

that of Lower Canada did, and argues that French Canadian farmers were not backward, producing crop yields largely consistent with those secured elsewhere. He finds little reliable evidence of rural over-population. Birth rates were not astronomically high, farms excessively subdivided, or arable land all cropped. Certainly, the natural disasters of the 1830s produced dislocations, probably severe ones, but such disasters were not symptomatic of an ongoing crisis. McInnis does not deny that Lower Canada's economy faced certain intractable problems. Natural increase was sufficiently high to "strain ... the economy's ability to grow through capital accumulation just at that time when much of the rest of North America was initiating the process of Modern Economic Growth" (p. 33), while the lack of internal and external markets for agricultural produce boded ill.

McInnis' work is of considerable import. If he is right, then many others, most notably Fernand Ouellet, are wrong. Though many of his conclusions are tentative and need further exploration, as McInnis fully recognizes, good reasons exist for taking them seriously, grounded as most are on a considerable body of hard data drawn from Lower Canada's first detailed agricultural census, that of 1851-52. This article is, incidentally, worth reading for its historiographical content alone. McInnis' article and several of the others, notably Akenson's and Russell's, amply justify acquiring this volume.

Colin READ,
Huron College, University of Western Ontario.

* * *

DAVID GAGAN. — *Hopeful Travellers. Families, Land, and Social Change in MidVictorian Peel County, Canada West*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. Pp. xxi, 197.

The Hopeful (or perhaps better the *Hopeless*) *Travellers* were some 13,000 households enumerated in the three census returns of 1852, 1861 and 1871. This analysis of a county's social structure, which has been made possible through the use of the computer, is the most ambitious yet to be published by a Canadian historian.

Peel County is strategically situated between the urban centres of Toronto and Hamilton. Access to trade at first lay through Port Credit, whose trade volume was exceeded in Canada West in 1851 only by Toronto, Kingston and Whitby (pp. 15-16). Then, in the 1850s, that route was supplanted by the railway, which made Brampton an important regional centre of 2,000 souls. Developed late owing to the reluctance until 1819 of the Mississaugas to sell their birthright and to the dislocations of the 1812-14 war, Peel received heavy immigration only in the 1820s, when the county was administered from Toronto. The system of land granting, which so favoured Loyalist descendants, the military and surveyors meant that thirty percent of the best land was held by absentees, thus preventing Peel and many other parts of Ontario from developing as rapidly as a more democratic system would have permitted. Speculators (absentee owners of more than 500 acres) formed but three percent of proprietors and held only ten percent of the land between 1820 and 1840. Such a small concentration of land holding compared to contemporary England, Scotland and Ireland, emphasises more the weakness than

the strength of the élite. With all its political advantages it lacked the wealth to develop the land into revenue-producing assets, tenanted holdings. One is struck by the relative poverty of these political martinets, not their wealth. This is not Gagan's view.

In the 1860s and 1870s Peel's population declined, despite the growth of Brampton. This was characteristic of much of rural Ontario, except in the new frontier of the Bruce Peninsula and in parts of south-western Ontario, where some of the most productive land in North America is located. In Peel, earlier than in many counties, it was found that too much inferior land had been cleared. This was allowed to revert to rough pasture and woodlot, as more food could be produced by fewer hands on the best land. New farm families could be absorbed in the 1860s only with the "death or displacement of established farmers, or the subdivision of existing farms" (p. 42). Too many people were competing for too little land. Land prices, averaging \$12 an acre in the 1840s, exceeded \$60 an acre in 1870, and earlier had peaked at \$114 between 1857 and 1859. To finance such rising capital costs the mortgage became a common instrument of debt. Only eleven percent of land was mortgaged in 1851, a burden of \$9 per head of population. By 1860 this had risen to thirty-eight percent and \$70, and then fell by 1870 to sixteen percent and \$30. Like so many historians, Gagan assumes debt is evil, while its absence is a positive element. Indebtedness is a much more subtle matter. Generally in periods of inflation increased debt is to be favoured, while in periods of depression and stagnating prices debt reduction is equally prudent. The ability to acquire debt is usually a statement about credit worthiness as well as the availability of loanable funds, not of poverty or impoverishment. The very fact that Peel farmers were able to pay debts in the 1860s contracted in the 1850s, borrowing sensibly without incurring insolvency, was a measure both of their relative prosperity and of their business acumen. Gagan seems to misunderstand this; and it does not really help to know that younger men with few children were more prepared to mortgage land to expand their holdings than older household heads with larger families.

