

New Approaches in Early American Studies : The Local Community in New England

by J. M. BUMSTED *
and J. T. LEMON

As with most areas of study, that of early America has been undergoing a considerable revolution in the past few years. Such reassessment has not been the sole province of the historian, for economists, sociologists, and geographers have been active as well.¹ Although the new work has not been confined to analysis of the New England region, it has produced the largest share of interesting results there. The bulk of our comments will therefore be directed toward recent research on colonial New England, always the most thoroughly studied region in early America. Most of the new scholarship has emphasized what can be most conveniently described as "social history", with particular emphasis on the local community and the problems associated with it. One result has been to break out of an old reliance on literary evidence, with scholars turning instead to the massive quantities of local official records—land transactions, probates, vital statistics, court proceedings, church and town minutes, and tax assessments. As might be anticipated, the new findings frequently challenge long-standing interpretations.

A separate paper could easily be produced discussing the reason for the shift to social history, particularly on the local level. All that we will attempt here is to sketch briefly the intellectual framework, the methodology, and some of the results of the new studies. The framework has been most commonly described as microcosmic or microstudy, the methodology involves detailed reconstruction and analysis of local and regional communities and their records—frequently with quantitative overtones and now occasionally with the use of computers. The results have provided a good deal of insight into the life patterns of the large number of

* J. M. Bumsted is Assistant Professor of History, McMaster University; J. T. Lemon is Associate Professor of Geography, University of Toronto. An earlier version of this paper was read before the Canadian Association of Geographers, Southern Ontario Division, in February 1968.

¹ For a review of some literature in historical geography, see H. Roy MERRENS, "Historical Geography and Early American History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXII (1965), 529-548.

ordinary individuals who had previously escaped from the gaze of historians dealing with ruling elites or larger questions. This is of considerable importance to any scholar working with historical issues: the new findings have questioned a good many assumptions which have long been part of history's givens; some stimulating new concepts and techniques have been suggested; and both the methodological and substantive revisions have great relevance for anyone interested in the historical enterprise.

The historical study of the local community is, of course, nothing new. Almost every early American town has had its detailed history, usually written in the nineteenth or early twentieth century by an interested local inhabitant; many Canadian communities have been similarly treated.² But the worst of these studies degenerated into blatant filiofetism and ancestor worship, and the best are frequently important only because they have gathered information and reprinted local records since lost, destroyed, or unobtainable. Most local history, unfortunately, is singularly lacking in understanding of larger historical movements and issues, either conceptually or substantively. For this reason it is crucial to distinguish between traditional local history and the new studies which deal with local communities.

Those currently working on the local level have chosen their region or community out of awareness and understanding of the larger historical questions. The chief criterion of selection of particular communities for analysis is usually the completeness of records, an important consideration when studying an era where an enormous bulk of evidence has not been preserved.³ The "microcosmist" is principally interested in producing as detailed and total a reconstruction of the local community as is possible. He is convinced that this is a level of human life which can be meaningfully reconstructed, he believes that this level of action is intrinsically important (even dominant for those involved in it, the vast bulk of

² For Canada, the University of Toronto Press is now publishing a series entitled *Canadian Local Histories to 1950: A Bibliography*. Volume I, edited by William F. E. MORLEY, *The Atlantic Provinces* (Toronto, 1968) is now available. No comparable checklist is available for American local histories.

³ Probably no American colony or state has available as rich and complete a collection of local records (particularly public ones) as Upper Canada before Confederation. Opportunities for microstudy in Upper Canada are virtually unlimited. For a discussion of the use being made in the United States of local sources distinctly inferior to those in Upper Canada, see Walter RUNDELL, JR., "Southern History from Local Sources: A Survey of Graduate History Training," *The Journal of Southern History*, XXIV (1968), 214-226.

the population), and he seeks to test the generalizations of the traditional scholars (the "macrocosmists") in an objective and scientific way.

