ‘subsistence vs. the market’ question that has provided the context for the more specifically pre-industrial American debate, see R. E. Mutch, “Yeoman and Merchant in Pre-Industrial America: Eighteenth Century Massachusetts as a Case Study”, *Societas*, 7 (1977), pp. 279–302; M. Merrill, “‘Cash is Good to Eat’: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States”, *Radical History Review*, 7 (1975), pp. 42–71; J. Lemon, “Early Americans and their Social Environment”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 6 (1980), pp. 115–131; W. Rothenberg, *From Market Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); C. Shamus, “How Self-Sufficient Was Early America?”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. XIII, no. 2 (Autumn 1982), pp. 247–272. This argument has not been fully articulated in the Canadian context, but when it has appeared it has tended to fall implicitly along ethnic lines, appearing as the difference between Quebec and Ontario. The Quebec rural historiography is richer and more extensive than that of anywhere else in Canada, although this article only has the space to hint at the quantity and quality of research. It is unfortunate that this literature has done so little, to date, to inform rural history in the rest of Canada.

15 Richard R. Wilk, *Household Ecology: Economic Change and Domestic Life Among the Kekchi Maya in Belize* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), pp. 4 and 3.

16 Howard Newby, *The Deferential Worker: A Study of Farm Workers in East Anglia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), esp. p. 93. The problems that this modernization paradigm presents to rural historians are explored and traced to their nineteenth-century roots in Richard Wilk’s introduction to *Household Ecology*. He argues that a growing body of research is demonstrating the fallacy of assuming a single direction of social and economic change. See also the introduction to Mick Reed and Roger Wells, eds., *Class Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside* (London: Savage, 1990) for the dissatisfaction of British rural historians about the invisibility of rural nineteenth-century society. John Schaffer, *Family and Farm: Agrarian Change and Household Organization in the Loire Valley 1500–1900* (New York: State of New York University Press, 1982), and Stuart Woolf, ed., *Domestic Strategies*, are among those raising similar issues in the European context. The limitations placed on Canadian rural history by the dominant discourse are argued forcefully by Allan Greer in “Wage Labour and the Transition to Capitalism”, Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein in “Ethnicity and Class”, Gordon Darroch in “Class in Nineteenth-Century Ontario”, and Chad Gaffield in “Children, Schooling and Family Reproduction”. The subsistence vs. the market debate in the American literature (see note 14) has provided a forum for these complaints, while Robert Swierenga explores this question *vis à vis* the ‘new’ rural history in the United States in “The New Rural History: Defining the Parameters”, *The Great Plains Quarterly*, 1 (1981), pp. 211–223.

Recent documentation of the erratic progress of urban industrialization, international critiques of 'modernization', and the new emphasis on the persistence of rural communities in Canada suggest that it is time for historians to reassess assumptions about 'normal' patterns of change.¹⁷ The need for reassessment is particularly pressing because, as we will see in more detail below, ideologies rooted in the primacy of urban industrialization have brought their own terms of reference to rural societies of the past, and through this lens many of the complexities of rural life have simply disappeared. The goal here is not to develop an approach that trivializes the impact of urban and industrial society; rather, the challenge for historians is to discover a framework of description and analysis that, unlike the paradigm of urban industrialization, neither obscures nor marginalizes dominant economic and social formations that persisted long after the first Canadians made their move to city and factory.

The Problem of the Wheat Staple

If the nineteenth century economy and society cannot be constructed simply in terms of the abandonment of rural agriculture in favour of urban industrialization, how can it be understood? When historians have focused their attention on the economic dynamics within rural Canada, the staples theory has usually provided the economic underpinning of the linear transformation by which the Canadian economy progressed from subsistence to commercial agriculture.¹⁸ In David Gagan's words, by 1850, wheat as

17 For an interesting example of what the revision of modernization might hold for political history, see S. J. R. Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers: Ontario Society and Politics, 1791–1896* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). There are a number of interesting indications that *urban* history is also being distorted by an overemphasis on the 'modernization' of social, moral and economic life assumed to accompany urbanization. See for example Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working Class History", *Labour/le Travail*, 19 (Spring 1987), pp. 22–43, and "Pigs, Cows and Boarders: Non-Wage Forms of Survival among Montreal Families, pp 1861–91", *Labour/le Travail*, 14 (Fall 1984), pp. 9–46, and, more generally, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993); Darroch and Ornstein, "Family and Household in Nineteenth Century Canada", pp. 158–177; Sheva Medjuck, "Women's Response to Economic and Social Change in Nineteenth Century Moncton Parish, 1851–1871", *Atlantis*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 7–21; and Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). William Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture: The Textile Trade in French Society 1750–1900* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), makes a similar argument in the European context.

18 The terms Quebec and Ontario are used to apply to Lower Canada or Canada East and Upper Canada or Canada West respectively. The staples theory was first articulated by H. A. Innis in *The Fur Trade in Canada* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930) and *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940). For a review of the staples theory as it pertains to the agricultural crisis in Lower Canada, see T. J. LeGoff, "The Agricultural Crisis in Lower Canada, 1802–12" in D. McCalla, ed., *Perspectives on Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1987), pp. 10–36; and Marvin McNinn, "A Reconsideration of the State of Agriculture in Lower Canada in the First Half of the Nineteenth

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'the most successful staple product in Canadian history' had created a class of independent farmers whose productive capacity and prosperity fuelled the demand for goods and services which in turn generated the local economic activity necessary to sustain a powerful, increasingly diversified urban industrial economy.¹⁹

The Ontario experience, based on well-developed markets resulting from the wheat staple, has defined the norm, while the French-Canadian and Maritime experiences, characterized by subsistence agriculture and off-farm work, have constituted deviation from it.²⁰

Over the past 20 years, however, historians have argued that a narrow focus on declining wheat exports from Quebec seigneuries after 1802 has obscured our view of other economic indicators of importance in that province. Debates about the health of Quebec agriculture are still raging, but a consensus is growing that the nineteenth-century Quebec economy was characterized not by a 'failed' staples trade in wheat relative to Ontario, but by the growth of a varied and vigorous *local* market economy throughout the period. Historians are now scrambling to uncover new ways of calculating this local market activity in order to demonstrate the 'modernizing' trend manifested in the commercialization of agriculture; others are trying to reconstruct Quebec's failure to modernize 'normally' as a badge of its cultural distinction.²¹ Whichever side of this debate Quebec historians take,

Century" in D. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, 3 (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1984), pp. 9-49.

19 D. Gagan, "Class and Society in Victorian English Canada: An Historiographical Assessment", *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1989), p. 76.

20 See Fernand Ouellet, *Lower Canada, 1791-1840: Social Change and Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980) and *Economy, Class and Nation in Quebec: Interpretive Essays* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1991). Catharine Desbarats' "Agriculture within the Seigneurial Regime of Eighteenth Century Canada: Some Thoughts on the Recent Literature", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. LXXIII, no. 1 (1992), pp. 1-29, provides a good overview of the problems with, and necessity of, finding out the extent of market activity in pre-industrial Quebec. In the same issue, Ronald Rudin in "Revisionism and the Search for a Normal Society: A Critique of Recent Quebec Historical Writing", pp. 30-61, accepts the modernization paradigm for English Canada, but questions its applicability to Quebec's distinctive culture and economy.

21 For his most recent review of non-agricultural activity and underdevelopment in the pre-industrial period, see Fernand Ouellet's review essay, "Développement et sous-développement en milieu colonial pré-industriel", *Acadiensis* (Autumn 1992), pp. 146-168. See also Serge Courville, "Villages and Agriculture in the Seigneuries of Lower Canada: Conditions of a Comprehensive Study of Rural Quebec in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century" in Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, V (1986), pp. 121-146; and John McCallum in *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario Until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), whose work posited a 'modified staples' approach combining local conditions with the staples economy, an argument taken up in the context of the Maritimes by Anthony Winson in "The Uneven Development of Canadian Agriculture: Farming in the Maritimes and in Ontario", *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1985), pp. 411-438. Julian Gwynn, "A Little Province Like

the historical question about the later nineteenth century tends to remain the same: to what extent was Quebec “a ‘normal’ society whose past could largely be understood in the context of such processes as urbanization and industrialization that were common to most of the Western world”?²² The inevitability of this normalizing imperative and the nature of the ‘modernizing’ forces that comprise it have continued to be widely accepted in the Quebec, Maritime, and Ontario contexts.

