

Hawking and Peddling in Canada, 1867-1914

John BENSON

The history of Canadian retailing remains to be written. It is still assumed that the years after Confederation witnessed a sharp decline in the importance of hawking and peddling. Yet hawking and peddling survived both in rural and urban areas in Canada. Indeed it was in the growing towns and cities that this form of selling performed its most vital economic and social functions: it filled some of the gaps in the retailing system and provided employment and income to many non-English-speaking immigrants on the margins of Canadian society.

L'histoire de la vente au détail n'a pas reçu l'attention qu'elle méritait. Et pourtant, le peu que l'on connaît de l'une de ses formes, le commerce établi, a plutôt servi à perpétuer une mauvaise compréhension de certaines autres activités commerciales comme le colportage et la vente itinérante. Ces dernières activités ont survécu dans les régions urbaines comme dans les zones rurales du Canada. En fait, c'est dans les villes et les communautés en expansion que ces formes de vente ont rempli leurs fonctions économiques et sociales les plus vitales: tout en permettant de combler certaines carences du commerce établi, elles ont procuré emplois et revenus à beaucoup d'immigrants non-anglophones se situant en marge de la société.

The history of retailing in Canada has not received the attention it deserves.¹ Paradoxically, the little that is known about the expansion of one major form of retailing, fixed shopkeeping, tends merely to perpetuate misunderstandings about the decline of another, hawking and peddling.² In fact, the terms "hawking" and "peddling" are not easy to define

John Benson is Senior Lecturer in History at Wolverhampton Polytechnic, England.

This article derives from a larger study of working-class capitalism in Canada, a preliminary discussion of which is to be found in J. BENSON, "Working-Class Capitalism in Great Britain and Canada, 1867-1914", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 12 (1983): 145-154. I am grateful for the financial support of the British Academy, the Leverhulme Trust, the Twenty-Seven Foundation and Wolverhampton Polytechnic and for the advice and assistance of Stan Hanson, Greg Kealey, John Kandle, Bryan Palmer, Alan Ridge, Lloyd Rodwell and three anonymous referees. Earlier versions of the article were read at the Annual Conference of the British Association for Canadian Studies at Birmingham University, April 1984 and at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association at the University of Montreal, May 1985.

1. The 24-page index to a standard text such as W.T. EASTERBROOK and H.G.J. AITKEN, *Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), does not contain a single reference to retailing.

2. For the limited literature on hawking and peddling in Canada, see B.S. OSBORNE, "Trading on a Frontier: The Function of Markets, Peddlers, and Fairs in Nineteenth-century Ontario", *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, II (1980): 59-81. However, there has been some discussion of hawking and peddling in other societies. For Great Britain, see John BENSON, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-century Working-class Entrepreneurs* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), pp. 98-114; D.R. GREEN, "Street Trading in London: A Case Study of Casual Labour, 1830-1860", in *The Structure of Nineteenth Century Cities*, ed. J.H. JOHNSON and C.G. POOLEY (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 129-51. For Sweden, see Sven DAHL, "Travelling Pedlars in Nineteenth Century Sweden", *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 7 (1960): 167-78. For the United States, see P.C. KLINE, "New Light on the Yankee Peddler", *New England Quarterly*, 12 (1939): 80-98; Harry GOLDEN, *Forgotten Pioneer* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1963); R.L. WRIGHT, *Hawkers & Walkers in Early America* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1927).

for they encompass a wide range of retailing practices. They could be conducted in the street, at the market or on the doorstep; performed part-time or full-time; and conducted by employees or the self-employed, by artisans, fixed shop retailers or workers from other occupations altogether. According to one definition, the distinction between hawking and peddling is that the pedlar carries his stock whereas the hawker uses a horse and cart or some other type of vehicle. According to another definition, the distinction is rather that the hawker "attracts attention by public outcry, placards, labels or signals, or by exposing his goods in a public place."³ In practice, however, the terms hawking and peddling are "usually considered and employed as equivalent and synonymous, ... the chief (*sic*) feature of a hawker or peddler [being] that he is one who goes about concurrently selling and delivering."⁴ It is this broad definition which forms the basis of that adopted in this article. A hawker or pedlar is defined here as any person who, in any place other than a fixed shop, sells and delivers his or her goods at the same time.⁵