Land shortage in the late 1850s obliged farmers to compensate their children otherwise than with land. Best able to do this were those with but a single heir. The so-called "Canadian" system differed from this impartible form. There the estate was devolved upon a single heir "who in return for his patrimony was obligated to provide, out of his own resources, more or less equitably for all of the residual heirs and legatees as they would have been provided for had the estate been settled in a perfectly partible fashion" (p. 51). Many farmers mortgaged their farms to their principal heirs to provide regular retirement income for themselves, while widows held dower rights to one-third of the real property. Gagan provides the first detailed demonstration of this system in southern Ontario at mid-century.

Gagan understandably is much concerned with demographic factors. Household size declined by eight percent (to 5.7 persons) in the 1860s after remaining at 6.2 in the 1850s. By then three-quarters were composed of simple families: parents and children without servants, boarders or relatives, even though between 1850 and 1870 seventy-five percent of households took a more complicated form at least for some years. The smallest households in 1851 were those of the unskilled, native-born Catholics (5.5), while the largest (6.8) were foreign-born Methodist farmers. By 1871 the smallest were the professional families (3.8) and foreign-born Presbyterians (5.0), while the largest were still the foreign-born Methodist farmers. So much for the myth of Catholic Irish breeding like rabbits! Gagan found that fertility began to decline in the 1860s among younger women. This he

calls a trend, but without analysis of the 1881 census the matter must be left open. This is important for a great burden is placed on the fact; and here Gagan must be quoted extensively:

That this transition in patterns of marital fertility was especially pronounced among young farm wives in each age cohort and extended even to farm women in their late twenties must be taken as incontrovertible evidence that the land, inheritance, and demographic crises which arose within the farming community in the late 1850s, and the general instability of the period, had a decided, far reaching effect on the very foundations of life in this society. The farm family besieged [*sic*] on all sides by changes which threatened its traditional expectations, underwent an equally profound parallel change in the form of a permanent alteration in its customary patterns of reproduction. It would take time before the effects of this transition, begun on the eve of Confederation, had a visible effect on the demography of the community. But ... between 1861 and 1891 the birth rate for the county fell from roughly 40 births per thousand of population per annum to less than 30 as these rural families adjusted to the new realities of the society and economy of pre-Confederation Ontario (pp. 73-75).

Delayed first marriages resulted in later first conceptions. Later and perhaps fewer marriages (though Gagan is silent here) resulted from a decline in the number of available young men (aged 15 to 30). Though Gagan presents convincing evidence of this decline and is sure it arose from the collapse of economic expectations, he cannot satisfactorily link the two. If the trend continued in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s, which witnessed several marked fluctuations in the economic cycle, we would expect a return of young men to Peel, with corresponding increases in fertility and in the marriage rate. Yet there is no evidence that this happened. His ideas are suggestive, but they need more testing over a longer interval.

Gagan is also interested in the educational experience of Peel's children. In the 1850s the children of labourers and servants were least likely to be sent to school among all occupational groups, especially if their fathers were Anglicans born in Upper Canada. By 1871 labourers sent as high a proportion of their school-age children to school as farmers, while children of servants still lagged seriously behind. By 1871 children of Irish-born Catholics participated least in the system. Generally, Peel conformed to the pattern found elsewhere of educating a smaller proportion of its girls than its boys and for fewer years.

Gagan has also studied a sample of 161 permanent families in one township to discover something of the pattern and expectations of rural women. Mean age of women starting families in 1848-52 at the time of the birth of their first child was 21 years, with the last birth at 38.5. Of these, twenty percent of women died in childbirth while another twenty percent became widowed while still responsible for young dependent children.

As other studies elsewhere have found, there was a high degree of mobility. Less than ten percent of the inhabitants were enumerated in all three of the census returns used in the study, while twenty percent appear in two and seventy percent in only one. Most inhabitants obviously saw the county as a disappointment, despite the fact that freeholders increased from less than half the landholders in 1850 to more than two-thirds two decades later, with the major change taking place in the 1860s. These landowners were predominately farmers, the major occupational group. Other groups were more likely to be tenants.