The past few years, however, have witnessed not only a revision of the ‘failure’ of Quebec commercial agriculture, but some considerable challenges to the norm contained in the ‘success’ of the Ontario staples market for wheat. In his seminal 1978 article, Douglas McCalla examined the failure of Ontario’s economic development to correlate with high levels of wheat exports and was among the first to provide evidence instead that local markets for a variety of agricultural products fuelled the economy of early nineteenth-century Ontario. He suggested that credit, not subsistence agriculture, provided the economic underpinnings of the society.²³ The importance of local and North American markets for wheat, other field crops, and livestock is supported by detailed research in the 1860–1897 period by Marvin McNnis.²⁴ A consensus is growing that “focusing on staples alone yields an oversimplified and fundamentally inaccurate view of the process of economic development in Upper Canada”.²⁵

Although the staples theory has provided the framework of analysis of the entire nineteenth-century economy and society for many years (particularly regarding the economic and cultural differences between Ontario and the rest of Canada), historians have witnessed the shift in emphasis from staples

This: The Economy of Nova Scotia under Stress, 1812–1853” in Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, VI (1988), pp. 192–225, also discusses the fluctuations in market activity and industrial development in international terms. See McNnis, “A Reconsideration of the State of Agriculture”, for a sustained critique of the agricultural crisis.

22 Rudin, “Revisionism”, p. 30.

23 D. McCalla, “Rural Credit and Rural Development in Upper Canada, 1790–1850” in Roger Hall *et al.*, eds., *Patterns of the Past: Interpreting Ontario’s History* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988), and “The Wheat Staple and Upper Canadian Development”, *Historical Papers* (1978), pp. 34–46.

24 Marvin McNnis, “The Changing Structure of Canadian Agriculture 1867–1897” in Akenson, ed. *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, VIII (1992), pp. 85–90.

25 Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784–1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 5. See also McCalla’s essay on the importance of credit and local exchange networks, “The Internal Economy of Upper Canada: New Evidence of Agricultural Marketing Before 1850”, *Agricultural History*, vol. 59, no. 3 (July 1985), pp. 397–416. Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, *Rural Life in Nineteenth Century Quebec*, CHA Booklet no. 47 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1989), argue for the dynamic and internally generated economy of mid-nineteenth-century Quebec. Marjorie Cohen in *Women’s Work* argues that too much emphasis has been placed on market activity at the expense of non-market productive relations within the family. Desbarats, “Agriculture within the Siegneurial Regime”, as noted above, provides a good overview of the French Canadian situation regarding market activity.

production to local markets in the first half of the century with surprising equanimity. Revision of the staples theory has failed to stimulate any new conceptualizations of the 'norm' of the Canadian rural economy.²⁶ Here, as everywhere in rural Canadian history, the problem of sources has made research into and generalizations about rural society of the later nineteenth century difficult. Recent studies suggest, however, that theories placing local markets at the centre of economic activity in Canada are as vulnerable to attack as the deposed wheat staple theories. Specifically, theories positing the predominance of local market activity fail to account for either the inconclusive role of 'the market' in agriculture or that of farming in rural life.

The Problem of Commercial Agriculture

The failure of farming to appear as a typical case of capitalist entrepreneurial activity has commonly been glossed over by the small minority of historians studying the rural 'post-industrial' period.²⁷ While historians of Canada have typically explained the nineteenth-century rural economy in terms of the linear increases in commercial farming, they are now drawing attention to the important problems of constructing the family farm as a simple business endeavour. Instead, evidence is growing that both the accumulation of capital and the wage relationship in agriculture were "generally subordinate to and embedded in a resolutely pre-capitalist social formation in which the independent family household was central".²⁸

26 For a discussion of the importance of the staples theory to Canadian history see Séguin and Courville, *Rural Life*; and McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings*. Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), is one of the few historians to systematically challenge the orthodoxy by suggesting that a successful farmer was not necessarily defined as one who participates most profitably in the market.

27 David Breen's ranching study *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, 1874-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), Paul Voisey's community study *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), and Sarah Carter's *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) are among the important contributions to our understanding of Western Canada. Their work does little, however, to question the view that the norm of rural life was defined by agribusiness in wheat or beef. Much more work emphasizing the social and kinship structures of the rural Canadian West, such as Lyle Dick's *Farmers 'Making Good': The Development of Abernathy District, Saskatchewan, 1880-1929* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks, Environment Canada, 1989) and Royden Loewen's *Family Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), needs to be done. Perhaps these works will contribute to the type of critical revisionism in Western Canada, stressing the interaction of market and non-market factors and the cultural politics of settlement, that is evident in the American West. For an invigorating re-evaluation of the West in the United States, see for example William Cronan, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, eds., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (New York: Norton, 1992); and Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

28 Greer, "A Critique of Pentland", p. 20. See also Greer's *Peasant Lord and Merchant*, which ques-

Where we expect to see the agrarian capitalist pushing himself forward in a drive towards maximization of profits, we see instead strong indications of the continued importance of the non-waged, non-profit family work unit within a context that remained rooted in a 'modest sufficiency' on the land.

Marvin McNinnis, for example, looks at a sample of over 1,000 farms in Ontario, estimating net farm production and household consumption to calculate the extent of marketable surpluses in 1860. His complex calculations suggest that while "Ontario farms were ... well beyond what can be described as essentially self-sufficient or subsistence agriculture ... the average marketable surplus was not very large".²⁹ He estimates that only 16 per cent of farms were "substantially commercial".³⁰ McNinnis concludes that, while surplus production was an aspect of nineteenth-century agriculture, most farms did not produce very much over subsistence requirements, indicating that "the distinction between self-sufficiency and commercialization is not very important".³¹ In a similar vein, the work of Bouchard and Thibeault on late nineteenth-century Quebec examines the 40- or 50-year gap between economic opportunities in intensive dairy farming and the decision of farmers to take advantage of them.³² Mary Gregson argues that, even when commercialization and specialization can be found at the national or regional level, they may have had little bearing on the nature of farm life. Her study of American midwestern agricultural change in the late nineteenth century indicates that "the trend toward specialization that seems obvious at the macro (regional) level disappears at the micro [farm] level".³³ Farmers' response to agricultural specialization was, she maintains, diversification.

The difficulties of identifying commercial farming with other capitalist enterprises are clearly expressed in the work of Attack and Bateman. Their massive study of the post-1850 period, *To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North*, examines over 12,000 farms in the American north,

tions the uniformity and progression of capitalist forms of economic behaviours on rural populations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See below for a further discussion of the economy of the family farm.

29 Marvin McNinnis, "Marketable Surpluses in Ontario Farming, 1860" in McCalla, ed., *Perspectives on Canadian Economic History*, p. 44. Rusty Bitterman, Graem Wynn, and Robert McKinnon examine the questions of occupational plurality, wage labour, commercial farming, and subsistence agriculture in their detailed study of two Nova Scotia communities, "Of Inequality and Interdependence in the Nova Scotia Countryside, 1850-1870", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. LXXIV, no. 1 (March 1993).

30 McNinnis, "Marketable Surpluses in Ontario Farming", p. 45.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

32 Régis Thibeault, Normand Perron, and Lise St-George, "Naissance et évolution de l'industrie laitière dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent : le projet VALIN", Chicoutimi, SOREP, 1991; and Gérard Bouchard, "Sur un démarrage raté : industrie laitière et co-intégration au Saguenay, 1880-1940", *Recherches sociographiques*, vol. 45, no. 1 (1991), pp. 73-100.

33 Mary Eschelbach Gregson, "Specialization in Late Nineteenth Century Midwestern Agriculture: Missouri as a Test Case", *Agricultural History*, vol. 67, no. 1 (Winter 1993), p. 17.

using census data to examine the irregularity and variability of the transition from subsistence frontier farming to commercial agriculture. Market activity seems to have increased significantly after 1850, and the authors argue that local markets for products were probably central in determining local production, but they note the gradual and erratic nature of changes in the rural economy: "Although increasingly a market-oriented enterprise, the family farm still possessed non-economic attributes that shaped the economic choices in ways not characteristic of manufacturing, transport, or other economic activities."³⁴

Within this loosely defined 'modernization' model, the authors polarize market and subsistence, business and affection, money and sentiment, economic reality and the rural family-centred farm. Attempts to increase market activity are perceived as rational responses to "the hard facts of economic security and of gaining outside monetary income", and subsistence and non-market activity are non-rational attempts to maintain a particular way of life in "a pleasant world, one combining the more poetical aspects of rustic living, such as individualism and independence".³⁵ The authors demonstrate that families could have made better investments than farming and conclude that farmers "wanted it both ways. They desired pastoral serenity, independent individualism and psychic rewards, as well as cash flow."³⁶ Atack and Bateman conclude that during the mid-nineteenth century, "What had been a way of life increasingly took on the characteristics of a business, but the transition was incomplete."³⁷

As Betty Hobb Pruitt has argued in the pre-industrial American context, "[T]raditionally sharp distinctions between subsistence and commercial agriculture can be set aside as inapplicable to an agrarian economy in which production for home consumption and production for sale or exchange were complementary, not mutually exclusive objectives."³⁸ In light of new re-

34 Atack and Bateman, *To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), p. 11.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 273. The 'traditional' and 'modern' behaviour patterns polarized by Atack and Bateman have received a lot of attention in the fields of anthropology and sociology. See A. Macfarlane's introduction to *Marriage and Love in England 1300-1500* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell's, 1986) and the introduction in Richard Wilk, *Household Ecology*, for a review. Discussions of the changing nature of work and culture within this framework are absorbing the interest of historians such as, for example, E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Pantheon, 1963) and *Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1991), and William Reddy in *Money and Liberty* and *The Rise of Market Culture*. Atack and Bateman are not concerned with the broader debate, but its significance is briefly touched on below.

