

## *Note de recherche — Research Note*

### *“My Dear Eliza”*

#### *The Letters of Robert Hoyle (1831-1844)*

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*Through an examination of the letters of Robert Hoyle to his wife Eliza Nye Hoyle, this article provides a glimpse into the private world of a “yeoman” farmer who settled in Lacolle, Lower Canada, after the War of 1812. The letters relate details of his life away from home; his views on the economy, marriage, children and education; and some of the experiences of the kin, friends and neighbours who surround and support his family. This evidence suggests that the private and public spheres were not separate in pre-industrial Lower Canada. Family and domestic concerns were the province of husbands as well as wives. The author, therefore, argues that the diaries and correspondence of men should not be neglected in the study of the family and the household economy in this period.*

*L'examen des lettres de Robert Hoyle à son épouse Eliza Hoyle fournit un aperçu de la vie privée d'un exploitant agricole venu s'installer à Lacolle, dans le Bas-Canada, après la Guerre de 1812. Il y expose les détails de sa vie loin du foyer; ses vues sur l'économie, le mariage, les enfants et l'éducation; ainsi que certaines expériences vécues par les parents, amis et voisins qui entourent et soutiennent sa famille. Il est manifeste, à la lumière de ces témoignages, qu'il n'y avait aucune distinction entre la sphère publique et la vie privée dans la société pré-industrielle du Bas-Canada. Tous les problèmes de la famille étaient du ressort du mari autant que de la femme; aussi, précise l'auteure de cet article, on aurait tort de négliger la correspondance et les journaux intimes rédigés par des hommes quand on étudie la vie familiale et l'économie domestique d'alors.*

Diaries and letters have attracted renewed attention from researchers of family history and the history of women. Diaries have been of particular interest because they may shed light on routine events and the emotive aspects of past experiences.<sup>1</sup> Used in large samples, diaries can provide a useful antidote to conclusions based on prescriptive literature. Linda A. Pollock studied 496 diaries and autobiographies, for example, and rejected previous

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1. Beth Light and Alison Prentice, eds., *Pioneer and Gentlewomen of British North America, 1713-1867* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1980) and Margaret Conrad, Toni Laidlaw and Donna Smyth, eds., *No Place Like Home: Diaries and Letters of Nova Scotia Women, 1771-1939* (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited, 1988) are illustrative of this in the British North American context.

claims that early modern parents had little affection for their children and that there was no concept of childhood in the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Individual diaries, such as that of Ralph Josselin, have also gained their places in the historiography because of their richness of detail.<sup>3</sup> Farm diaries have been used to reconstruct the "seasonal round",<sup>4</sup> while letters from immigrants to their families back home add considerable information about farm life.<sup>5</sup> Peter Ward's recent study on courtship and marriage<sup>6</sup> is based on such sources, as is Katherine McKenna's study of the Powell family.<sup>7</sup>

That the diaries of men and their correspondence revealed concerns about marriage and childhood has been demonstrated with respect to fur trade society,<sup>8</sup> but the extent to which the family papers of men in the pre-Confederation era might lend themselves to a similar re-examination remains to be seen. There has been a tendency, probably encouraged by archival practices,<sup>9</sup> to assume that the letters of men relate only to political or business matters and thus to seek out only the diaries and correspondence of women for material relating to domestic concerns. This proved to be the case in Anthony Wallace's study of Rockdale:

But the businessmen wrote mostly of themselves. It is in the quiet correspondence of women that the quality of life among the ruling families in Rockdale is most clearly recalled, in brief vignettes of their encounters with each other, and with their menfolk, and with the working people of the neighborhood, and in intense discussions of books and ideas and people that interested them.<sup>10</sup>

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2. L.A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

3. Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman: An Essay in Historical Anthropology* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977).

4. James O'Mara, "The Seasonal Round of Gentry Farmers in Early Ontario: A Preliminary Analysis," in Don Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. II (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1980), pp. 103-112.

5. See, for example, Susan Beattie, ed., *A New Life in Canada: The Letters of Sophia Eastwood, 1843-1870* (Toronto: The Scholar's Press, 1989).

6. P. Ward, *Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

7. K. McKenna, "Options for Elite Women in Early Upper Canadian Society: The Case of the Powell Family," in J.K. Johnson, ed., *Historical Essays on Upper Canada: New Perspectives* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), pp. 401-423.

8. Jennifer Brown's study of children in fur trade society reveals that children's education, for example, was the specific concern of fathers. See "Children of the Early Fur Trades," in Joy Parr, ed., *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), pp. 44-68. Sylvia Van Kirk's *'Many Tender Ties': Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1980) is also based on the journals and correspondence of male fur traders.

9. Both the utility of family papers and the difficulty of consultation given the relative absence of information in the finding aids have been pointed out by Peter Ward in "Family Papers and the New Social History," *Archivaria*, 14 (Summer 1982), pp. 72-73.