Gagan has worked out a scheme to distinguish the layers of rural society, though he offers no illustrations of either horizontal solidarity or vertical antagonism to allow us to speak with confidence about a class system. Quality of house, pos-

session of domestic servants, property ownership and a large household of relatives, visitors, lodgers and orphaned children were the four "measurements of social betterment" (p. 100) he employed. About 19% were demonstrably poor, a proportion of society unchanged a century later! Less than 4% had all the attributes and so formed an elite. Another 13% formed the next most affluent group, while 29% were middle and 35% the lower middle strata of rural society. Gagan found the Irish overrepresented in the poorest group. Foreign-born Roman Catholics, whether Scots or Irish "were the least likely of Peel's principal cultural groups to put down root in this county" (p. 120).

A chapter is devoted to Brampton, Peel's only urban centre, which soon developed social characteristics very different from its rural hinterland, and thus remains achronistic to the rest of the story and perhaps should have been omitted. The one subject that seemed obvious for consideration, movement into Brampton by Peel rural dwellers, was not treated.

From this sketch of some of the highlights let us turn to a number of general criticisms. The first concerns the audience Gagan had in mind when he agreed to include his book in "The Ontario Historical Studies Series" whose purpose is "to enable the general reader and the scholar to understand better the distinctive features of Canada". This study does little to distinguish Peel from other parts of Canada. Comparative references are made instead to colonial Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, parts of the nineteenth-century mid-West, USA, and pre-industrial England. No reference is made to studies underway, for instance, in nineteenth-century Quebec. Moreover much of what appears here has been foreshadowed in earlier articles published in a variety of historical periodicals, and some rightly contained an array of densely packed tables of data and statistics. Some such tables, considerably multiplied here, will certainly be of no interest to regional history enthusiasts and keen undergraduates (the general reader). The rest (the scholar) would have been content to receive Dr Gagan's message in a further series of short articles with whatever technical presentation he felt obliged to include. As Dr Gagan is at home with contemporary accounts of Peel, he has wherever possible included human testimony. Whenever this occurs it is decidedly the better part of any chapter, and leaves most of the relative and absolute numbers with the occasional coefficient of correlations in limbo. This abstract approach to historical writing, the rage among demographers and economists, ought to be shunned by historians whose principal task is to communicate their ideas about the past to the largest possible audience among the literate elements surviving in our society. A level of unreality is reached when Dr Gagan felt obliged to employ two decimal points when expressing percentages (p. 115), as if the system of measurement had attained an immutable precision.

Another complaint relates to the near absence of sampling. The bulk of the data comes from an analysis of the entire population. A ten-percent sample (remembering always that most social scientists are perfectly satisfied using a one-percent sample) would have produced the same results, within an acceptable level of error, and would have reduced both the labour and costs considerably. Adequate sampling techniques for large populations are readily available for historians' convenience.

This leads to the problem of the narrowness of the subject matter. The study is limited to two decades of one out of the thirty-eight counties in Ontario of 1871. Long before the book appeared, the 1881 census had become available. A decision to incorporate the data of that census, and other data for the 1870s where available, would probably have modified many of Dr Gagan's conclusions. One of the most important relates to Peel's agricultural economy. He characterises the

years 1857-60 as an "economic debacle" (p. 67), and the 1860s as a mixture of "inflation, depression, falling commodity prices, [wheat] blight, and market dislocation [which] ... conspired to create a crisis of confidence" (p. 7) in Canada. My complaint is that his view is limited to the short cycle. He seems unduly influenced by Ibister, who insists that "surplus farm production in central Canada declined by 100%" between 1860 and 1870 (John Ibister, "Agriculture, Balanced Growth and Social Change in Central Canada since 1850: An Interpretation", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 25 (1977): 673-97). Both Ibister and Gagan have failed to remember that, whereas 1860 witnessed a normal growing season, 1870 was a summer of severe drought, when most Ontario farm production indices fell dramatically, only to recover the next year. Moreover by concentrating excessively on wheat production, Dr Gagan has failed to notice the diversification of crops in the 1880s by Peel farmers, a process well underway by 1870. Thus though only 156,000 bushels of barley and 274,000 bushels of oats were grown in Peel in the drought year of 1870, by 1880 fewer farmers had produced 437,000 bushels and 492,000 bushels of each respectively. For barley this was more than double the 1860 figures and for oats it represented a modest four-percent increase. Yet the average production for these grains between 1882 and 1892 was 924,000 and 1,169,000 bushels respectively. Wheat, which had been the mainstay of Peel farmers in the 1850s and 1860s, did not wither as Gagan suggests by 1870, for the 1882-92 average yield was 783,000 bushels, or nineteen percent greater than in 1860, according to the *Annual Report for 1892 of the Bureau of Industries for the Province of Ontario* (Toronto, 1893). Gagan acknowledges the growth of dairying in Peel, but also underestimates its economic importance. All this leads him to overestimate the importance of severe short-run changes in the period 1857-60. It was not a watershed, but a setback, a useful corrective to excessive expectations.