Such study is open to the criticism levelled against Sir Lewis Namier by Herbert Butterfield that microanalysis overparticularizes to the point where movement and direction in the historical past are lost.⁴ Concentration on the level of activity also may lead to the conclusion that this is the only part of life where the "action" was. Such studies do sometimes tend to question old theses without advancing new ones. It is certainly true that those studying local communities are chary about generalizing from their particular cases, but it does not follow from this either that local study does not or will not produce hypotheses, or that generalizations which cavalierly ignore the contradictory evidence of particular cases are inherently superior. The best of the American microanalysts are aware of the pitfalls. While they would argue that "the events of American history are intrinsically pluralistic in that they take place simultaneously on personal, local, and state levels as well as the general one", and that "the closer the investigator comes to the primary constituents of a phenomenon, the higher the probability of accuracy", they also recognize that "a historical phenomenon is more than the sum total of its manifestations on local levels, just as it is more than the phenomenon as it manifests itself on the general level."⁵

The microstudy of early America probably most familiar to scholars and the general public is Sumner Chilton Powell's *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in American History in 1964.⁶ This is in a sense unfortunate, since Powell's work is not necessarily the best example of the recent scholarly trend. Although he directs himself to most of the important questions of seventeenth-century study—especially the transference of institutions such as landholding patterns and agricultural usage from England to America, and the dynamic of geographic expansion—neither his answers nor his methodology are entirely satisfactory. Powell virtually ignored certain American records (such as land transfers and probates) and

⁴ Herbert BUTTERFIELD, *George III and the Historians* (New York, 1959), pp. 206-213.

⁵ Forrest McDONALD, *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago, 1958), pp. 411-412.

⁶ Published originally by Wesleyan University Press and available in paperback edition from Doubleday Books.

apparently lacked certain others (such as church records), which severely limits his findings. Despite his involvement in English local records, he is not sufficiently familiar with agricultural and agrarian change in England at this time, and he does not consider demographic questions to be of great importance. Work on other New England communities by, for example, Philip Greven on Andover, Massachusetts, Kenneth Lockridge on Dedham, Massachusetts, Darrett Rutman on Boston and the Plymouth Colony, Charles Grant on Kent, Connecticut, and John Demos on Plymouth Colony and Bristol, Rhode Island, is more representative of recent developments than is Powell's on Sudbury.⁷ Because only the studies of Rutman and Grant are readily obtainable in their entirety, let us turn for the moment to them.

One of the most striking features of the work of both Grant and Rutman is their obvious awareness of the larger historical context into which their studies must fit. Rutman, for example, discusses colonial America's first urban centre (Boston) in its formative years, and although he is interested in outlining its development from an agrarian socio-economic unit to a commercial one, he also deals at some length with such critical matters as the role of Puritanism in this development.⁸ He explores the "metropolitan" implications of the growth of Boston and its economic changes, but he focusses on related social and psychological shifts as well. Rutman sees early Boston not simply as an agglomeration of people (or a proto-city) but as a community as well, a focus lacking in too much urban history. Rutman has recently produced a little work on agricultural practices in the seventeenth-century Plymouth Colony, which is a model of techniques of analysis in the absence of detailed

⁷ Charles S. GRANT, *Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town of Kent* (New York, 1961); Darrett B. RUTMAN, *Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (Chapel Hill, 1965), and *Husbandmen of Plymouth: Farms and Villages in the Old Colony, 1620-1692* (Boston, 1967); Philip GREVEN, "Family Structure in Seventeenth Century Andover," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXIII (1966), 234-256, and "Old Patterns in the New World: The Distribution of Land in 17th Century Andover," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CI (1965), 133-148; Kenneth LOCKRIDGE, "The Population of Dedham, Mass., 1636-1736," *Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser., XIX (1966), 318-344, and (with Alan KREIDER), "The Evolution of Massachusetts Town Government, 1640 to 1740," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXIII (1966), 549-574; John DEMOS, "Notes on Life in Plymouth Colony," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXII (1965), 264-286, and "Families in Colonial Bristol, Rhode Island: An Exercise in Historical Demography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXV (1968), 40-57.