It has long been recognized that hawking and peddling constituted an important form of marketing in pre-Confederation Canada.⁶ However, because it is acknowledged that retailing, like other economic activities, underwent substantial change during the course of industrialization and urbanization, it is also believed that hawking and peddling declined in importance after Confederation⁷ so that "by the end of the century" it was only in rural areas that "peddlers ... made a continuing contribution."⁸ This assumption lies behind the statement that, "In general the development of trade has largely paralleled that of the country itself and it may be traced from the pedlar and small general store of the frontier or early settlement days to the numerous forms of retail distribution which exist in our modern complex society."⁹

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the error of such views. It will be argued that, as in Great Britain,¹⁰ hawking and peddling remained common both in urban and rural areas, a survival which has implications for the historiography, not simply of retailing, but of many aspects of working-class life. Indeed it was in urban areas that this form of selling continued to perform many of its significant economic and social functions. It not only helped to fill the gaps left in the retailing system by established agencies, but it also provided employment and income to non-English-speaking immigrants on the margins of Canadian society.

3. New Brunswick Provincial Archives, RS 151 H2/2, "Pedlar's licenses (oaths) (*sic*)", 1932?, p. 1. Also RS 151 H2/2, Letter from Secretary-Treasurer, Municipality of Kings to G. W. Crawford, 16 July 1932.

4. New Brunswick Provincial Archives, RS 151 H2/2, "Pedlar's licenses (oaths) (*sic*)", 1932?, pp. 2-3. For a discussion of some of the difficulties of definition, see T. McGEE, *Hawkers in Selected Asian Cities: A Preliminary Investigation* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Centre for Asian Studies, 1970).

5. This definition makes it difficult to classify newspaper sellers, some of whom sold papers which had been ordered previously, others of whom sold and delivered concurrently. It has been decided therefore to omit from this article any discussion of newspaper sellers.

6. OSBORNE, "Trading", pp. 61-68; K. KELLY, "Wheat Farming in Simcoe County in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *Canadian Geographer*, XV (Summer 1971): 106; K. KELLY, "The Development of Farm Produce Marketing Agencies and Competition Between Market Centres in Eastern Simcoe County, 1850-1875", *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, I (1978): 71.

7. OSBORNE, "Trading", p. 63; KELLY, "Wheat", p. 106; KELLY, "Development", pp. 71-72; G. JOHNSON, "The Syrians in Western Canada", *Saskatchewan History*, XII (1959): 32.

8. OSBORNE, "Trading", p. 63.

9. BANK OF MONTREAL, *The Service Industries* (Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects, 1956), p. 6.

10. BENSON, *Penny Capitalists*, pp. 103-4.

It is impossible to calculate precisely the number of men, women and children who worked full- or part-time in the various branches of hawking and peddling. Neither gazetteers nor trade directories provide more than tantalizing glimpses: the Toronto directory for 1885, for example, listed only one of the eleven licensed Italian peddlars known to have been resident in the city's St. John's ward.¹¹ Licensing records themselves are not informative. However through the licensing of peddlars may have been at the beginning of the nineteenth century,¹² by Confederation the system was in some disarray. Many municipalities did not exercise their licensing powers;¹³ those that did imposed widely varying fees: from as low as \$2.50 for a foot licence or \$30 for a horse and vehicle licence in Toronto to as high as \$60 for a foot licence in Montreal and \$125 for a horse and vehicle licence in Winnipeg.¹⁴