36 Atack and Bateman, *To Their Own Soil*, p. 271.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

38 Betty Hobb Pruitt, "Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy of Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3 (July 1984), p. 338. For a view of the complexity of the rural economy in the Quebec context, see Christian Dessureault, "L'égalitarisme paysan dans l'ancienne société rurale de la vallée du Saint-Laurent : éléments pour une réin-

search on the rural economy, the ability of such categories as 'traditional', 'modern', 'market-oriented', or 'subsistence-based' to describe or explain the complex social and economic systems emerging from the historical record is indeed being sorely tested: if farmers do not progress towards commercial farming at a uniform rate, then what determines their progress? Are there substantial differences between subsistence and market production? If not, then what is the relation of the rural economy to the increasingly urban and industrial world? If Canadian farmers were being affected by factors other than the market and making decisions accordingly, what were those factors, and how can we measure their influence? Can they be used to explain the great variety and variability in farm practices that are being uncovered? If so, how? Another conceptual approach that can address these problems is needed.

The Myth of the Full-Time Farmer

While studies are reinterpreting the significance of the wheat staple to the Canadian economy and casting doubt on "Victorian Canada's favourite object of national pride, the 'agrarian capitalist'",³⁹ rural historians are revealing other ways in which the "model of the transition to capitalist agriculture hitherto used by historians does not always reflect rural realities".⁴⁰ Studies are showing that throughout the entire nineteenth century farmers, although obtaining some of their living from the land, were not exclusively dependent on farming for their economic support. Evidence concerning the pre-1870 period abounds. MacKinnon and Wynn, for example, examine the great regional variations in "size, productivity, market orientation and crop and livestock mix" in the Maritimes in the later nineteenth century.⁴¹ Not only was there variation in the extent of commercial farming, but the role of agriculture in rural life was also flexible: while some families were entirely supported by agriculture, households were as likely to be dependent on a combination of activities, particularly fishing and small-scale agriculture or lumbering and mixed agri-forestry. They suggest that "the primary purpose of most farms was to raise a family", but accord no theoretical importance to this claim.⁴²

terprétation", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1987), pp. 373-408. Pruitt and Dessureault both emphasize the importance of labour services, not just sales of produce, in this household economy.

39 Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers*, p. 77.

40 Allistair Orr, "Farm Servants and Farm Labour in the Forth Valley" in D. M. Devine, ed., *Farm Servants and Labour in Lowland Scotland, 1770-1914* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishing, 1984), p. 48.

41 MacKinnon and Wynn, "Nova Scotian Agriculture in the Golden Age: A New Look" in Douglas Day, ed., *Geographical Perspectives on the Maritime Provinces* (Halifax: St. Mary's University Press, 1988), p. 59.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Rusty Bitterman argues that Cape Breton was characterized by economic disparities that forced many families to take up a variety of economic strategies, including wage labour, to survive on their farms. Poorer 'backlanders' "perpetually operated under the necessity of dual commitments; at issue was the relative mix of self-employment and wage work."⁴³ In another article, he documents the considerable reliance of farmers on wage labour throughout Nova Scotia in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Inwood and Roelens contend in their study of Leeds County in Ontario that the nature and role of women's productive work in the household played an essential role in the family economy. They demonstrate both that weaving was women's work and that families in the later nineteenth century had complex and varied strategies to ensure their survival.⁴⁵ Focusing on the latter part of the century, Larry McCann argues that traditional seasonal employment in the Maritimes continued after immigrants arrived in Canada, leading to seasonal urban work and a permanent rural residence. He demonstrates that "the culture of work was based on multiple work opportunities or occupational pluralism".⁴⁶ Thomas W. Acheson describes the economic versatility of the rural population in two New Brunswick mid-nineteenth-century communities, arguing forcefully that a complex economy existed based on farm and forest, in which "there was no single agriculture or simple definition of farmer".⁴⁷

As we will see in greater detail below, numerous studies documenting the central role of the forests in Canada's agricultural history also support the economic versatility of rural populations. Occupational plurality, formerly relegated to the 'marginal' farming areas or overlooked to the extent that it involved women's work, is emerging as a defining characteristic of rural life throughout the nineteenth century. It can no longer be construed as a simple result or harbinger of urban industrialization. Interpretive and analytical models need to be adjusted to accommodate the distinctive nature of rural society in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, since "the

43 Bitterman, "The Hierarchy of the Soil", p. 43. The complexity of social and economic relations even within single-resource fishing communities is explored in the preliminary work of Robert Sweeney. See "Research Note: Movement, Options and Costs: Indexes as Historical Evidence, a Newfoundland Example", *Acadiensis*, vol. XXII, no. 1 (Autumn 1992), pp. 111-121.

44 Rusty Bitterman, "Farm Households and Wage Labour in the Northeastern Maritimes in the Early 19th Century", *Labour/le Travail*, 31 (Spring 1993), pp. 13-45, and "Middle River: The Social Structure of Agriculture in a 19th Century Cape Breton Community" (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1987).

45 Inwood and Roelens, "Labouring at the Loom: A Case Study of Rural Manufacturing in Leeds County, Ontario, 1870" in Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, VII (1989), p. 222.

46 L. D. McCann, "Living a Double Life: Town and Country in the Industrialization of the Maritimes" in Day, ed., *Geographical Perspectives*, p. 94.

47 T. W. Acheson, "New Brunswick Agriculture at the End of the Colonial Era" in Kris Inwood, ed., *Farm, Factory and Fortune: New Studies in the Economic History of the Maritime Provinces* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1993), pp. 37-60.

simple distinction between 'self-sufficient' and 'market-oriented' fails to do justice to the varying strategies of production and exchange followed by household producers during the period".⁴⁸ Rather than continuing to discuss these characteristics as anomalies in an otherwise coherent framework of nineteenth-century history, perhaps it is time to find a way of reconciling these elements – the problematic role of commercial agriculture, the importance of occupational plurality, the persistence of rural society – with our conceptualization of what happened, and what they meant in Canadian history.

Part II: The Problem Defined

In a thoughtful review of the 'subsistence vs. the market' debate and its relevance in the later nineteenth-century American context, Allan Kulikoff is perturbed by evidence that the rural economy was simultaneously different from one characterized by wage labour, regular paid employment, single occupations, exclusively male work, individualism, and self-interest on the one hand, and from the mutuality and self-sufficiency of the family-based peasant or frontier economy on the other. After reviewing the polarized terms of the debate, he argues for a "judicial synthesis"⁴⁹ of the qualities defining these two different economies and for the recognition of people who were 'transitional' between subsistence farmers and entrepreneurs: "[W]hat was exceptional about the rural United States was not the development of capitalism, but the formation of a transitional class of yeomen living in a capitalist world, but not of it."⁵⁰ Rural historians have good reason to applaud Kulikoff for employing the 'missing term' that tries to capture the distinctive nature of nineteenth-century farmers, whose way of life differed both from the 'traditional' peasantry and the 'modern' agrarian capitalist; his identification of a class of "petty producers who grew much of their own food, and participated in commercial markets"⁵¹ provides important advances over works that insist on the polarized nature of the two economies.

In spite of these advantages, there are two problems with Kulikoff's conceptualization of rural life. The term 'yeoman' is itself difficult because of its association with a particular class of British farmers whose conditions, as Kulikoff notes, were quite different from those of nineteenth-century

48 Mick Reed, "'Gnawing it Out': A New Look at Economic Relations in Nineteenth Century Rural England", *Rural History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1990), p. 84. This occupational plurality is also quite clear in the later years covered in Paul Voisey's *Vulcan*, but he accords off-farm work significance only as an indicator that farmers were in trouble with their cash flow.