⁸ See also James HENRETTA, "Economic Development and Social Structure in Colonial Boston," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXII (1965), 75-92.

records.⁹ He has exploited archaeological reconstruction, local records, a few surviving estate inventories, and the usual literary sources to the limit.

Grant's community of Kent is an eighteenth-century "frontier" township in western Connecticut, and he quite explicitly sets out to test some of the major theses of American history, particularly those connected with the influence of the frontier and the degree of political, economic, and social democracy to be found in the eighteenth century.¹⁰ Kent is a newly-settled community in the direct path of westward expansion which populated North America. The questions he raises and discusses are relevant not only for those studying early New England, for example, but for those interested in early Canada as well. He considers the question of what constituted a subsistence farm, and while his conclusion might be valid only for western Connecticut, some of the techniques are ingenious and, with modification or improvement, could be employed elsewhere. Grant also deals with the problems of motivation for early settlement (discovering that it was neither the poor nor the young who migrated to Kent), local debt, and land speculation (done mostly by residents rather than absentees). He underlines the disparity between the complaints of the Kent citizenry to the Hartford government and what was actually going on, thus casting doubt on most evidence existing in the State archives. Along with those of Rutman, Grant's study is one which no student of new settlements can afford to overlook or ignore.

Among other major recent concerns of students of early America are population trends, family structures, and social (especially sexual) mores. Greven, Lockridge, Demos, and J. Potter (a British scholar) have led the way.¹¹ They have been inspired by the French and English schools of historical demography. In Europe, led

⁹ For a criticism of Rutman's statistical techniques, see Kenneth LOCKRIDGE's review in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXV (1968), 486-487.

¹⁰ Particularly the Turner "frontier" thesis and the Beard "aristocracy-democracy" dichotomy.

¹¹ Greven reviews the subject in "Historical Demography and Colonial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXIV (1967), pp. 438-454. POTTER's article, "The Growth of Population in America, 1700-1860," appears in D. V. GLASS and D. E. C. EVERSLEY, eds., *Population and History; Essays in Historical Demography* (London, 1965), pp. 631-688. For comparison, see J. HENRIPIN, *La Population canadienne au début du XVIII^e Siècle* (Paris, 1954) and an earlier work by Georges LANCLOIS, *Histoire de la Population canadienne-française* (Montréal, 1934).

primarily by Louis Henry of Paris, demographers for nearly two decades have been determining changing rates of population growth during the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, as well as exploring movements of people, birth and death rates, ages of marriages, spacing of births of children, the degree of birth control, fertility variables, infant mortality, and family structure. They have developed two basic statistical techniques: aggregate analysis and family reconstitution.¹² The first is familiar enough; by utilizing available tax lists, church rolls, census returns, and other vital records, the number of persons in a given area can be totalled and data compared over time to ascertain changes in population and the amount of mobility of segments of the population. But this approach does not provide very sharp insight into such matters as birth and death rates, and it may obscure important variations within the totals. So family reconstitution—that is, genealogy without the motives of genealogists—is employed to trace the history (births, deaths, and marriages) of members of particular families through as many generations as possible. Of course, if enough records and money for research are available, this data can be aggregated.

Potter has provided the most ambitious study using aggregate analysis.¹³ Employing a wide variety of data, he has tried to describe comprehensively the birth rates and other variables of population in selected colonies and states up to 1860. Unfortunately, as might be expected, the limitations of the data make his conclusions tentative in the extreme, and point to the difficulty at the present state of investigation of formulating a satisfactory general view. Potter suggests, first, that the rate of natural increase was at its height in the late eighteenth century; second, he argues that fertility was fairly constant throughout the eighteenth century, but declined in the early nineteenth century; finally, he attributes the population spurt toward the end of the eighteenth century to improved health. A major limitation he and other researchers have encountered is the paucity of data on immigration. Because most figures

¹² For a brief review of European studies, see Emmanuel LE ROY LADURIE, "From Waterloo to Colyton," *Times Literary Supplement*, LXV (September 8, 1966), pp. 791-792, and for English studies in particular, consult G. S. L. TUCKER and M. W. FLINN, "Population in History," *Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser., XX (1967), 131-144. Demographic methodology is discussed in E. A. WRIGLEY, ed., *An Introduction to English Historical Demography from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1966).