High fees encouraged evasion. The subterfuges took many forms. Circus followers presented their own printed slips to the local chief of police for signature and then used them as authority to sell canes, balloons and other souvenirs.¹⁵ In Montreal, where licence fees were always high, the mayor and the chief of police were prepared to grant reductions, award licences for part of the year and allow applicants to pay in instalments: "The Mayor said it was better and cheaper to do as he had done than to send these people to jail."¹⁶ When the Hamilton city council fixed a new fee of \$40 in 1890, it was claimed immediately that this would simply drive the local Italian fruit vendors to Toronto "where the license (*sic*) fee is a nominal charge."¹⁷ The more successful peddlars ran several wagons from a single licence;¹⁸ but most simply went into business without any licence at all, often pretending to be farmers who were not required to purchase a licence in order to sell their own produce.¹⁹ The *Maritime Merchant* reported from Halifax and Saint John in 1904 "that in most municipalities, and in all incorporated towns, there is a license (*sic*) fee for all peddlars who are not ratepayers, but this is often a dead letter in the rural districts, and is evaded in many towns."²⁰ The result of these evasions is that the fragmentary licensing returns which do survive prove more useful for examining the efficiency of municipal administration than for determining the extent of hawking and peddling.²¹

11. J. ZUCCHI, *The Italian Immigrants of the St. John's Ward, 1875-1915: Patterns of Settlement and Neighbourhood Formation* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1980), p. 31.

12. OSBORNE, "Trading", pp. 62-65.

13. *Canadian Grocer*, 27 June 1890; 13 September 1895; 18 August, 6 October 1905; *Retail Merchants' Journal*, October 1906; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 25 October 1911. This article makes considerable use of the *Canadian Grocer* and other trade journals, publications which, because they represented the established trades, almost always viewed hawking and peddling as activities that needed to be controlled more strictly. Yet these journals contain a good deal of information about peddling and hawking which is unavailable elsewhere. For a comment on the value of the trade press, see Michael BLISS, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business, 1883-1911* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 145-46.

14. *Canadian Grocer*, 28 March, 24 May, 20 June, 27 June, 3 October 1890; *Labour Gazette*, August 1905.

15. *Canadian Grocer*, 19 June 1914.

16. *Canadian Grocer*, 29 April 1892. Also 1 March 1895.

17. *Canadian Grocer*, 9 May, 23 May 1890.

18. *Canadian Grocer*, 15 March 1889; 14 March 1890.

19. Vancouver City Archives, City Clerk Incoming Correspondence, RG2, A1, vol. 9, Petition, 1895; *Canadian Grocer*, 18 January, 25 October 1889; 20 May 1892; 5 April 1895; 21 April 1905; 30 December 1910; 6 March 1914.

20. *Maritime Merchant*, 21 April 1904.

21. OSBORNE, "Trading", p. 62. Between 1868 and 1884 the number of hawkers' and peddlars' licences issued by the City of Toronto fluctuated between 5 (in 1871, 1872 and 1876) and 270 (in 1880). See Toronto City Archives, *Annual Report [Statement] of [The City Treasurer of] the Receipts and Expenditure of the City of Toronto, 1870-1884*.

The census returns, too, have their weaknesses. They tend to under-record activities such as peddling and hawking in which numbers fluctuated during the course of the week, from season to season, and according to the prevailing economic climate. They were perhaps affected by a growing vocational awareness in the trade as licensing laws were implemented, enforced and strengthened towards the end of the century.²² Yet, as David Alexander has suggested, census returns can be used to provide an approximate indication of the size of the permanent core of full-time, outdoor vendors.²³

Used in this limited way, the returns reveal an increase in the number of full-time hawkers and pedlars between 1871 and 1911 (Table 1).

Table 1 Full-time Hawkers and Pedlars,
Canada, 1871-1911

Year	Number	Number per 1000 of the Occupied Population
1871	666	0.7
1881	813	0.6
1891	1,655	1.0
1901	1,980	1.1
1911	3,248	1.2

Sources: Canada, *Census*, 1871, vol. II, p. 339; *Census*, 1891, vol. VI, pp. 8-9.