10. A.F.C. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), p. 22.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's study,<sup>11</sup> which concludes that nineteenth-century American women existed in an almost exclusively female culture, encourages this view. McKenna has argued that the elite of Upper Canada held views consistent with the "cult of true womanhood" although she admits that pioneer conditions worked against their application.<sup>12</sup> Ward uses the notion of separate spheres when he writes that each sex occupied separate space:

Men moved in one world of work, power, and associations, women moved in another....Man's domain encompassed the field, the workshop and the tavern, and civic affairs; woman's included the house, the garden, the family, and the church.

Although he admits that this was not equally the case everywhere, and that "the pioneer economy tended to break down the walls of the separate spheres", one is nonetheless left with the impression that this was the norm.<sup>13</sup>

But to what extent, if at all, does the notion of separate spheres, and particularly the "cult of true womanhood", apply to rural society in this era? Their relevance to pre-industrial British North America, where the household economy prevailed and the home was still the place of work for many men, seems doubtful. This is not to deny that roles were assigned according to gender and that women were restricted by ideals of femininity. On the farm, women had the major responsibility for cooking, childcare, spinning, the making of clothes, gardening and dairying, and men were responsible for field work, care of livestock, marketing of produce and commercial transactions in general; during the unavoidable, and often prolonged absences of the male head of the household, however, the farm wife was expected to keep the household and farm running smoothly.<sup>14</sup> She could not, therefore, be kept in ignorance of the business of the farm. Conversely, since children usually helped out with various jobs from an early age, the care and training of children, especially boys, was not entirely a female role. The ultimate responsibility for the children fell on the father, who, therefore, could not be indifferent to their education and marriages. We suggest that historians of the family in pre-industrial Canada can profit from the use of the correspondence and diaries of men. The letters of Robert Hoyle to his wife Eliza, richly detailed on questions pertaining to family history, attest to this.

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11. C. Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs*, 1 (Autumn 1975), pp. 1-29. See also Carol Lasser, "'Let Us Be Sisters Forever': The Sororal Model of Nineteenth-Century Female Friendship," *Signs*, 14 (Autumn 1988), pp. 158-181.

12. McKenna, "Options for Elite Women", pp. 402-404.

13. Ward, *Courtship*, p. 64.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-84.

## Origins and Background

Born in England in 1781, Robert Hoyle<sup>15</sup> moved to New York in 1806 where he was involved in the timber trade. At the outbreak of the War of 1812, he moved to Lacolle, Lower Canada, a seigneurie which had been settled largely by English-speaking settlers in the 1780s and 1790s and which bordered the United States. This move was inspired by loyalist sentiments, and his decision resulted in a loss when he sold his New York property. His loyalty was rewarded by a commission in the militia and he participated in the quelling of the Rebellions of the 1837-1838. Elected to the Legislative Assembly as member for l'Acadie in 1830, he held his seat until 1834. A "Constitutionalist", he had favoured the reform of seigneurial tenure and supported bills for local improvements, but his vote against the 92 Resolutions cost him local support and he lost his seat to a more radical candidate. Anticipating this loss, Hoyle had lobbied for the vacant post of Collector of Customs at Stanstead, and he received it over 50 other candidates. The income was stable, though not lucrative, and he retained the post until 1844.

Although essentially a farmer, Hoyle also was engaged in a variety of business activities, including trading timber, storekeeping, milling and running a ferry. He was comparatively prosperous although not wealthy; he could afford to have at least one servant and hired farm labour when necessary. He drank coffee every morning and his daughters learned to play the piano. Like other farmers, however, he had little cash, and was often forced to borrow money even though he was a creditor in the local economy. Like many of his neighbours, he was tempted to move to Canada West in the late 1830s, but he remained. Despite the difficulties it imposed upon his family life, Hoyle's post as Collector of Customs undoubtedly kept him afloat during the difficult decades of the 1830s and 1840s. With the revival of the economy after his return to Lacolle, he was able to accumulate land and was one of the largest proprietors in Lacolle by 1854. He died in 1857 at the age of 75.

## The Letters

The Hoyle correspondence consists of 145 personal letters, all but seven of which are from Robert Hoyle to his second wife, Elizabeth (Eliza) Nye.<sup>16</sup>

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15. This biographical background is based on research conducted for my study *The Christie Seigneuries: Estate Management and Settlement in the Upper Richelieu Valley, 1760-1854* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992) and Larry S. McNally, "Hoyle, Robert", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. VIII. Much of the biographical detail comes from his petition for a government post found in NAC, MG8 B141.

16. NAC, MG24 B141, Pt. 1, 2, 3. Unless otherwise noted, all letters referred to are from Robert Hoyle to Eliza Hoyle. Of the others, only one letter predates 1831. Dated 1826, it is from the Reverend H.M. Townsend and refers to Hoyle's daughters. One (30 Oct. 1831) is from Robert Hoyle to Truman Nye regarding who should officiate at his and Eliza's wedding. A letter (Stanstead, 16 Feb. 1835) is from Eliza to her step son Henry, and two (Lacolle, 5 March