¹³ For another less sweeping analysis, see Stella H. SUTHERLAND, "Colonial Statistics," *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History*, 2nd Ser., V (1967), 58-107.

on migration to America are virtually "guesstimates", particularly for the eighteenth century, we cannot at the moment be precise about such other variables as natural increase.

Not necessarily more correct in the larger sense but probably more accurate in specifics are the results of microstudies by Lockridge on Dedham and Demos on Plymouth Colony and Bristol (Rhode Island).¹⁴ Lockridge has relied principally on aggregate analysis from local records although he has used some family reconstitution as well to interpret the pattern of population growth over the century beginning with the 1630's. His reconstruction of birth, death, and migratory rates uncovers a large part of the demographic structure and social processes operating in the town. His results most clearly contradict Potter on the question of health. Lockridge sees in Dedham few crises of hunger and disease to halt population growth, which he suggests took place in generational spurts because of the bunching of marriages. A majority of settlers or their children reached marriage age at the same time, and so the number of marriages tended to jump upwards, followed soon after by births. Over the long run, this bunching effect among population cohorts (or generations) should disappear, although it had not in Dedham after the passage of three generations. One other striking conclusion of Lockridge—which agrees with findings by Greven in Andover—is the relative lack of geographical mobility among the population.¹⁵ The result is a rural society much more stable than a good part of England at the same time. Lockridge seems to concur with Greven also that the New England family structure was "modified extended", neither clearly extended (i.e., including a broad range of immediate kin) nor nuclear (i.e., confined to mother, father, and their children).

A recent study by John Demos on Bristol qualifies Lockridge and Greven on stability, and probably reflects the difference between agrarian and commercial-mercantile communities in New England.¹⁶ Demos finds considerable mobility and less stability in mercantile Bristol, particularly when cross-sections of the population of 1689 and 1774 are compared. Demos joins others in emphasizing that the median age of marriages

¹⁴ LOCKRIDGE, "The Population of Dedham, Mass., 1636-1736;" DEMOS, "Notes on Life in Plymouth Colony," and "Families in Colonial Bristol, Rhode Island."

¹⁵ See especially GREVEN's "Family Structure in 17th Century Andover."

¹⁶ This is not a distinction which Demos particularly emphasizes, but one which we feel is of great importance; see later comments in this paper.

was in the mid 20's, a pattern which parallels the European scene and contradicts previous assumptions of early marriages in America.¹⁷ The implications of this finding for long-cherished notions of mobility and frontier expansion are enormous. Demos also supports the long-standing assumption that the average number of children per family (i.e., fertility) was relatively high. But he finds fault with the accepted view that life expectancy was low and that infant mortality rates and those of bearing mothers were extremely high. Here his findings generally agree with those of Lockridge and Greven. A final discovery made by Demos is a relative loosening of sexual mores in the eighteenth century, at least in terms of the numbers of first children born before nine months of marriage. New England would seem to have paralleled Old England in this respect.¹⁸ Like Greven, Demos has called for more study of the family, sexual behaviour, and related matters in the colonial period. More research unquestionably must be done, but the work of historical demographers in Europe, Britain, New England, French Canada, and elsewhere is exciting and worthy of both attention and emulation.

Still other areas of concern to those working in social history are such matters as the division of land, inheritance, field patterns, and rural settlement. We have been accustomed to think in stereotyped terms of the New England village complete with open fields and common set neatly in the midst of a township.¹⁹ This sort of nucleated settlement may have fit the Puritan conception of social order, but Powell, Rutman, Demos, and especially Greven, have suggested that it is a very unstable pattern. Although more study focussing on this question is needed, New

¹⁷ The European situation is discussed in J. HAJNAL, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," Glass and Eversley, eds., *Population in History*, pp. 101-143. The early American pattern, particularly median age for marriage among males of 26 years, appears very similar. For females, median age of marriage was 22.