49 Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Early America", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 46 (1989), p. 129.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

American farmers.⁵² His definition, with its emphasis on productive and not just exchange relations, is important, but his situation of these 'yeomen' on a continuum between 'traditional' and 'modern' is problematic. Explaining nineteenth-century farm life as 'transitional' between two states which it is not makes as much sense as explaining the behaviours and nuances of adulthood exclusively within the parameters set by infancy and old age: certainly it is possible to construct such a portrayal, but why would anyone want to? Why not try to discover the behaviours, beliefs, customs, goals, and institutions that characterize the condition or state one is examining?

The explanatory value of 'transitional' is limited because the terms of analysis remain outside the sphere of discussion. As Colin Duncan complains, this is in part because rural society is "basically assumed to be fundamentally *for something else*, for some other supposedly self-evident whole"⁵³ – i.e. urban industrial society – from which rural society gets its significance and towards which it is moving. The problem is deeper than this, however: not only is rural society seen as marginal to the nineteenth century, but key aspects of the political economy upon which rural society was based are themselves marginalized within the parameters of both neoclassical and Marxist economic theory. This marginalization is most clearly manifested in historians' response to the family farm. While almost universally placed at the front and centre of Canadian rural history in the nineteenth century, the family farm is an economic, political, and cultural institution essentially devoid of theoretical content. Historians continue to pay lip-service to the institution, but pay scant attention to either the form of labour or the type of society characterized by non-wage workers organized on the basis of kinship within a capitalist economic system.⁵⁴ Instead,

52 *Ibid.*, p. 141. This is mainly because the traditional yeoman hired waged labourers. Mick Reed argues for the use of the term 'peasant', in the British context, because rural British life was more characterized by 'peasant' farmers than yeomen. Reed, in "Nineteenth-Century Rural England: A Case for Peasant Studies?", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (October 1986), pp. 79–99, and A. P. Donajkowski, "Twentieth Century Rural England: A Case for Peasant Studies?", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3 (April 1989), pp. 425–442, have a similar problem with the term 'peasant'. While the work of Shanin in *Defining Peasants: Essays Concerning Rural Societies* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell's, 1990) suggests that the term is technically appropriate, the distinctive form of nineteenth-century rural life is lost in its association with earlier forms. The same applies to the term 'yeoman'.

53 Colin Duncan, "Agriculture and the Industrial Teleology in Modern English History: An Essay in Historiographic Provocation and Sociological Revision" in Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, VII (1989), p. 31.

54 While Canadian historians have found little to debate in the economic nature of the farm enterprise in the 'post-industrial' period, this subject has been of considerable interest to economists, anthropologists, and sociologists. Harriett Freidmann, for example, has provided a Marxist analysis of the family farm in twentieth-century Canada. She outlines how the structures of the capitalist system are modified by the problematic physical environment of capitalist agriculture in the northern reaches of the continent and by the social factors in production of the family farm. Her argument that the family farm constitutes a special type of capitalist enterprise has been vigorously opposed

the theoretical importance of the household economy tends to be reduced to the status of vestigial remains, wherein 'traditional' and 'family based' become emblematic of a backward-looking sentimentality, which largely serves to explain (as Atack and Bateman clearly demonstrate) those areas of rural society that cannot be reconciled with the market economy.

The propensity of historians to allocate the broadly-defined household economy and the subsistence aspects of the family farm to a realm outside the economy – to be examined within the conceptual framework provided by a separate sub-discipline (the history of the family), another approach (cultural studies), or another discipline entirely (anthropology) – provides an excellent opportunity for observing the gendered construction of the neoclassical economic discourse.⁵⁵ The privileging of market relations in economic analysis, like the division of society into public and private on the basis of participation in the market economy, is the result of an historically specific and politically derived set of definitions about 'what happened':

One prominent suspicion within contemporary feminism is that there is something ideological and harmful to women about the ways modern western culture views the relation of family, state and economy – that the divisions

by Goodman and Redcliffe, who argue that forms of economic activity in capitalist societies can only be peripheral or transitional to capitalism. See Harriet Freidmann, "World Market, State and Family Farm: Social Bases of Household Production in the Era of Waged Labour", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 20 (1978), pp. 545–586; Goodman and Redcliffe, "Capitalism, Petty Commodity Production and the Farm Enterprise", *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. XXV, nos. 3–4 (1985), pp. 231–247; and Freidmann's reply in "Patriarchy and Property", *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. XXVI, no. 2 (1986), pp. 187–193. These issues are complex and impossible to address in detail here. The present argument, however, sidesteps this debate to some extent by suggesting that the terms of both Marxist and neoclassical economic theory limit an understanding of rural society precisely because the household (like the work of women and children within it) is marginalized within the terms of a discourse that identifies economic activity with the accumulation of capital. This is why we have so little theoretical analysis of the economy and politics of family life. As Richard Wilk argues, Marxist explanations leave "forms of social structure and economic extraction that are outside the modern capitalist system in limbo, and denies that they have anything to tell us about the world today" (*Household Ecology*, p. 24). Once the *a priori* assumptions of neoclassical and Marxist interpretations are suspended, the activities of farm families take on a new complexity in the economic and social processes of history.

55 Unfortunately, the history of the family, after making impressive conceptual and empirical contributions to our understanding of the past, has fallen into a theoretical impasse since the 1980s, probably because of the fundamental problems arising from the limitation of its discursive framework within the flawed public/private dichotomy. As Tamara Hareven noted in her impressive review of the international literature in the field, "When the historical study of the family first emerged it drew its vitality and motivation from the need to link discrete family patterns to the community and through the larger processes of social change. ... Doing justice to this goal ... continues to be a major challenge. ... The question about when and how change takes place needs to be asked again." Tamara Hareven, "The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change", *American Historical Review*, 96 (February 1991), p. 124.

between these spheres are not as rigid as we are led to believe, and that conceiving them in such a manner obscures the realities of women's lives.⁵⁶

Within this framework, the home is either a pre-economic unit or non-economic unit, or (for those more to the political left) the household becomes important in the economy only to the extent that it contributes to the reproduction of labourers or the accumulation of capital. As a result,

scholars have paid scant attention to the family, the private, the home, the place to which women have been conceptually relegated. The world of production and the state have been systematically privileged as central to historical understanding. Many social scientists as well as historians have inherited this 'double view' of the social order, and consign women to the home and family, sites which are accorded no conceptual or analytic importance in social theories. Women are defined by their sexuality, while men remain gender neutral and defined by class.⁵⁷

The feminist theorists who are deconstructing the gendered terms of economic and political discourse are not, however, the only ones critical of its assumptions, for their work is closely allied to a growing *problématique* in the history of Western civilization. As Giovanni Levi explains, by the late 1970s, "Forecasts of social behaviour were proving to be demonstrably erroneous and this failure of existing systems and paradigms required not so much the construction of a new general social theory as a complete revision of existing tools of research."⁵⁸ The diversity and complexity revealed by 'microhistory' has helped fragment models of uniform and one-directional change. At the same time, the terms of neoclassical economic analysis, drawn from wage labour, market activity, and capital accumulation, provide too narrow a framework of social, political, and cultural analysis, forcing European and North American historians to re-examine "the adequacy of purely 'economic' explanations of processes of economic change".⁵⁹

56 Linda Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 11. For a full discussion of this problem, see Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); and Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

57 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1750-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 29. On the failure of Marxism to account for the family's role in the class struggle and in the culture of the working class, Jane Humphries's 1977 article is still one of the best. See Jane Humphries, "Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working Class Family", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1 (1977), pp. 241-258.

58 Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory" in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1991), p. 94. This article outlines the challenge that local history is offering to traditional historiography.

59 Woolf, *Family Strategies*, p. 4. Stuart Woolf uses the introduction of this book to review the inadequacies of the neoclassical economic discourse and to examine directions of change.

As William Reddy argues, “the evidence is in fact overwhelming that non-market-factors – family survival, political and patriarchal authority, control over the workplace, the desire for independence – continued to play a role” in the economy, culture, and society of the industrializing world until at least the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁰

The marginalization of women and the family in our historiography shares a common bond with the marginalization of rural history. The silence regarding the economic, political, and cultural behaviour of each of these groups can be largely attributed to their failure to appear clearly or consistently on the screen of the market economy. While the history of Western society has suffered from the exclusion of many types of experience from the historical discourse, the distortions created by the household’s marginalization are nowhere as obvious as in the case of rural history. While evidence grows that the rural economy continued to be closely connected to, if not rooted in, the family economy, the social relations that create the specifics of household family production continue to be eclipsed by market factors within the framework of neoclassical economic and political theory. By the same process, the ‘non-productive’ aspects of the household economy disappear altogether.