His first wife, Pamela, died in 1825, leaving him responsible for twin daughters, Mary and Margaret, and a son, Henry. His daughters were boarded with Reverend Townsend in Caldwell Manor until his second marriage to Eliza in 1831. Eliza was from Burlington, Vermont, but two of her brothers, Freeman and Bartlett, were traders in Lacolle and a third, Timothy, was a lawyer in Montreal. Almost immediately after her marriage, she was left to care for her step-children and her new household in Lacolle while Robert attended the Assembly at Quebec. Robert's first letter to his bride was dated 16 November 1831. The letters continued through subsequent winters until March of 1834. Hoyle moved to Stanstead in July of 1834 and Eliza joined him there that winter. She gave birth to a daughter, Sarah Ruth, in the early spring of 1835,<sup>17</sup> but in July, she returned to Lacolle with the baby and Margaret. She remained there until at least December of 1836 while Hoyle made arrangements to sell the farm and acquire a place for them in Stanstead. The letters, therefore, continue through much of 1835 and 1836. From 1836 to 1841, Robert and Eliza were almost always together in Stanstead and there is a virtual break in the correspondence.

In 1841, Eliza went to visit her family in Burlington and Champlain, New York, and the correspondence between the couple resumed. The strain of living apart, an issue which now divided the couple, is reflected in these letters. Hoyle's last letter is dated Stanstead, 18 December 1842, but the last two letters in the collection, addressed to him in 1844, indicate that the couple were still apart at that time. In all, the collection contains 138 letters from Robert Hoyle to his "Dear Eliza", many of them written by candlelight in a cold room and with ink and pen which were giving him difficulty. In their survival intact, we have Eliza's silent testimony of their importance to her.

Hoyle clearly wrote in part to ease his loneliness while separated from his family. He described his activities and what he considered noteworthy events. The letters written from Quebec describe his private life, as well as assembly proceedings, committee work, and the social events of the season. The letters written from Stanstead refer to local occurrences and his duties as Collector of Customs. Until 1836, they also contained detailed instructions for Eliza regarding the farm, his mill, and other business activities including the collection of debts. These themes alone, however, hardly would warrant special consideration of these letters. It is their reflective quality which makes Hoyle's letters particularly interesting as a source. There emerges an image of Hoyle as a rather austere man in his fifties who had a great sense of responsibility to his family and community, a strong loyalty to the Crown, and a deep

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1833 and Stanstead, 31 Aug. 1834) are from Eliza to her sister Ruth Nye. Only the last two letters are from Eliza to Robert Hoyle (Lacolle, 9 and ? July 1844), the latter being partly written by Mary and Sarah Ruth.

17. A letter from Asylum, 28 Feb. 1835, written while Robert was visiting her brothers, refers to her anxiety to have Ruth visit. The next letter, dated 30 May 1835, is the first to refer to the baby.

religious faith. But even more striking is the extent to which Hoyle expressed his attitudes regarding more personal issues such as the nature of the relationship between husband and wife, the care and education of his children, and illness and health. In order to demonstrate the utility of these letters to the study of family history, the following analysis focuses more specifically on the latter themes.

### Husband and Wife

In the context of a household economy, the major decision faced by most individuals was not whether to marry, but when and to whom. The demographic and economic aspects of this question have received considerable attention. The Canadian population followed the western European pattern of late marriage, with age at first marriage being relatively advanced, especially for males.<sup>18</sup> This was linked to inheritance or alternative means of acquiring economic independence. Rural parents could exercise a considerable amount of control with respect to this decision because of their economic contribution to the new marriage. Through their control of courtship practices, especially regarding daughters, most parents generally were able to assure marriage within the right social rank and religious background.<sup>19</sup> Once they were married, the interaction of couples is more difficult to document. Legal sources reflect deviation from the norm and prescriptive literature relates to societal expectations rather than actual behaviour.<sup>20</sup> Ward found that the expectation of love was universal in the nineteenth century, but his study is based on the writings of couples at the time of courtship, not after marriage.<sup>21</sup> These couples, like the Hoyles, may have found that married life did not always unfold according to their preconceptions.

Robert Hoyle's letters indicate that he had a great affection for his wife and that he saw his marriage as a companionate one. Although this meant that Eliza was his best friend, the person in whom he could confide all and for whom he "would sacrifice any earthly good to promote her happiness",<sup>22</sup> propriety and gender norms did restrict his confidences. References to sex were veiled. When she mentioned his not having anyone to "disturb his repose", he found this "taunting" and indicated that he will "pay" her for it —

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18. In New France, the average was 27 for men and 22 for women: Alison Prentice *et al.*, *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), p. 47. For Upper Canada/Ontario in the nineteenth century, Ward found the average for rural grooms to be 25.6 and rural brides 21.9. His findings also confirm a rising age at marriage during the century, more pronounced for women than for men. Ward, *Courtship*, pp. 51-56.

19. Ward, *Courtship*, pp. 64-89. The example he gives of the courtship of George and Honorine (pp. 9-14) demonstrates how parents could intervene in the marriage choice at the time of courtship.

20. Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: Women's Press for The Osgoode Society, 1991), pp. 167-199.