¹⁸ This phenomenon was discussed some years ago by C. F. ADAMS, "Some Phases of Sexual Morality and Church Discipline in Colonial New England," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd Ser., VI (1891), 497-503, and H. B. PARKES, "Sexual Morality and the Great Awakening," *The New England Quarterly*, III (1930), 133-135, and "Morals and Law Enforcement in Colonial New England," *The New England Quarterly*, V (1932), 431-452. See also Emil OBERHOLZER, *Delinquent Saints: Disciplinary Action in The Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (New York, 1956), pp. 235-241. However different their orientation may be, recent studies have been returning to questions raised by the "Progressive" historians of the earlier years of the century, and moving away from the Puritan studies instituted by S. E. Morison and Perry Miller.

¹⁹ For example, see Conrad M. ARENSBERG, "American Communities," *American Anthropologist*, XVII (1955), 1143-1162, reprinted in ARENSBERG and S. T. KIMBALL, eds., *Culture and Community* (New York, Chicago, and Burlington, 1965), esp. pp. 103-106.

England apparently shifted to the general American pattern of the isolated family farmstead with fenced, contiguous fields, not in the eighteenth century — as was previously assumed — but in the second generation of settlement within townships. Indeed, in some cases, the process of dispersion was strongly apparent in the first decade of settlement.²⁰ Despite the communal restraints of Puritanism, farmers who in England seem to have favoured enclosure were committed to individual ownership and operation in America as well. The family farm held out greater possibilities for individual success than co-operative ventures.²¹ Size of holdings provide a clue; the wide disparity of farm acreages in Greven's Andover and Powell's Sudbury suggests that some were able to take considerable advantage of the general commitment to private entrepreneurialism by achieving quite large acreages. The system of land allotments tended to reinforce this. Instead of emphasizing greater equality and hence the greater likelihood of co-operation, town managers ensured the material success of the affluent by giving them more land at each distribution while allotting proportionally less to the poorer members of the community. Interestingly, some of Sudbury's second and third generations reacted toward these inequalities by establishing the new town of Marlborough, where at least temporarily lands were distributed more evenly.²²

The relationship between settlement patterns, mobility, and land inheritance has not yet been carefully worked out. In support and perhaps explanation of Lockridge's conclusion that few persons moved in or out of Dedham, Greven has pointed out that most young men in Andover preferred to inherit part of the family farm rather than move to the frontier. This would explain marriage at a later age than previously assumed; men do not typically marry until they feel ready to support a household. It has been suggested that New Englanders tended to practice partible inheritance rather than primogeniture.²³ But partible inheritance is disfunctional in the long run; continued division of a farm

²⁰ An earlier hint of this was given in Glenn T. TREWARTHA, "Types of Rural Settlement in Colonial America," *Geographical Review*, XXVI (1946), 568-596.

²¹ See a discussion of this point in Michael CHISHOLM, *Rural Settlement and Land Use* (London, 1962), pp. 73 ff.

²² GREVEN, "Old Patterns in the New World;" POWELL, *Puritan Village*, pp. 171-177.

²³ Donald S. PRITKIN, "Partible Inheritance and the Open Fields," *Agricultural History*, XXXV (1961), 65-69.

among descendants leads to small inefficient units, and seems to contradict the emphasis on individual ownership and material success. However, one of the major motivations for acquisitiveness in terms of land may have been the desire to provide usable farm sizes for one's heirs, and Massachusetts townsmen did find the New World temporarily more amenable to reconciliation of partible inheritance and agrarian entrepreneurialism. While town lands were still available, periodic distributions added to the stock of land in each family. Increased acreages could then permit partition. Lands awarded were exchanged to create contiguous farms, as Greven has shown. In addition, new townships were created and settled.