Absolute numbers rose nearly five times, from 666 to 3,248. The returns also show a growth in numbers relative to the size of the working population: in 1871 there were 0.7 outdoor vendors per thousand workers; in 1911, there were 1.2 per thousand, an increase of 80 percent. For all their limitations, therefore, the census figures provide no indication at all of decline or stagnation in either the absolute or the relative size of the permanent core of full-time hawkers and pedlars.

Nor does census evidence support the contention that hawking and peddling were becoming uncommon in urban areas. Although the census cannot be used to examine the alleged decline in urban street selling between 1871 and 1911, it can be used to show the extent of this form of retailing at the end of the period. The 1911 census records show that in the twenty-six cities with populations of 15,000 or more, there were 2,275 hawkers and pedlars, 2.95 per thousand of the occupied population, a figure a full 150 percent higher than in the country as a whole.²⁴

Of course, it is necessary to be sceptical about any estimate of the extent of street selling that is based upon complaints emanating from either the trade press or from established branches of the retail trade. Yet it is significant that the chorus of often well-orchestrated, complaints should have reached a crescendo in depressed years such as the early 1890s²⁵ and those after 1905, a period during which one tea manufacturer headed its ad-

22. OSBORNE, "Trading", p. 60; Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Toronto (hereafter MHSO), Interview Log Form, 0679, P. Tulumello; *Canadian Grocer*, 11 August 1905.

23. David ALEXANDER, *Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 63-65. Also OSBORNE, "Trading", p. 62.

24. Canada, *Census*, 1911, vol. VI, pp. 8-9.

25. *Canadian Grocer*, 27 May 1892; 1 March, 2 August 1895; ZUCCHI, *Italians*, pp. 32-33.

vertisements with the slogan, "You Can Beat Out the Peddler".²⁶ Urbanization, it seems, encouraged both full- and part-time street selling. As the *Canadian Grocer* pointed out, as Toronto "gets larger, the privilege of doing a house to house trade in it becomes more valuable."²⁷

By what factor should the available licensing and/or census figures be multiplied in order to arrive at a reasonable estimate of the total number of hawkers and peddlars? Contemporary comments are extremely rare and not very helpful. It was claimed in 1895, for example, that one expensive Montreal licence served three peddlars: one took the receipt, another the badge, and a third the licence itself.²⁸ Unfortunately, no way to check the accuracy or typicality of such a claim exists. It remains impossible to arrive at an acceptable factor by which to multiply the available census and licensing figures.

There is little doubt that the country pedlar maintained an important niche in rural life, bringing news to the farmers, buying their dairy produce, and selling them food, drink and manufactured goods. The country pedlar flourished well into the twentieth century, to be displaced finally by mail order, catalogue selling and the country store.²⁹ However, it is no longer possible to accept the traditional view that itinerant selling survived only among "a dispersed rural population ... which was narrowly constrained by their farm locations",³⁰ and that urban hawking and peddling declined in the forty years following Confederation. As in England, "the pedlar's trade developed into an urban rather than a rural occupation: in a sense, the pedlar followed his customers into the towns."³¹

Hawking and peddling survived because in both rural and urban areas they continued to perform a useful retailing function. They flourished in the gaps left by other marketing agencies; they "fatten", lamented the *Canadian Grocer*, "on the neglects of the retailer."³² In the countryside they enabled farmers both to dispose of small quantities of dairy and other produce and to purchase basic necessities and small luxuries in a simple and convenient fashion. Indeed, small farmers living on the fringes of urban areas were themselves able to sell fruit, vegetables and dairy products direct to the consumer from door to door. Those living near Toronto, for example, were allowed to sell their produce in the city without obtaining a licence so long as they did not venture within six hundred yards of the market area.³³ Those living on the outskirts of St. John's and Charlottetown continued to peddle milk and vegetables until well after the First World War.³⁴

In urban areas street selling continued to provide the consumer with a familiar and convenient service. As in England, it provided "a stop-gap between the development of

26. *Canadian Grocer*, 6 May 1910; 19 June 1914. See also 11 August, 6 October 1905; 9 May 1913; *Retail Merchants' Journal*, August, October, November 1905.