21. Ward, *Courtship*, pp. 148-168.

22. Quebec, 2 Dec. 1831; 30 Jan. 1834.

unless it is the Sabbath.<sup>23</sup> The possibility of her being pregnant was another matter to which allusions were made, and in this case, Eliza failed to understand Hoyle's indirect inquiry to that effect. At a loss to explain why his daughter Mary had written saying that she was getting fat, he asked: "Is it the climate, living or has the old lady with the red P—t discontinued her visits, or omitted one of her regular ones?"<sup>24</sup> Hoyle was aware that it was not considered manly to express feelings, even to one's wife. He nonetheless told Eliza how strongly he cared for her and that he thought he had "drawn a Prize".<sup>25</sup> After admitting he had found their parting difficult, he added: "It is or may be called weak and childish in a man, well be it so. I have betrayed it and if only to you, no matter, you will make the best of it."<sup>26</sup> When he left for Stanstead without her, he confessed that he **would** admit that she had become absolutely necessary to his happiness if it were not "degrading to our sex".<sup>27</sup> Even confiding that he had been sick (with an illness he described in some detail) was a transgression of gender norms: "Do not let any one see or hear you heard about my being unwell, you will only get yourself & old Husband laugh'd at."<sup>28</sup>

The Hoyles stressed the equality of the spouses in marriage in contrast to later Victorian attitudes which stressed the submissiveness of the wife. In this, they were probably influenced by the rise of American feminism which emerged from the evangelical movement of the late eighteenth century. These feminist tendencies found expression in resistance to the Church of England form of the marriage ceremony in which the wife was asked to obey. Commenting on a Church of England wedding ceremony in Stanstead, Hoyle noted that the couple was married "in the good old way, the promising to obey".<sup>29</sup> It was rather in jest, therefore, that after asking her to look after her health, he added: "I command you, and trust that you will like a dear good wife obey."<sup>30</sup> If he could not command obedience, he could and did plead for more letters, chastising Eliza for not writing often enough. She reminded him that friends bear with a friend's infirmities. He apologized for having caused her disquiet (his reproach had been upsetting enough to have affected her sleep), and resolved to be more content:

I will comfort & console myself that I have a wife, and in her, a friend as dear as life itself to me — and now we must both think, and act like (as I am at least) old, married people, folks.<sup>31</sup>

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23. Quebec, 2 Dec. 1831.

24. Quebec, 30 Dec. 1831.

25. Quebec, 16 Nov. 1831.

26. Quebec, 19 Nov. 1832.

27. Stanstead, 21 July 1834.

28. Quebec, 14 Dec. 1832.

29. Stanstead, 28 July 1834. A letter from Upper Canada in 1833, reprinted in Light and Prentice, eds., *Pioneer and Gentlewomen* (p. 119), refers to an incident in which an American woman left the church unmarried rather than pronounce that promise.

30. Quebec, 17 Jan. 1834.

31. Quebec, 4 Dec. 1831.

But he never was content. One can picture him alone in his boarding house room, lonely and wishing for a letter, while she, busy with a full household of children and servants, found writing one more chore and was too tired to comply with his requests.

The expectations which Eliza Nye had brought to her marriage had been defined in the context of genteel Burlington society, but her marriage existed in the context of a rural household economy. Life in the early nineteenth century was far from secure: the danger of early death caused by disease or accident was always a possibility and economic security was difficult to achieve even for those who were industrious and thrifty as Hoyle appeared to be. Hoyle's long absences also meant that Eliza was expected to see to the smooth operation of his business affairs as well as to her domestic household chores. According to his detailed instructions, she was to collect his debts, oversee his workmen at the mill, supervise the care of the livestock, see to it that the fences were kept in good repair, and buy oats or hay when Hoyle expected these to be scarce. For example:

Tell Henry to ask David the Blacksmith to furnish him with all the oats he can, and have him get all he can from Trudell & Sandy Hilman as I think oats will be dear & scarce in the spring. — and let Henry get R Lund or Mr Waldy to shingle over the hole for the Stove Pipe in the roof of the Store at Booths, to prevent the rain and wet.<sup>32</sup>

The women of the household were expected to deliver goods from the store, and were reminded to make immediate note of this in the ledger.<sup>33</sup> In all of these business transactions, Eliza acted on the basis of her tacit authority as representative of her husband, not on that of her own severely limited legal rights.<sup>34</sup>

Eliza hardly could doubt her utility, but this endless round of toil may not have left much time for the activities which she considered essential to a companionate marriage. These might have included social calls, country drives and discussions on current topics.<sup>35</sup> The reality of their first thirteen years of married life, however, was that the Hoyles often were apart. A brief (undated) fragment of Eliza's diary, written in Lacolle shortly after Robert's

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32. Quebec, 19 Nov. 1831.

33. [Stanstead], 12? July 1834.

34. Living in Lower Canada, Eliza had rights based on the Custom of Paris, which was similar to English Common Law in its patriarchal provision that the husband control the assets of the couple during the marriage, and which limited the wife's right to contract. With the consent of their husbands, however, wives could acquire a relative amount of freedom. See Brian Young, "Getting Around Legal Incapacity: The Legal Status of Married Women in Trade in Mid-Nineteenth Century Lower Canada," in Peter Baskerville, ed., *Canadian Papers in Business History* (Victoria: Public History Group, University of Victoria, 1989), Vol. I, pp. 1-16. We know very little, however, about the boundaries of the wife's tacit right to act for her husband or family in the routine matters of running a household, as Eliza evidently did on a regular basis.