Given the confused thinking about the family as an economic unit, the theoretical invisibility of subsistence agriculture, and rigid notions about the nature of capitalist enterprises, it is not surprising that historians in Canada are having difficulty coming to terms with the distinctive rural society and economy emerging from the recent literature. The question remains: how can we incorporate what may be the most important economic, social, and cultural institution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – the family – into a critical analysis of change in Canadian history?

Part III: Towards a New Perspective

The Family Strategies Approach

Although the mid-nineteenth-century economy may seem to Attack and Bateman as a transitional world where opposing forces lived side by side, studies of mobility, inheritance, and immigration provide strong evidence that North Americans did not perceive their life choices as being polarized between the rational self-interest offered by the commercial economy and the affective values of mutuality and psychic rewards contained within the family. Instead, there is considerable evidence that nineteenth-century

60 Reddy, *Money and Liberty*, pp. 10–11. Richard Wilk in *Household Ecology* notes variables of “household mobility, the diversity of household economic roles, the stratification of household by wealth and social position, and the degree of self-subsistence provided by the household” and argues that “we really need to look at more evidence before we can say that these variables are all changing in some uniform and directional way during incorporation into a capitalist system” (p. 27). His argument is that change occurs as a result of historically and geographically specific local factors that historians and anthropologists need to address through local studies.

families were basing their decisions on a perception of the coherent imperatives of the family economy, where divisions between affect and practicality were blurred.⁶¹ In short, while market activity waxed and waned throughout the century, “the goal of rural couples was clearly to establish most of the children on the land as farmers, and to manage accordingly to acquire sufficient land”.⁶² Occupational plurality was but one of the strategies facilitating this end. Although there are many debates within studies of inheritance, immigration, and mobility, the premise that the household economy – and not the market-driven rational self interest of the individual – was the basis of the economy is seldom seriously questioned.⁶³

The importance of the family in patterns of migration is being reassessed in the light of recent work documenting the extent of previously invisible chain migrations in particular regions in Canada.⁶⁴ The view that migra-

61 While the imperatives of the family economy may have been coherent, this is not to suggest that they were egalitarian. The difficulties that the division between practicality and sentiment has given historians are presented by Hans Medick and David Sabeau, “Interest and Emotion in Family and Kinship Studies: A Critique of Social History and Anthropology” in Medick and Sabeau, eds., *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 9–27. Woolf, as noted above in *Family Strategies*, addresses the problematic implications of this division, particularly for economic historians. Nancy Folbre argues that both sides of this paradigmatic construction of the neoclassical economy need investigation: “It seems ... that the invisible hand swept the moral economy into the home, where an imaginary world of perfect altruism could counterbalance the imaginary world of perfect self-interest in the market. The bulk of economic theory either takes altruism as a given or rules it out of order. Neither of these alternatives is very convincing, and both legitimate the social institutions that structure economic life within the family and without. They also seriously handicap the development of any general theory of co-operation and conflict.” Nancy Folbre, “Hearts and Spades: Paradigms of Household Economics”, *World Development*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1986), pp. 252–253.

62 Gaffield, “Children, Schooling and Family Reproduction”, p. 61. This is the view being forwarded most clearly in the work of Gérard Bouchard and the SOREP group mentioned below. This emphasis on the household is not intended to suggest that the family was the sole concern of rural dwellers. As Hans Medick, “Plebeian Culture in the Transition to Capitalism” in R. Samuel and G. Stedman Jones, eds., *Culture, Ideology and Politics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), and Gerald Sider, “Christmas Mummery and the New Year in Outport Newfoundland”, *Past and Present*, 71 (May 1976), pp. 102–125, argue, community, culture, and neighbourhoods were central and interrelated aspects of family-based economies.

63 The assumptions underlying historians’ dependence on the theory of family strategies are reviewed in the old but very useful essay by Easterlin, “Farms and Farm Families in Old and New Areas: The Northern United States in 1860” in T. Hareven and M. Vinovskis, eds., *Family and Population in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Randy William Widdis provides a persuasive argument for developing a longitudinal perspective in demographic analyses in “Generations, Mobility and Persistence: A View from the Genealogies”, *Histoire sociale – Social History*, vol. XXV, no. 49 (May 1992), pp. 125–150, while Ian MacPherson and John Herd Thompson argue that even the adoption of business methods by Prairie farmers in the twentieth century constituted another household strategy for maintaining families on the land. MacPherson and Thompson, “The Business of Agriculture: Prairie Farmers and the Adoption of Business Methods, 1880–1950” in P. Baskerville, ed., *Canadian Papers in Urban History*, vol. 1 (Victoria: Public History Group, 1989), pp. 245–269.

64 Elliott’s *Irish Migrants in the Canadas* provides one of the best documented examples of chain mi-

tions were the outcome of 'progressive' individuals taking advantage of the new economic opportunities is also being revised. As J. M. Bumsted observes about emigration of Highland Scots to Canada, the migrating Highlander recognized full well that "only by departing his native land could he hope to maintain his traditional way of life".⁶⁵ The motivation of immigrants needs to be re-examined in a familial context:

Family strategies to insure sufficient labour to work the land and to pass it on to the next generation influenced every aspect of the peasant family, from its size, composition, residential patterns and life cycle to its internal relationships and its external links to the wider world. For many peasants it was the final realization that this traditional symbiosis was no longer viable in the changing homeland that led to emigration.⁶⁶

Once families arrived in North America, they developed certain common land and inheritance strategies by which means their children could be settled and remain for generations on productive farm land.⁶⁷ The concern with providing for offspring by the transmission of land during the farmer's life, or after his or her death, figures largely in explanations of the economic behaviour of families throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Works by Har- even, Bouchard, and Brookes demonstrate that family 'life course' patterns found expression in decisions about when to move, while studies by Kathleen Conzen, Robert Ostergen, Royden Loewen, and R. Bruno Ramirez suggest that family considerations were central in determining both where

gration, while R. Ommer's "Highland Scots Migration to Southwestern Newfoundland: A Study of Kinship" in J. Mannion, ed., *The Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography* (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977), Cecil Houston and William Smyth's *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement*, and M. Molloy's "No Inclination to Mix with Strangers: Marriage Patterns among the Highland Scots Migrants to Cape Breton and New Zealand 1800–1916", *Journal of Family History*, 11 (1985), pp. 221–243, provide massive additional support to the important role of the family unit in populating this continent.

65 J. M. Bumsted, *The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770–1815* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1982), p. xvi.

66 K. Conzen, "Peasant Pioneers: Generational Succession Among German Farmers in Frontier Minnesota" in S. Hahn and J. Prude, eds., *The Countryside in an Age of Capitalist Transformation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 259.

67 Mays, "A Place to Stand"; Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers*; J. Waters, "Family, Inheritance and Migration in Colonial New England: The Evidence from Guildford Connecticut", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 39 (1982), pp. 64–86; J. W. Adams and A. B. Kasakoff, "Migration and the Family in Colonial New England: The View from the Genealogies", *Journal of Family History*, 9 (1984), pp. 24–42; C. Heller and F. Moore, "Continuity in Rural Land Ownership: Kalamazoo County, Michigan, 1830–1861", *Michigan History*, 56 (1972), pp. 233–246; M. Friedberger, "The Family Farm and the Inheritance Process: Evidence from the Corn Belt, 1870–1950", *Agricultural History*, 57 (1983), pp. 1–13.

68 See for example Gordon Darroch, "Migrants in the Nineteenth Century: Fugitives or Families in Motion?", *Journal of Family History*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Fall 1981), pp. 257–277.

people moved, and the varied processes of acculturation in North America.⁶⁹ To argue for the importance of family strategies in patterns of behaviour does not preclude recognition of rational responses to economic stimuli; rather, looking at “the logic of work organized around family life and structure” extends economic analyses into forms of social organization that we do not commonly regard as economic.⁷⁰

The concept of family strategies is still imperfectly realized and theorized in the historical literature. Discussions about the power dynamics contained under the banner of ‘the family’ need to be developed, and the complexity of factors and perceptions that constitute ‘strategic’ activities need more attention. What this concept *does* provide, however, is an alternative to reducing all behaviour to the mechanistic ‘individual calculus of self-interest’ that has tended to dominate analyses of social and economic change. It also gives us a broader definition of ‘significant’ behaviours in the past. If “the family unit remained the basis of social organization”⁷¹ throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then historians need to continue to refine such concepts as ‘family strategies’ to reach beyond the experience of the male breadwinner and market activity.