27. *Canadian Grocer*, 23 May 1890.

28. *Canadian Grocer*, 1 March 1895. See also 24 May 1889.

29. *Canadian Grocer*, 7 July, 11 August 1905; 7 January, 6 May, 27 May, 3 June 1910; *Retail Merchants' Journal*, August 1905; F.G. SMALLWOOD, "Marketing, Hawking and Peddling in St. John's in the Nineteen Twenties" (Undergraduate paper, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1967), pp. 3, 9-10.

30. OSBORNE, "Trading", p. 77.

31. ALEXANDER, *Retailing*, p. 65.

32. *Canadian Grocer*, 1 August 1913. Also 21 March, 16 May 1890.

33. *Canadian Grocer*, 15 February, 25 October 1889; 2 April, 14 April, 21 April 1905.

34. Alexander MacKINNON, "The Growth of Commercial Agriculture Around St. John's, 1800-1935: A Study of Local Trade in Response to Urban Demand" (M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981), pp. 68, 71-72, 87; SMALLWOOD, "Marketing", pp. 3-4. For peddling in Charlottetown after the First World War, see Public Archives of Prince Edward Island, Oral History of the Belfast Area, Acc. 2924/34, E. Gillis.

housing suburbs and comparable development of suburban shops and a transport system which could get the consumer into the central area rapidly at low cost.”³⁵ Street traders moved into districts without shops and traded when existing shops were closed. In Toronto “growlers”, with whisky hidden in their pockets or boots, used to work public events such as the Exhibition and excursions to Toronto Island.³⁶ Everywhere the “early closing” movement of the late 1880s and early 1890s afforded new opportunities. Thus as soon as the grocers of the Spring Gardens area of Halifax agreed in 1887 to close at 8 p.m., the pedlars moved in and began to sell tea, coffee, sugar and onions in the evenings.³⁷ In Toronto, remarked the local correspondent of a Montreal paper, the “fruit, fish and vegetable pedlars are a great convenience to the general public”.³⁸

Street selling remained an efficient means of clearing supplies of perishable food from city markets. Even the trade press, bitterly hostile to street selling though it was, found itself forced to admit:

Despite the precautions taken in the packing, shipping, carriage and storage of the fruit, there would be loss through decline in quality, and re-packing would necessitate the separation of culls from choice stock. For this of course there had to be an outlet. It would be considerable in quantity and far from worthless. Someone had to take it and the pedlars offered the needed relief.³⁹

Street selling was efficient, too, at breaking bulk products into the small, cheap units which were all that many of the urban poor were able to afford. A low price was crucial to the street seller. The trade press contained countless diatribes against “unscrupulous vendors of vegetables and fruits, who have no standard of quantity in a barrel, box, crate, basket or bag.”⁴⁰ There were numerous comparisons unfavourable to the street trader: in the spring of 1897, for example, the *Canadian Grocer* contrasted, with telling illustrations, the tiny “peddler quarts” used by street vendors of strawberries, with the much larger, “regular”, quart boxes employed by reputable grocers.⁴¹ As in Great Britain, it was precisely in the “no-man’s land between consumer demand and ... slow industrialization” that hawking and peddling were able to survive, grow and even flourish.⁴²

Street selling also survived because it helped to meet the employment needs of some of the rapidly growing urban population. It provided work and income for a minority of working-class immigrant families and so did something to ease the dislocation brought about by large-scale immigration and rapid economic and social change. Most often the decision to sell was born of poverty and misfortune. As in nineteenth-century Britain, it was the last, desperate resort of the unskilled, the unemployed, the very young and the very old, the sick, the injured and the victimized;⁴³ as in the Third World today, it was the first resort

35. ALEXANDER, *Retailing*, pp. 61-62.

36. *Royal Commission on The Liquor Traffic*, 1894 (no. 21), Q. 9,729a, H.J. Grasett.