35. Quebec, 3 Jan. 1832; 10 Dec. 1832.



departure, reveals her gloom at being left alone. Instead of visiting her step-daughter, she resolved to remain home to “do all that could reasonably be expected to promote the interest of my Husband and family as in Duty bound — a hopeless task, therefore, a heartless one.” She reflected “with regret of the great change in [her] character and feelings the last three or four years produced”.<sup>36</sup> More of this diary unfortunately has not survived and Eliza’s perception of their marriage is not always as clear as one might wish.

By 1841, they seemed unable to reconcile their differences on the issue of living apart. Eliza wished the family to be together again. Robert agreed with her that living as a family again was important, and described this as living “in love, harmony & with proper regard for each [others] feelings, & I may say failings, for I know I have mine”,<sup>37</sup> but his sense of responsibility towards his much younger family would not allow him to give up the steady income of his post in Stanstead. If Eliza understood this, she remained unconvinced. She accused him of injuring her and being ‘blind’ to her feelings. He denied this and claimed that she harmed him at times, that he would forgive her, but he hoped this would not encourage repetition: “If a wife loves & respects her husband, she will not provoke.”<sup>38</sup> It was not until 1844 that he finally gave up the post in Stanstead and returned to Lacolle. The Hoyle letters remind us that adherence to the ideal of a companionate marriage was no guarantee against spousal conflicts. As Michael Anderson has cautioned:

The sentiments approach [to family history] is incomplete if it ignores behaviour and the economic and social context which constrains the ideas it describes.<sup>39</sup>

### Children and Childrearing

The nature of childhood and changing parental attitudes are topics which have fascinated historians since the publication of Philippe Ariès’s classic study *Centuries of Childhood* in 1962. The evolutionary view which emerged from early studies suggested that a concept of childhood first emerged in the seventeenth century and that dramatic changes occurred in the treatment of children in the eighteenth century. Linda Pollock’s recent study, which was based on an intensive examination of primary sources, however, convincingly argues that this view is “a myth brought about by over-hasty reading, a burning desire to find material to support the thesis and a willful misinterpretation of evidence.”<sup>40</sup> She argues that there were “few changes in parental care and child life from the 16th to the 19th century in the home, apart from social changes and technological improvements”; she does indicate that there was “an

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36. NAC, MG24 B141. It was probably written in 1835 or 1836.

37. Stanstead, 28 Oct. 1841.

38. Stanstead, 21 Nov. 1841.

39. Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 84.

40. Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p. 271.

increased emphasis on the abstract nature of childhood and parental care from the 17th century onwards” and “a distinct intensification of adult demands for obedience and conformity, notably in the schools” in the early nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> If there have been more similarities than differences in the treatment of children over time, there nonetheless were important differences related to class and gender. Hoyle’s attitudes toward his children corresponded to the vast majority of parents studied by Pollock; he loved them, he did not approve of corporal punishment, he was very concerned when they were ill, and he wanted them to be well educated.

Robert Hoyle openly expressed affection for his children in his letters. To his infant daughter Sarah Ruth, he offered unconditional love and affection, sending her a kiss in every letter and referring to her as a pet. His older daughters, Mary and Margaret, also were sent kisses, but with restrictions: “Kiss Mary and M. for me every night If as I sincerely hope they do, deserve yr approbation.” Henry was sent his love, but no kisses. Hoyle also hoped that Henry would be “entitled to her good opinion”.<sup>42</sup> The expression of affection differed, therefore, according to gender and age.

Hoyle’s concern for his children’s health and safety was also an expression of affection. Given the high rate of infant mortality at the time, it is hardly surprising that this concern was acute particularly regarding Sarah Ruth. When she fell ill, he wanted desperately to go to her, but the two-day journey rendered it impossible.<sup>43</sup> Although his religious faith taught him to accept the inevitability of death, his emotional attachment to his family made this a difficult task. Once past infancy, children were less vulnerable, but disease and fire remained as serious threats. Hoyle was forcibly reminded of these dangers by the events which surrounded him. Witnessing the fire of the Governor’s castle at Quebec, for example, he wrote home with a minimal description of the fire and a long set of instructions: to tack sheets of iron around the cooking stoves in the house and store and cover the planks around them; not to leave ashes in the house, store, or shed; and for Mary to be careful not to have her clothes catch on fire.<sup>44</sup> During the Montreal cholera epidemic in 1834, he worried constantly about his family’s health, particularly since, according to his informants, the death rate was higher than the newspapers reported.<sup>45</sup> In the spring of 1842, illness was very prevalent in the Stanstead area and every day brought news of new cases or deaths from a variety of diseases.<sup>46</sup> When several of their kin in Lacolle fell ill, Hoyle became very anxious. The fact that disease and death were common occurrences did not seem to lessen their emotional impact.

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41. *Ibid.*, pp. 268-269.