Proto-Industry and the Family Economy

Studies employing a ‘family strategies’ approach document the central place of the family in the economy of nineteenth-century North America, but this regional, local, and family-oriented framework has stopped short of fully

69 Conzen “Peasant Pioneers”; R. C. Ostergen, *A Community Transplanted: The Transatlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West 1835–1915* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Bruno Ramirez, *On the Move: French-Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1860–1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); J. I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism and Colonization in Nineteenth Century Quebec* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989) and *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848–1881* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991); Chad Gaffield, *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict: The Origins of French Language Controversy in Ontario* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987); and Loewen, *Family, Church and Market*.

70 Elinore Accampo, *Industrialization, Family Life and Class Relation: Saint Chamond, 1815–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 47. For more details of the family strategies approach in the European context, see Woolf, ed., *Family Strategies*, and in the Canadian context, the work of Jack Little discussed below.

71 Gaffield, *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict*, p. 93. Historians’ methods of including the family economy in an examination of market factors and social and economic change are discussed below. Others include Jeanne Boydston, “To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working Class Subsistence”, *Radical History Review*, 35 (April 1986); Richard Bushman, “Family Security in the Transition from Farm to City, 1750–1850”, *Journal of Family History*, 6 (1981), pp. 238–256; and Deborah Fink, “Farming in Open Country, Iowa: Women and the Changing Farm Economy” in M. Chibnik, ed., *Farmwork and Fieldwork: American Agriculture in Anthropological Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 121–144, and *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

incorporating the family into the economic and political dynamics of the period. In Europe, the concept of proto-industry has provided a theoretical basis that has shown some potential in resolving the tension between ‘occupational plurality’, capitalism, and the household economy. As a broadly based and all-inclusive explanation of industrialization, however, proto-industrialization has shown itself vulnerable to a number of important criticisms. The most telling of these address its failure either to describe or to account for the considerable diversity in the economic, demographic, and social changes that occurred during the transition from rural agricultural to urban industrial society.⁷² In spite of proto-industrialization’s weaknesses as a model, it offers some important methodological and theoretical insights for historians. Because it provides a theoretical bridge between the family and the larger economy – because it gives us a way of speaking meaningfully of the family, the economy, and social change in the same breath – its advantages are worth exploring.

Hans Medick was among the first to elaborate the importance of ‘proto-industry’ as a specific, family-centred force in the growth of industrial capitalism. He explains how family-based, non-agricultural productive activity

appears as the essential agent in the growth of emergent capitalism. The family functioned objectively as an internal engine of growth in the process of proto-industrial expansion, precisely because subjectively it remained tied to the norms and rules of behaviour of the traditional familial subsistence economy.⁷³

Thus proto-industrialization “illustrates the essential function which the preservation of pre-capitalist enclaves has had and still has for the evolution

72 The relationship that Medick and others saw between cottage industry, proto-industry, and industrialization is being challenged on a number of fronts. The concept itself is under debate (see K. D. M. Snell and Rab Houston, “Proto-Industrialization? Cottage Industry, Social Change and Industrial Revolution”, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2 [1984], pp. 473–492), while, as noted in the introduction, a number of European historians are questioning the direction and inevitability of the changes connected to proto-industrialization. See for example Gay Gullickson, *The Spinners and Weavers of Auffay: Rural Industry and the Sexual Division of Labour in a French Village, 1750–1850* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Aminzade, “Reinterpreting Capitalist Industrialization”. Richard Wilk provides an interesting analysis of the ways in which theories of dependency contain the assumptions of unilinear progress that inform modernization theory. Wilk, *Household Ecology*, pp. 20–26.

73 Hans Medick, “The Proto-Industrial Family Economy: The Structural Function of Household and Family in the Transition to From Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism” in P. Thane and A. Sutcliffe, eds., *Essays in Social History*, 2 (1986), p. 30 (first published *Social History*, 3 [1976], pp. 291–316). The importance of non-agricultural employment to the family farm may have been first explored by Joan Thirsk in “Industries in the Countryside”. This 1961 article is reprinted in Joan Thirsk, ed., *The Rural Economy of England: Collected Essays* (London: Hambleton Press, 1984), pp. 217–233.

and stabilization of capitalist societies".⁷⁴ The possibility of the coexistence of different economic forms is thereby suggested and explained. Medick argues that the limited subsistence potential of the land first encouraged rural dwellers to take up industrial work, but their ability to provide some of their own sustenance from the land freed entrepreneurs from the necessity of paying them a living wage, resulting in poverty for the workers. He argues that peasants who had come to rely on the wages from proto-industry and who were without trade union protection were ultimately forced off the land to become landless urban proletariat.

Canadian historians have accepted the European criticisms of proto-industrialization and have further argued that proto-industrial forms of cottage industry remain largely unexamined in this country. They have also maintained that Canadians were subjected in different ways than their European counterparts to the land shortages widely believed to fuel proto-industrialization.⁷⁵ As we will see below, however, a number of Canadian historians are using a household-based approach to argue that changes in the nineteenth-century economy and society evolved on the foundation of continued land availability, the growth of off-farm work, and the persistence of land-based, petty commodity production organized through kinship (i.e. the family farm). Understandably, historians have shown little propensity for understanding this peculiarly Canadian formation within the theoretical confines of "proto-industry", but the complexity of this type of approach – one that examines the interplay between the household economy and the imperatives of capitalist relations – is providing some very interesting insights into Canadian history.

Agri-Forestry: Household, Land, and Wage Labour

James Sacouman was among the first English-Canadian historians to examine the coexistence of 'traditional' and 'modern' patterns of economic behaviour and the central role of the family economy in important economic and social transformations. Sacouman uses the proto-industrial theory, similar to that outlined by Medick in the context of Maritime Canada, to argue that it was the simultaneous dependence of families on an industrial wage and on production-for-use economic activity in the household that led to entrenched semi-proletarianization and the underdevelopment of the Maritimes: "The domestic petty producer unit and the relative surplus population have been increasingly exploited by the strictly capitalist mode of production."⁷⁶

74 Medick, "The Proto-Industrial Family", p. 31.

75 For Canadian criticisms, see for example Gaffield, "Children, Schooling and Family Reproduction", p. 169; and Cohen, *Women's Work*, p. 10.

76 James Sacouman, "Semi-Proletarianization and Rural Underdevelopment in the Maritimes", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1980), p. 239.

The relationship between the household and the capitalist economy has, however, been explored and debated most thoroughly in the Canadian context of agri-forestry.⁷⁷ In his analysis of Hébertville, for example, Normand Séguin outlines how the particular relationship between farming and forestry was structurally derived from the imperatives of capitalism. Drawing, like Sacouman, on the development-of-under-development literature, Séguin maintains that (anglophone) lumber capitalists and bourgeois colonization advocates sought to maintain the (predominantly francophone) settlers in long-term economic dependency on both near-subsistence farming and low-wage work in the lumber industry. The cycle of dependency suited the needs of the lumber capitalists for cheap labour and produce and created the “development of underdevelopment” in Quebec’s colonization zones.⁷⁸

A similar economy based on farm and forest has been examined in the new Brunswick context by Graeme Wynn, Béatrice Craig, and T. W. Acheson. Using detailed local and household-based studies, they explore the complexity with which wages, market sales, and agriculture combine within different geographical areas and over time.⁷⁹ In a series of articles concerning the society and culture of those involved in agri-forestry in the Saguenay region, Gérard Bouchard explores different types of subsistence-based and market-oriented economic activity within the conceptual framework of “co-intégration”.⁸⁰ Bouchard contends that the analysis of economic change can only come from a broad understanding of the co-integration of economic and cultural imperatives at both the broad economic and household levels. On this basis, he argues that evidence of entrenched underdevelopment in the Saguenay region is not clear.⁸¹ He uses family reconstitution to argue that “l’activité forestière a pu, dans un court terme, favoriser directement le

77 See Ouellet, “Développement et sous-développement”, for a review of underdevelopment literature concerning early nineteenth-century Canada. For a broader and later view of pluri-economic activity, see also Serge Courville, “Villages and Agriculture in the Seigneuries of Lower Canada: Conditions of a Comprehensive Study of Rural Quebec in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century” in Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, V (1986), pp. 121–149; and Courville and Séguin, *Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century Quebec*. McCann, “Living a Double Life”, also uses this framework to explain the coexistence of seasonal shipbuilding and shoe making with rural life in the Maritimes.