37. W.J. Forrestal to *Canadian Grocer*, 11 April 1889.

38. *Montreal Echo*, 16 July 1892.

39. *Canadian Grocer*, 27 May 1892. Also 25 January 1889; OSBORNE, “Trading”, p. 72; ZUCCHI, *Italians*, pp. 20, 41, n.64.

40. *Canadian Grocer*, 8 February 1889. See also 27 May 1892; 10 February, 6 October 1905; 8 July 1910; 18 July 1913; *Retail Merchants’ Journal*, September 1904; December 1905.

41. *Canadian Grocer*, 23 April 1897.

42. R.F. HARNEY, “Toronto’s Little Italy, 1885-1945”, in *Little Italies in North America*, ed. R.F. HARNEY and J. VINCENZA (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981), p. 48.

43. University of Calgary, E. SILVERMAN, Oral History Collection, Transcript 118, pp. 28-29; *Butler’s Journal*, July, August 1890; January 1891; *Canadian Grocer*, 27 May 1892; Ontario, Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers, *Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the Prison and Reformatory System of Ontario*, 1891, p. 72A, J.J. Kelso; M.B. KATZ, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in*

of non-vernacular-speaking immigrants.⁴⁴ However, it is not true that in Canada "peddling came easily to ... immigrants; [that] even if they had never tried it themselves, they came from the small villages and towns where the itinerant salesman was common."⁴⁵ What drove European and Asian immigrants into street selling was their poverty, the discrimination which they faced, and their desire to resist — or at least to control — the threat of acculturation.

By the turn of the century Jewish pedlars were active throughout Canada, both in remote rural areas⁴⁶ and in large cities such as Montreal where, it was complained in 1905, they had "established themselves seemingly irrevocably".⁴⁷ By 1916, indeed, Jewish pedlars were entrenched so firmly in Toronto that six hundred who made their living by selling rags offered to pay \$10 each to the local Red Cross if it would agree to stop collecting rags as a means of raising money.⁴⁸ Chinese and Italians too had to bear "the burden of prejudices and the reality of poverty".⁴⁹ Again peddling appeared to offer one possible solution: some newcomers began to sell fruit in their spare time; others entered the business full-time, some for no other immediate reason than that they had happened to lodge with a pedlar when they first arrived in the Dominion.⁵⁰ Italian immigrants took virtual control of the cities' fruit and vegetable trade. As early as 1882 five of the seven licensed pedlars in Toronto's St. John's ward were Italians. When the *Canadian Grocer* castigated the foreign fruit hawker, it described him in the following terms: "Usually an Italian, his wants are few, supplied at the lowest cost, as a colony of them will inhabit one tenement and subsist on the barest and rudest necessities."⁵¹ By 1911 over three-quarters of all the hawkers and pedlars listed in the census were foreign-born, compared to less than a third of the population as a whole.⁵²

It was difficult for these immigrant hawkers and pedlars to earn an adequate, let alone a comfortable, living. It was no simple matter to break into the trade successfully. Newcomers were likely to be sold short measure or even refused service by the wholesalers.

a *Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 192; BENSON, *Penny Capitalists*, pp. 101-2.

44. *Canadian Grocer*, 20 June 1890; *Retail Merchants' Journal*, August 1905; December 1905; Robert HARNEY and Harold TROPER, *Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975), p. 86; T.G. MCGEE, "Hawkers and Hookers: Making Out in the Third World City: Some Southeast Asian Examples", *Manpower and Unemployment Research*, 9 (1976): 3-21.

45. HARNEY and TROPER, *Immigrants*, p. 86.

46. S. SHARKEY, "The Jewish Community of Pembroke: Aspects of Survival" (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 1982), p. 7. For Newfoundland, see *Fishermen's Advocate*, 11 June 1910; 1 June, 15 June 1912; for New Brunswick, see *Butler's Journal*, November 1891; September, November 1894; June 1895; June 1899; *Maritime Merchant*, 21 April 1904.