42. Quebec, 2 Dec. 1831.

43. Stanstead, 20 Nov. 1842.

44. Quebec, 23 Jan. 1834.

45. Stanstead, 31 July 1834.

46. Hoyle mentions erysipilas, mumps, scarlet fever, inflammation of the bowels and fever. Stanstead, 27 March 1842.

Hoyle perceived diet and clothing to be keys to the prevention of disease. He, therefore, wanted Eliza and Sarah to be warmly dressed in flannel, wool socks and thick shoes, regardless of cost.<sup>47</sup> Sarah Ruth was not to eat any ‘junk food’, or in his words: “sweet meats, cake, or any such trash”. He believed the neglect of her teeth could lead to pain and mortification later.<sup>48</sup> Hoyle displayed an awareness of teething pain, the dangers and fear of childbirth, and the concerns related to nursing.<sup>49</sup> In this regard, he seems to have been closer to Ralph Josselin in the seventeenth century than to the image of the middle-class Victorian male.

Hoyle considered it to be more important to impart a good education than property to children.<sup>50</sup> But what was a good education? For Margaret and Mary, it included lady-like decorum. Hoyle worried that they might not know how to behave in society. Thus, if Mary was to go to Burlington:

She must appear well, or I had rather she remained at home. I hope she will study & practice the Art of pleasing and that she will make herself obliging and useful...<sup>51</sup>

Although upset when he heard his daughters were not practising the piano, Hoyle acknowledged that “one thing of more importance I wish them to learn perfectly, the true meaning & force of words”.<sup>52</sup> He also wished them to become virtuous and public-minded persons, “to study to improve in every thing that is laudable, so as to become more useful members of society”.<sup>53</sup> When his daughter became a school teacher, he encouraged her efforts, unlike William Dummer Powell who responded to his daughter Anne’s suggestion of keeping a school “with sarcasm, emphasizing her meagre education and suggesting that by teaching, she would be lowering her social status”.<sup>54</sup>

Sarah Ruth’s education posed practical problems as there were no schools in close proximity. She would have to board in town, but Hoyle worried that if she slept alone, she might throw off her bedclothes and catch cold; if she slept with an unhealthy person, she might get sick. He hoped the school teacher would let her stay with her — but only if she were a kindly person.<sup>55</sup> For the moment, Eliza was teaching her at home, probably with occasional help from Margaret, but Robert continued to offer advice:

I feel great concern about Sarah. She must not be permitted to be in the kitchen; — she want[s] Society, poor thing, and recreation; try to amuse her, out of the K[itche]n and if possible, get her interested in her books; — do not

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47. Stanstead, 19 Sept., 17 Oct. 1841.

48. Stanstead, 12 Dec. 1841, 8 Dec. 1842.

49. Stanstead, 20 Aug., 17 Sept. 1835; 10 Oct. 1841.

50. Stanstead, 13 March 1842.

51. Quebec, 20 Nov., 29 Dec. 1832.

52. Quebec, 20 Nov. 1832.

53. Quebec, 12 Dec. 1832.

54. Quebec, 12 Dec. 1832; McKenna, “Options for Elite Women”, p. 413.

55. Stanstead, 7, 10 Oct. 1841.

impose her lessons or work of any kind as a task; as Miss Lyman says in her circular, 'not only impart, but elicit thought'; — help her to make out her sentences & stories, and correct her pronunciation.<sup>56</sup>

Hoyle's son, Henry, was another concern. When Robert first left for Quebec in 1831, Henry was nineteen. He still attended school but also was expected to take on many of the responsibilities of the farm. Once his father left, however, Henry began drinking with the men and abandoned his education.<sup>57</sup> Since Hoyle was adamantly opposed to intemperance, this caused a rift between them and Henry left home rather than face his father's displeasure. In one subsequent letter, Hoyle indicated his wish to be remembered to Henry if either Mary or Margaret wrote to him. "Who know[s]," he added, "but new circumstances may produce a change for the better. They undoubtedly will if blessed by God."<sup>58</sup> He received a few lines from Henry in 1834. During a period of poor health in 1835, Eliza wrote what she believed might be her last letter to Henry, indicating the family's willingness to forgive the prodigal son, should he demonstrate a reformation of his character.<sup>59</sup> The absence of all references to Henry thereafter suggests that he did not mend his ways or, at least, that he never returned to Lacolle. Hoyle's silence on this subject is impossible to interpret; perhaps this topic was too painful to discuss.

In the early nineteenth century, parents placed more emphasis on obedience and physical punishment than in earlier periods, but the majority continued to prefer alternatives.<sup>60</sup> The withdrawal of affection was regarded as one of the more effective ways of disciplining children without corporal punishment, particularly when shaping the character of a young child. Hoyle subscribed to the latter view. He reminded Eliza that he "must and will" hold her "personally responsible" for treating Sarah Ruth kindly. He told Sarah Ruth that, if she loved her father, she would be good and kind to her mother and would try to learn. As a reward, she would be allowed to ride out with him on a gentle horse.<sup>61</sup> Having heard the Reverend Wilkes preach that the fear of God should not be like that of a slave, but the fear of offending a holy God of love, he wrote:

This is the kind of fear I wish you to inculcate in Sarah Ruth, not a dread, or fear of punishment, but fear to offend, those she loves — or ought to Love, God & her kind parents.<sup>62</sup>

He repeats his injunction later:

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56. Stanstead, 7 March 1841.