78 Normand Séguin, *La conquête du sol au 19^e siècle* (Sillery: Boréal Express, 1977). For a review of the agri-forestry literature, see Normand Séguin, “Paysans et monde forestier : nouvelles réflexions sur le monde rural québécois au XIX^e siècle”, *Cahier des annales de Normandie*, 24 (1992), pp. 177–187.

79 Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 80–84; Béatrice Craig, “Agriculture in a Pioneer Region: The Upper St. John Valley in the First Half of the 19th Century” in Inwood, ed., *Farm, Factory and Fortune*; and Acheson, “New Brunswick Agriculture at the End of the Colonial Era”. Their studies focus on the early to mid-nineteenth centuries.

80 Gérard Bouchard, “Co-intégration et reproduction de la société rurale : pour un modèle saguenayen de la marginalité”, *Recherches sociographiques*, vol. XXIX, no. 2–8 (December 1988), pp. 283–309.

81 Gérard Bouchard, “Introduction à l’étude de la société saguenayenne aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles”, *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*, 31 (1977), pp. 3–27.

développement de l'agriculture".⁸² In Quebec, as in New Brunswick, seasonal labour in the forests complemented and stabilized work on the farm. Bouchard maintains that the rural population continued to develop and change without becoming proletarianized or stagnantly 'underdeveloped' into the early twentieth century. He concludes that assumptions about the appropriate directions for change in rural society – towards greater market orientation on the one hand or proletarianization on the other – have obscured the complexity of rural life revealed by family reconstitution.

In a similar way, Chad Gaffield's *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict* uses an analysis of the household to argue that differences in land settlement and economic strategies among English- and French-speaking Ontarians influenced such broad-ranging phenomena as school attendance, local ethnic composition, and migration patterns. Gaffield argues that the "communal nature of existence in Prescott county", resting on "the informal economy, barter, helping, lending, kin and neighbours"⁸³ and centred on agri-forestry, was undermined after 1870 when the timber industry moved farther from the county, reducing the population to landless proletariat. As the proportion of Franco-Ontarians increased in the area, Gaffield argues, the language of instruction became both an increasingly important cultural factor in people's lives and an increasingly important political issue, as "schooling increasingly filled the space in children's lives that had earlier been dominated by collective domestic industry".⁸⁴

In *Nationalism, Capitalism and Colonization in Nineteenth Century Quebec: The Upper St. Francis District* and its companion volume *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848–1881*, Jack Little examines the simultaneous colonization of a portion of the Eastern Townships by Scots crofters and French Canadian *habitants* in the mid-nineteenth century. While demonstrating the extent to which the prevailing political, economic, and ideological forces handicapped settlers in their struggle for survival, he rejects the suggestion that colonists can be understood simply as victims of either the rural mythologizing of French Canadian nationalists or the process of underdevelopment or semi-proletarianization through agri-forestry. Using sources that reflect the demographic, political, economic, and cultural aspects of the township, he argues that colonists sought to establish and maintain a subsistence-oriented agricultural economy, supplemented by work in the forests, in an area where environmental conditions and government policy hindered exclusive reliance on subsistence farming. For both the Scots and the French, it was the relation between logging, the family economy, farming, and the State that determined the particular nature of the economy in Winslow, and not a general

82 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

83 Gaffield, *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict*, pp. 118–119.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

predisposition towards a market economy or modern progress.⁸⁵ Cautioning against a judgment of settlers by their 'failure' to achieve a purely agricultural economic base, Little maintains that the family farm not only "remained the basis of the labour market in the lumber industry until well into the twentieth century",⁸⁶ but that it answered the varied requirements made of life by the settlers:

Those who chose Winslow Township and environs as their destiny were seeking economic independence but also the perpetuation of traditional social ties and cultural values. In effect, they were rejecting the two basic alternatives that conformity to the norms of modern capitalistic society had to offer: to become either wage earning proletarians or individualistic pioneers.⁸⁷

The complexity of social change, hidden by macro-economic analyses and exclusive reference to the market economy, becomes clearer through these studies on agri-forestry. From a perspective that includes the household economy, it becomes possible to see how "older forms of production were not simply vestiges of a pre-capitalist past that were destined to be rapidly eliminated or superseded by capitalist factory production; rather they were linked in new ways to an emergent capitalist system."⁸⁸ Many of the patterns of behaviour which, when viewed within narrow definitions of neo-classical economics must be either labelled as anomalous or described as 'normal', can be explored and explained.⁸⁹ Whether or not one is interested in 'family history' *per se*, works by Little, Séguin, Bouchard, and Gaffield explain, in a way that Atack and Bateman, Pentland, or Kulikoff cannot, the variability of economic forms and social contexts that define these changes in the rural economy:

[T]he analysis of domestic relations underlines how local, regional and global forces intersect within that context. This is not to plead the case for understanding family relations as some kind of autonomous system; it is, however, to argue that this level of analysis may be appropriate for understanding wider issues.⁹⁰

85 Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism and Colonization*, pp. 11-13, argues that, while forestry was an essential element of farming in the Eastern Townships, there is sparse evidence to support the 'development of underdevelopment' that Séguin associates with agri-forestry.

86 Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, p. 155.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

88 Aminzade, "Reinterpreting Capitalist Industrialization", p. 396; see also Woolf, *Family Strategies*, pp. 1, *passim*.

89 Marjorie Cohen makes a similar point in *Women's Work*, arguing that the market economy is the wrong paradigm within which to understand women's work. Here, the inappropriateness of the paradigm is extended to include a majority of rural occupations in which both men and women participated and to rural history in general. Cohen's insistence on the inherent sexism of economic theory will be discussed below.

90 Mary Bouquet, *Family, Servants and Visitors: The Farm Household in Nineteenth Century Devon* (Norwich: Geo Books, 1985), p. xvii.

Politicizing Family Life

As the evidence grows that nineteenth-century populations found their context in the politics, economics, and culture of family life, historians are discovering the complexity that is revealed by focusing on the family rather than the wage-earning individual and on the household economy as well as the market.⁹¹ A great strength of this approach is that it allows conceptual room for descriptions and analyses of the roles played by all rural dwellers, particularly women and children, who otherwise have been exiled to 'personal' or 'non-economic' realms.⁹² However, it is not without problems. Historians who are used to calculating economic activity in terms of aggregate data of 'productive' behaviours must not only find new sources, but interpret them: historians must find new ways of seeing and understanding complex patterns of interaction between the 'non-economic', 'non-productive' activities that have long defined the internal aspects of family life and broader manifestations of social and economic change.

In an article urging historians to accord theoretical legitimacy to the economy of the family farm, Harriet Freidmann suggests:

[I]f we wish to examine the multiple forms of capitalism – not only family farming, but also family enterprises in general, the 'informal sector', domestic labour, and many of the atypical but important aspects of capitalist societies ... then we must delineate, in Weber's evocative phrase, a 'constellation' of factors, both capitalist and familial or patriarchal, which define the phenomena we wish to understand within capitalism. Then we can see to what extent and in which ways value theory, and other theories relating to family and demography, may help us.⁹³

In her study of western wheat-growing countries between 1870 and 1930, Freidmann argues convincingly that the household nature of wheat production, based on unpaid family labour for most of the agricultural year, was the factor that brought down the international price of wheat.⁹⁴ Household

91 David Sabean in *Property, Production and Family* (esp. pp. 29–30) comments on the inadequacy of individualism as a starting point for social analysis, a point discussed more thoroughly by Ruth Smith and Deborah Valenze in "Mutuality and Marginality: Liberal Moral Theory and Working Class Women in Nineteenth Century England", *Signs*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1988), pp. 277–299.

92 The importance of children's work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been most thoroughly documented by Neil Sutherland, particularly in his recent works "I Can't Recall When I Didn't Help: The Working Lives of Pioneering Children in Twentieth Century British Columbia", *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, vol. XXIV, no. 48 (November 1991), and "We Always Had Things to Do: The Paid and Unpaid Work of Anglophone Children Between the 1920s and the 1960s", *Labour/le Travail*, 25 (Spring 1990), pp. 105–141.