I cannot end without commenting on the inadequacies of the index. We find no reference to "sons" and "daughters", curious in a book partly devoted to the family, and in which both are frequently mentioned. Nor do we find entries for "debt" or "indebtedness", though it forms an important part of Gagan's analysis. Also missing from the index is an entry for the Irish, when in 1852, fully fifty percent of household heads were Irish-born. His treatment of this dominant group accords little with the observations recently made by Dr Akenson (Donald H. Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?", in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, ed.: D. H. Akenson (1982), pp. 204-56). Dr Gagan seems to believe that many were famine Irish, recently arrived in Peel. Yet more probably they were pre-famine Irish, mainly Anglicans and used to land holding, though on a very small scale, at home. The problem seems to be that Dr Gagan is little interested in ethnicity or religious affiliation. A table dealing with this (p. 38) is left undigested and unexplained. A second opportunity was missed when later he discussed elements defining economic improvement and prosperity, though he noted that the Irish were "considerably overrepresented among the least improved families" (p. 106). There he calls the Irish Protestants "Ulstermen", without a shred of evidence about their Irish province of origin. Had the dominant group been French-Canadian immigrants or Eastern European Jews, or other "popular" groups, would they have received such inadequate treatment from a Canadian historian? Dr Gagan has missed an opportunity to say something substantial about a group of enormous importance to nineteenth-century rural Ontario.

Still Gagan has mined a rich seam. His work should be read with Katz's study of Hamilton in mind. Gagan's is a much more satisfying book not only because he knows far more about Ontario than Katz, but because he writes so much better. Together the two represent for Canadian historiography in its English expression an important demarcation point. They render much earlier methodology

obsolete. Fertile imaginations and patient industry, especially among the most inventive, perceptive and literate of Canada's younger historians will soon ensure that both Gagan's and Katz's work, like the first Royal Navy Dreadnaughts, are themselves soon outdated. It is part of the excitement of current historical writing in Canada.

Julian GWYN,
University of Ottawa.

* * *

D. J. HALL. — *Clifford Sifton. Volume I, The Young Napoleon, 1861-1900.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981. Pp. xii, 361.

It is both a strength and frustration of a good historian that he can only write as much about the past as the evidence before him permits. Unlike the creative writer he cannot try to re-create events or circumstances for which he has no reliable evidence. As a result, historical writing tends to be rather uneven in its coverage of the past. Those who created and kept extensive documentary evidence get much more adequate treatment at the hands of the historians than those for whom little documentary evidence exists, and within documentary collections themselves, some aspects of the past are much more fully covered than others. Indeed some very important things may not be mentioned at all in the surviving documentary materials available to the historian. Such is certainly the case with the surviving documentation relating to the life of Sir Clifford Sifton. Professor Hall informs us that when the Sifton papers were deposited in the Public Archives of Canada they had been stripped of all personal and most business correspondence. Clearly this creates serious problems for the historian and biographer, and for his readers, particularly for those readers interested in social history and therefore the personal and business affairs of men like Clifford Sifton.

Professor Hall has written his biography in the only way open to an honest and competent historian. He has discussed those aspects of Sifton's life for which documentation exists, and he remains silent where the evidence is lacking or inadequate. He acknowledges in his preface that his work is of necessity a political biography. One might quibble about the fact that the exact nature of the work should be more clearly indicated in the title as well as in the preface. But the subtitle Professor Hall has chosen clearly refers only to a political reality of Sifton's career.

As a political biography this work has many admirable features and makes important contributions to our understanding of the political history of Western Canada. Professor Hall has meticulously gathered relevant evidence from many collections to provide an excellent and convincing account of Sifton's rather devious methods in acquiring the Manitoba Free Press. Similarly Sifton's role in the highly controversial Manitoba school question, his work in reorganizing the department of the Interior, his organization of the government of the Yukon Territory and of the Liberal Party in Western Canada, are discussed in authoritative detail. No radically new and different interpretations are offered, with the possible exception of the Manitoba Grain Act which Professor Hall has already discussed elsewhere, but a great deal of new and sometimes surprising detail is added. On