57. Quebec, 15 Jan. 1832.

58. Quebec, 19 Jan. 1834.

59. Eliza Hoyle to Henry Hoyle, 16 Feb. 1835.

60. Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p. 184. Her sources were British and American. She notes that more British than American parents used repressive measures.

61. Stanstead, 13 March, 12 Dec., 17 April 1842.

62. Stanstead, 22 Sept. 1842.

Encourage her, she wants confidence and assurances, guard against having her cowed by any one, win her love and affections, but I charge, not to make her **afraid**, love, and the best feelings of our nature, should be appealed to; I hope she will obey you, her parents, and her maker, from a higher motive than fear...<sup>63</sup>

The following passage summarizes his views on corporal and other forms of punishment:

Encourage, incite Sarah to learn, but do not give her a lesson, as a task, and then punish her for not getting it, by not allowing her to eat with the rest, or in any other way, for I fear she may become disgusted with her Book; do not scold her or keep reproaching her, much less whip her, or shake her — a common soldier in the french army would feel debased, degraded, with the most trifling corporal punishment, ...you are an enemy in theory, to tyranny & despotism, and for heavens sake, do not show it in yr government of your dear and **only child**. Be most careful you do not cow her, or destroy her fine sensibility, her spirit or independence; ...but secure Sarah's love and affections, then she will obey with plesure, if not implicitly; — aid her in forming her mind, and in forming her opinion; — her mother enjoys her own opinion, why not?<sup>64</sup>

Hoyle's advice to encourage the child's independence of mind and spirit is particularly interesting because it is quite the opposite of the female submissiveness so encouraged later in the century. In this instance, he also noted that Eliza should feel free to reject any advice with which she did not agree. As she was the one who actually had to deal with Sarah Ruth on a daily basis, her perspective may have been less idealistic than his. Unfortunately, we do not have her response.

### **Kin, Friends and Neighbours**

When Robert Hoyle and his brother Henry moved to Lacolle, a small community of anglophone Loyalists was already established there. Although Eliza was separated from her beloved sister Ruth, and from her other female friends, her brothers lived nearby. Unlike pioneers who had to depend on neighbours, Hoyle's relationships in this communal network seem based on affinity and kinship. According to the concentric circles of Alan Macfarlane's "kinship universe",<sup>65</sup> the Hoyle's intimate circle was filled primarily by kin, the effective circle by some kin and neighbours, and the non-effective circle by other English neighbours. The few French settlers in the area would fall into the unfamiliar circle, unless they had business dealings with him. Occasional references to kin still in England indicate that they were also not forgotten. Hoyle's servant, William,<sup>66</sup> is more difficult to place. Although not kin, he was part of the household and upon hearing satisfactory reports of his

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63. Stanstead, 18 Dec. 1842.

64. Stanstead, 13 March 1842.

65. Macfarlane, *The Family Life*, pp. 156-160.

66. In 1832, Hoyle brought home an orphan from Quebec who agreed to be bound to him until the age of 21. This reference to William seems to refer to the same boy.

behaviour, Hoyle wrote: “[He] shall never want a good home so long as I have one for myself, but he must be strictly honest, industrious, polite and respectful.”<sup>67</sup> The right to a “home”, therefore, was earned through behaviour. This exemplifies Joy Parr’s reminder that kinship was essentially social rather than biological.<sup>68</sup>

After marriage, kinship links were maintained through visiting. Women, especially in childbirth, found that new neighbours and friends could not replace their sisters and intimate childhood friends.<sup>69</sup> In Eliza’s two letters to her sister Ruth, one catches glimpses of the importance of their visits and of the hardships which distance and the difficulties of travel imposed upon these women.<sup>70</sup> Eliza, nonetheless, did manage to visit Ruth on at least two occasions and Ruth was with her at the birth of her first child.<sup>71</sup> Eliza was also with her step-daughter Mary at her first lying-in. The female network was extensive; Mary and Margaret were sent to Burlington to polish their social skills under the guidance of Ruth and Mrs. Pomroy, a special family friend, and Hoyle’s niece Cornelia visited Eliza. Hoyle unquestioningly accepted this visit, commenting: “I hope it will be a good one, I mean a long one, if she can be contented and happy, as I know you will enjoy it.”<sup>72</sup> According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, older women acted as foster mothers to their young charges: “They supervised the young girl’s deportment, monitored her health and introduced her to their own network of female friends and kin.”<sup>73</sup>

The festive season, especially New Year’s Day, was an important time for visiting. Robert was at Quebec for the first New Year after his marriage, but he wrote to his brother Henry that he and Eliza’s brothers should have New Year’s dinner together.<sup>74</sup> Visiting the ill was also expected, especially of females. Tending the sick took precedence over normal household duties and continued to apply to grown-up daughters. When brother Henry fell ill, Robert exhorted his daughters not to neglect him, and Margaret, who was unmarried,

67. Quebec, 11 Jan. 1832; Stanstead, 30 Oct. 1834.

68. Joy Parr, “Introduction,” in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, p. 8.

69. The expanding literature on women’s culture in the nineteenth century all confirms the significance of having one’s close circle of women friends, sisters and mothers present at the time of childbirth, which was essentially a women’s event. (See, for example, Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World”). McKenna (“Options for Elite Women”, p. 408) also notes that Powell felt he could not intrude on such an occasion.