47. *Canadian Grocer*, 11 August 1905. See also 28 March 1890; *Retail Merchants' Journal*, June 1907; MHSO, Tape JEW 6249, E.J. Weisman; M. TEFTELBAUM, "The Institutional Immigrant Aid Effort in the Montreal Jewish Community: A Study in Development 1847-1930" (B.A. research paper, Carleton University, 1979), pp. 26-27; G. TULCHINSKY, "Immigration and Charity in the Montreal Jewish Community before 1890", *Histoire sociale - Social History*, XVI (novembre-November 1983): 374-75.

48. Stephen A. SPEISMAN, *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), p. 73.

49. Robert F. HARNEY, *Italians in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978), p. 15. For the Chinese, see *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 18 June 1919.

50. MHSO, Interview Log Form. 0679, P. Tulumello; 2673, M. Wagman; Tape ITA 5432, Messrs. Meschino; ZUCCHI, *Italians*, pp. 4, 20; HARNEY, *Italians*, p. 13.

51. *Canadian Grocer*, 27 May 1892. Also 20 June 1890; *Retail Merchants' Journal*, 20 July 1903; August 1905; MHSO, Tape ITA 5432, Messrs. Meschino; ZUCCHI, *Italians*, pp. 4, 20, 41.

52. Canada, *Census*, 1911, vol. II, p. 445, vol. VI, p. 31.

Once started in business, there were constant difficulties, with inexperience, illness, aggressive animals, adverse weather and the public's xenophobia all posing a constant threat to their livelihood.⁵³ Moreover, although the low cost of starting business did much to ensure the persistence of street selling, it also encouraged fierce competition among sellers.⁵⁴ Indeed by the beginning of this century the competition was increasing; for there emerged a growing challenge from co-operative and departmental stores which had begun to sell many of the small, cheap items that had provided the mainstay of the pedlar's trade.⁵⁵

Most damaging was the growing pressure for stricter regulation. Local trade associations mounted increasingly insistent campaigns against every type of hawking and peddling. The Retail Grocers' Association was particularly active, urging the strict enforcement of existing regulations and by-laws whether they were concerned with unlicensed peddling, selling on Sundays, selling adulterated and short weight produce, or selling liquor to Indians.⁵⁶ The Association urged the extension of existing regulations into districts where trade was uncontrolled. In 1890, for example, the Ottawa branch of the Retail Grocers' Association petitioned the city council in favour of a tax on itinerant traders: "In this city", it was alleged, "anybody and everybody can blow a horn, yell, or rap at anybody's door at pleasure for the purpose of buying or selling his goods."⁵⁷ Other branches lobbied for licence fees to be increased. In 1895 a deputation from Montreal's Retail Grocers' Association urged the city council's market committee to impose a \$100 licence fee on all pedlars.⁵⁸ Ten years later the Associated Boards of Trade of the North West Territories resolved that, in addition to any licence fee imposed by towns, cities or municipalities in the Territories, each electoral district should be empowered to charge pedlars and hawkers an additional \$25, and this for a licence valid for a period of only three months.⁵⁹

The pressure to extend and increase licence fees was augmented after 1890 by demands for new and stricter controls. Toronto took the lead. A by-law passed in 1891 forbade pedlars to work on the city's main thoroughfares: Spadina Avenue and King, Queen, Yonge and Dundas Streets. It was proposed in the following year to prevent pedlars from stopping on any street corner while in 1905 it was planned to pass a by-law restricting the exposure for sale of any meat, fish or fruit. In 1912 a final blow was struck: an amendment to the city by-laws made it illegal for hawkers and pedlars even to shout their wares on the street.⁶⁰

It is not easy to assess the economic success enjoyed by pedlars and hawkers. Naturally, complaints from consumers or other retailers of pedlars "living sumptuously and

53. *Canadian Grocer*, 1 July 1910; *Butler's Journal*, January, October 1891; February 1895; SPEISMAN, *Jews*, p. 73.

54. *Canadian Grocer*, 23 May 1890.