93 Freidmann, "Patriarchy and Property", p. 188.

94 Freidmann, "World Market, State and Family Farm", i.e. not simply the fertility of virgin lands. This is not to suggest that wage labour played no role in the family farm. A number of works have addressed the role of migrant workers, particularly in the Prairie Provinces. Gordon Hak, "The

production forced out large capitalist operations, largely through competitive advantages resulting from the family's freedom from the need to make a profit and from paying wages. The complexities that she sees in the relationship between the household mode of production and international trade belie notions of the marginality of the household economy. Economists Immanuel Wallerstein and Joan Smith deal with the methodological and theoretical problems disclosed by the central role of the household by delineating five major varieties of economic activity that mediate between the household and the world economy. Divisions between the family, the workplace, and the state must be redrawn within a household-based perspective in which wages, market sales, rent, transfer, and subsistence (or direct labour input) must, they argue, all be examined in relation to their impact on world-wide economic change.⁹⁵ Richard Wilk argues that the household should be examined as an ecological process, not an institution. The key to understanding social change, he maintains, is found in an understanding of the local conditions governing the interaction of the household and the larger structures of economic and political activity.⁹⁶

Gender theory, important for its redefinitions of 'economic' activity, has also proved a useful tool for examining the ways in which the social and cultural norms operating within families are intimately tied to the political and economic dynamics of the larger society. A growing body of recent works by sociologists, historians, and anthropologists explores links between capitalist industry and subsistence farming and documents the variability of economic and social change. This examination of the specifically gendered nature of production roles within households brings capitalist practices, gender, and family politics into close theoretical proximity. Some recent works are exploring the gendered relations of power in society where "women's production of foodstuffs within the non-capitalist mode of pro-

Harvest Excursion Adventure: Excursionists from Rural North Huron-South Bruce, 1919-1928", *Ontario History*, vol. 77, no. 4 (December 1985), pp. 247-265; A. A. Mackenzie, "Cape Breton and the Western Harvest Excursions, 1890-1928" in Ken Donovan, ed., *Cape Breton at 200* (Sydney, N.S.: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1985), pp. 71-83. For the role of hired labour on the Ontario family farm, see Joy Parr, "Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective", *Labour/le Travail*, 15 (1985), pp. 91-103, who argues that farm labourers were often land owners, working for wages until their farms were productive enough to provide total support.

95 Joan Smith and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., *Creating and Transforming Households: The Constraints of the World Economy* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). This point is clearly demonstrated by Robert Sweeney, who has used nominal indexes to two merchants' accounting records to provide a household-based view of merchant credit in Bonavista, Newfoundland. He concludes that "the limits to, and pace of, capitalist development in outport Newfoundland were not inherent in 'staple' production, but were socially constructed" within the context of household, as well as capitalist, imperatives. Robert Sweeney, David Bradley, and Robert Hong, "Movement, Options and Costs: Indexes as Historical Evidence, a Newfoundland Example", *Acadiensis*, vol. XXII, no. 1 (Autumn 1992), p. 121.

96 Wilk, *Household Ecology*.

duction lowers the value of labour power indirectly, enhancing relative surplus value for capital accumulation".⁹⁷ More generally, such studies are examining how "informal work subsidises workers' wages, lowers the risks of capitalists, and together with housework, stabilizes and maintains the class position of the households".⁹⁸

In the Canadian context, Marjorie Cohen emphasizes the role of subsistence agriculture and staples production in the capitalist development of Ontario in the nineteenth century. In *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, she argues that the market economy provides too narrow a basis upon which to construct the economic activity of the period. Though hidden in the farm household and garden, women's unpaid work was central to the transformation of the economy from subsistence to wage labour, by virtue of the support it provided in the frequent times of shortage in the wheat staples economy. Their 'non-productive' work on the farm allowed other male members to participate in the staples economy. Women's work in the dairying industry, while eventually taken over by men as it became commercially viable, nonetheless provided an important source of cash income for the farm before that time. While her emphasis on the staples economy seems unwarranted in the light of recent work, she makes the vital point that much of women's and children's labour is integral to the market economy in spite of its invisibility against the backdrop of the market theory.⁹⁹ In a similar argument about the work of aboriginal women in the canning industry in coastal British Columbia, Alicja Muszynski states that race and gender are crucial to an understanding of "how capitalists used pre-industrial relations of production to structure cheap labour forces".¹⁰⁰

While gender and racial characteristics have nothing to do with the operation of capitalist relations of production in the abstract, they have everything to do with the way those relations are practiced. Structures of inequality are used to structure the work force.¹⁰¹

97 Carmen Deere, "Rural Women's Subsistence Production in the Capitalist Periphery" in R. Cohen et al., eds., *Peasants into Proletarians: The Struggles of Third World Workers* (New York: Monthly Press Review, 1979), p. 134.

98 Kathryn Ward, ed., *Women Workers and Global Restructuring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 8.

99 A similar argument is made in the American context by Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid Atlantic Farm Women 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 91. Similarly, Nancy Grey Osterud's local study *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) explicitly explores the role of kinship and community organized according to gender in a rural community.

100 Alicja Muszynski, "Race and Gender: Structural Determinants in the Formation of British Columbia's Salmon Cannery Labour Force" in Kealey, ed., *Class, Gender and Region*, p. 104.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Jeanne Boydston gives a further political edge to the marginalization of the household and the work that it contained. She looks closely at the significant re-evaluation of work that accompanied the transition to market capitalism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. She argues that this redefinition of work, particularly the increasing emphasis on wages, eroded “the traditional basis of a wife’s claim to some voice in the distribution of economic resources and [her] social status as a ‘productive’ member of society”.¹⁰² Boydston maintains that this loss of economic status provided the rationale for women’s exclusion from the ‘universal’ suffrage debates of the nineteenth century.

The success of these authors in describing the complexity of rural life can be directly attributed to their readiness to accord the household a legitimate historical place in the rural society, culture, and economy:

Households are creative responses, culturally constructed systems rooted in local history, local understandings, and local communities. By showing how households adapt to very localized economic and ecological settings, ... [we can see how] the transformation of the rural economy and ... culture proceeds through the conjunction of global and local processes. But in this conjunction people cannot be reduced to passive actors, responding to the world system in a determined way. They retain a voice and a creative role, shaping the direction of their own future. ... [T]he household is the best social unit, the best analytical level through which to study these active strategies and the conjunction of local and global processes of change.¹⁰³

Conclusion

It appears that only with increasing difficulty can the behaviour of both English- and French-speaking rural Canadians be reconciled with the traditional orthodoxy of Canadian history. Historians are forced to make ever more frequent recourse to anomalous behaviours, transitional states, and regional variation in order to remain within the loosely defined and often implicit concept of modernization. While some rural historians continue to struggle within the inadequacies of this conceptual apparatus, others like Boydston are asking, “How do we measure something that is largely defined by its alienation from the standard measures?”¹⁰⁴ Many are addressing this question by actively challenging the modernization paradigm, questioning the assumptions of neoclassical theory, and developing new methods of exploration and analysis. In spite of many advances, a coherent conceptual framework within which rural society – and the majority of nineteenth

102 Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xi.

103 Wilk, *Ecological Households*, p. xx.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

century Canadians who lived within it – can be understood has still not been fully articulated, nor has the need for it been accepted.

As Ian Carter rather unfortunately phrased it, rural historians and sociologists “must assert, as radicals did a century ago, that the big questions about rural [society] have to do not with economics, but with political economy – with the social relations of men in production”.¹⁰⁵ Within Canadian rural society, these relations have been obscured because they occur primarily within the household, where work is naturalized, social relations depoliticized, and the family constructed as “a ‘given’ that exists and must be described without questioning the way it has come into being”.¹⁰⁶ If historians are to bring insights of pre-industrial rural society to the rural societies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada, they must deconstruct definitions of economic activity and family life that obscure the intimate relations between work, society, economics, and the family. At the same time, the attempt must be made to “comprehend the priorities of the contemporary [rural population], by which they themselves assessed the social and economic changes which affected them”.¹⁰⁷

David Sabean summarizes the problems facing the rural historian this way:

The closer one looks, the more kinship and family appear to be the operative structures in which values are formed and meaningful action takes place. But we do not yet have the tools to generate theories about this kind of thing. Practice remains at the level of family and theory at the level of class. What we need are accounts of exchange, alliance and reciprocity at the local level, at the level of practice before we can begin to give an account of how practices connect up.¹⁰⁸

Until we redefine economics to include the variety of activities carried on to ‘make a living’ within the household and redefine the family as an economic and political site – not simply an affective one – the culture and society of the nineteenth century rural majority will remain obscure, marginal to the ‘real’ political and economic concerns of historians. The works discussed here provide ample evidence that Canadian rural historians are rising to meet this challenge.

105 Ian Carter, *Farm Life in North East Scotland, 1840–1914: The Poor Man’s Country* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishing, 1979), p. 184.

106 Bouquet, *Family, Servants and Visitors*, p. xvii.

107 Keith Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 4.

108 Sabean, *Property, Production and Family*, p. 24.