70. This included the bad state of roads and gender constraints. In one letter, for example, Hoyle advised Eliza not to try to make the trip to Stanstead herself because of the many hills, and the fact that the horses were not used to it. In another letter, he questioned her decision to let Mary travel alone with her uncle. The need for women always to be chaperoned, therefore, also would make travel more difficult.

71. Asylum, 28 July 1835.

72. Quebec, 10 Jan. 1833.

73. Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World”, p. 18.

74. Quebec, 26 Dec. 1831.

was expected to "tender her services in the most acceptable way, to him & his family".<sup>75</sup> Margaret also was expected to offer help when Sarah Ruth was ill.<sup>76</sup>

The significance of kinship in business is well documented for the pre-industrial period. Common examples of this are the Scots involved in both the fur and timber trades; the close connections between the rising industrial families of Rockdale are another.<sup>77</sup> Robert Hoyle also was involved in business transactions with his brother Henry and he expected help from his kinfolk in business matters. Although Eliza acted for him in most matters and was "quite the man of business",<sup>78</sup> Hoyle named the persons to consult if she encountered difficulties. These were usually kin, both his and hers, and occasionally friends. Should Eliza's tacit power to act for him be unrecognized in the community, Hoyle's brother, and later his son-in-law, Joseph Whitman Junior, were given his power of attorney.<sup>79</sup> The letters contribute to our understanding of the links between kinship and the development of rural communities, but this topic deserves more attention. Did rural kinship networks generally incorporate both the wife's and the husband's kin as readily as the Hoyle family seems to have done?

The Hoyles also maintained contacts with a wider circle of acquaintances through the ritual of calling. By necessity, country calls seem to have been limited to times when travel took people close to the homes of others, rather than following social dictates, but the purpose of calling appears to have been the same as in England: the maintenance of the social structure. Robert once asked Eliza to pay her respects to the party of Mr. Child, destined for Alburgh Springs, because he was "desirous of cultivating his society & friendship".<sup>80</sup> When in Stanstead, they called upon an acquaintance in Derby Center who "received [them] very politely", but Eliza did not expect that he would repay the call.<sup>81</sup> Status consciousness, therefore, extended into the countryside as well.

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75. Henryville, 3 March 1842.

76. Stanstead, 20 Nov. 1842.

77. David S. Macmillan, "The 'New Men' in Action: Scottish Mercantile and Shipping Operations in the North American Colonies, 1760-1825," in *Canadian Business History: Selected Studies, 1497-1971* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), pp. 44-103; and Wallace, *Rockdale*, passim.

78. Quebec, 14 Dec. 1832.

79. Quebec, 20 Nov. 1832.

80. Stanstead, 23 July 1834. Leonore Davidoff in *The Best Circles: Women and Society in Victorian England* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973) was the first to indicate that calling was socially significant and not just a trivial activity engaged in by women. Jeanne Peterson, *Family, Love and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 170-172, agrees and points out that it was not just women who called; when they did, "they stood in for the family unit as a whole". In the professional circles she studied, "women's social calls were part of a larger family activity, carried on among social and professional acquaintances of both sexes, for boundary-making, perhaps, but also to foster those networks that sustained professional life." The call Hoyle wished Eliza to make may have fallen in this latter category.

81. Eliza Hoyle to Ruth Nye, Stanstead, 31 Aug. 1834.

## Conclusion

The historian examining the letters of Robert Hoyle for the light they might shed on Lower Canada's politics likely would be disappointed. By sending the *Quebec Mercury* home, Hoyle freed himself from commenting on the daily proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. References about his farm and business operations also are fragmentary. Yet his letters are exceptionally rich in detail regarding his immediate surroundings, activities and experiences. The correspondence could be consulted with profit by anyone interested in social or geographic details on mid-nineteenth-century Quebec, Stanstead and, to a lesser extent, Lacolle. His letters dealt with health concerns, preoccupations with home and personal reflections, often stimulated by an influential sermon. Offering a rare glimpse into domestic topics such as marriage, childrearing, and gender roles, these letters provide a much-needed balance to the prescriptive literature of the day. It is evident that fathers as well as mothers were concerned with the education and rearing of their children; marriage was seen as a companionate partnership; and wife and daughters participated in the work of the family enterprise. Clearly, no strict notion of separate spheres could be applied to the world of yeoman farmers in pre-industrial Canada. The relevance of the 'cult of true womanhood' to this milieu also can be questioned. Although the Hoyle papers undoubtedly were preserved because of his position as a minor political figure in Lower Canada, the significance of militia and other miscellaneous papers in this collection pale in comparison to the wealth of information, for the social historian, found in Robert Hoyle's many letters to "My Dear Eliza".