55. *Canadian Grocer*, 11 January 1895; 11 August 1895; 18 July 1913; *Cotton's Weekly*, 17 December 1908; 7 October 1909; *Labour Gazette*, December 1901; May 1902; ZUCCHI, *Italians*, p. 12; BLISS, *Living Profit*, p. 38.

56. Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon, North-West Territories, Dept. of the Attorney General, Files of Justices of the Peace, At G1, B(2), Return, 14 October 1901; *Labour Gazette*, September 1903; July 1904; *Maritime Grocer*, 21 April 1904; *Canadian Grocer*, 4 October 1889; 20 May 1892; 1 March 1895; 6 May 1910; 18 July 1913.

57. *Canadian Grocer*, 1 August 1890. Also 17 October 1890.

58. *Canadian Grocer*, 1 March 1895.

59. *Canadian Grocer*, 7 July 1905. For Edmonton, see Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, BE 33 C581E, Box 25, File 213, Copy of City of Edmonton By-Law.

60. BLISS, *Living Profit*, p. 38; *Canadian Grocer*, 28 March 1889; 20 June, 1890; 12 February, 19 August, 22 November 1895; 14 February, 21 February, 7 March 1913.

clothed in purple”⁶¹ must be treated with considerable caution. But some vendors did achieve modest economic success. In 1882 John Abate was working the Toronto streets with a pushcart; by 1890 he had opened a stall in West market and by 1902 had moved to the St. Lawrence market.⁶² Two other Toronto Italians, Salvatore and Angelo de Ferrari, were working as fruit pedlars in 1886; ten years later both had managed to open fruit stores on Queen Street East.⁶³ For the ambitious and fortunate immigrant, street selling could provide an escape route, an avenue of economic, and just occasionally of social, upward mobility.

But for every success story it is possible to discover a failure, for every triumph a disaster. In the fall of 1908 an elderly Scottish woman collapsed from starvation in a Toronto street and, being too weak to undergo surgery, died within a few hours. Having been forced to give up laundry work as too heavy, she had been reduced to selling shoelaces on the streets but found herself unable to earn sufficient even to buy food.⁶⁴ These were all exceptions, however: most hawkers and pedlars neither opened shops nor collapsed on the streets. Most probably did little more than eke out a bare living; most enjoyed neither a higher standard of living nor a more elevated social standing than their colleagues and compatriots engaged in manual labour.⁶⁵ In hawking and peddling “the law of the jungle and the law of supply and demand operated concurrently.”⁶⁶

The failure of hawking and peddling to generate any significant degree of economic or social mobility does not invalidate their claim to historical attention. Rather the reverse. Hawking and peddling long remained of some importance in Canadian life. They helped both to fill gaps in the country’s retailing system and to provide a means of survival for some of the most disadvantaged of the urban poor. They remain essential to a proper understanding of the complex nature of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canadian society, its urban development and its large-scale immigration.

61. *Fishermen’s Advocate*, 22 April 1911. Also “Long Island” to *Fishermen’s Advocate*, 8 June 1912; KATZ, *Hamilton*, p. 105.

62. ZUCCHI, *Italians*, p. 22. Also MHSO, Tape ITA 5432, Messrs. Meschino; HARNEY, *Italians*, pp. 18, 23.

63. ZUCCHI, *Italians*, pp. 21-22. For other success stories, see, for example, *Canadian Grocer*, 14 March 1890; *Butler’s Journal*, January 1891; *Maritime Merchant*, 21 April 1904; Charles DRAGE, *Two-Gun Cohen* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), pp. 29-31.

64. *Toronto Globe*, 16 September 1908, cited by Wayne ROBERTS, “Studies in the Toronto Labour Movement, 1896-1914” (Ph.D. dissertation, Toronto University, 1978), p. 230.

65. MHSO, Interview Log Form, 2673, M. Wayman; *Retail Merchants’ Journal*, 20 August 1903; KATZ, *Hamilton*, p. 105; ZUCCHI, *Italians*, p. 31.

66. SMALLWOOD, “Marketing”, p. 11.