The process of settlement seems to have been more orderly and communal than individual, and motivated less by religious factors than economic ones. With the exception of a few squatters, most settlers did not go to the frontier to escape the restraints of society, but rather moved with others. The thrust of this communal activity was egalitarian; frontier individualism seems to have meant uncontrolled land-grabbing and acquisitiveness. Sudbury and Kent offer some interesting comparisons in this regard. The picture is confused and much work has yet to be done to clarify these relationships. Nevertheless, it appears clear that we may well have to revise some of our views of New England rural life. How different were New Englanders from, say, Pennsylvanians, in attempting to balance individual aspirations (inheritance, the family farm) and social order (community disposal of public lands and the creation of new rural townships)?²⁴

Although all the scholars noted above are sympathetic to quantitative methods, none have employed particularly sophisticated research techniques in their own research. Perhaps the most ambitious work relying on computer analysis thus far published has been done by William I. Davisson, an economic historian at the University of Notre Dame.²⁵ On some 26,000 IBM cards, Davisson has analyzed 430 estate

²⁴ LOCKRIDGE, "Land Population and the Evolution of New England Society, 1630-1790," *Past and Present*, No. 39 (1968), 62-80; J. T. LEMON, "A Rural Geography of South-eastern Pennsylvania in the Eighteenth Century: The contributions of Cultural Inheritance, Social Structure, Economic Conditions and Physical Resources" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1964), chapters 6 and 7.

²⁵ William I. DAVISSON, "Essex County Wealth Trends: Wealth and Economic Growth in 17th Century Massachusetts," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CIII (1967), 1-52; "Essex County Price Trends: Money and Markets in 17th Century Massachusetts," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CIII (1967), 144-185, 291-342.

inventories in Essex County, Massachusetts, for the years 1640 to 1682. His studies produce a good deal of important information on prices and economic trends in seventeenth-century Essex County (including land prices), and indicate what can be done with machine analysis of such previously intractable and hence virtually unexploited records such as those provided by the probate process. The main thrust of Davisson's interpretation of his results has been to argue that the shift from subsistence-agrarian to commercial took place far earlier in Essex County than had previously been thought possible. He dates the shift to mercantile-commercial at about 1650, only twenty years after initial settlement. This study suggests how new techniques can be helpful in reaching substantive conclusions.

To summarize, microstudies in early America have two dimensions : first, the search for greater accuracy and precision in data, and second, the emphasis on the community study. Part of the quest for accuracy involves aggregate analysis of discrete records, occasionally by means of the computer. So far the records subjected to such rigorous study have been largely vital statistics, tax lists, and estate inventories, although any records can be so treated.²⁶ One of the major difficulties inherent here is extrapolating from specific bodies of records to the society at large. As Kenneth Lockridge has recently pointed out with regard to wills and inventories, these records appear to be biased in favour of urban-commercial interests, and "the researcher into probate documents would do best to confine himself to a discussion of long-term changes *within* the peculiar minority of men who left wills or for whom inventories were recorded."²⁷ How representative any body of records is of the society as a whole must be taken into consideration. This difficulty has been met to some extent by the community study, which utilizes all available data for an organic unit of society. No attempt has been made, despite the richness of the source material, to do comparable work in most regions of Canada, and there exists no Canadian equivalent

²⁶ In addition to those studies already mentioned, see Oberholzer's tabulations of church disciplinary cases in *Delinquent Saints*, pp. 252-262, and Kai Erikson's tabulation and analysis of civil court record in seventeenth-century Essex County in *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York, 1966), pp. 163-181.

²⁷ Letter to the Editor, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXV (1968), 516-517.

of Jackson Turner Main's *Social Structure in Revolutionary America*, which employs such analysis to confront macroscopic questions.²⁸

One of the basic issues with community research is the degree to which the life patterns such studies reveal are subject to the regional variations emphasized by many scholars. Microstudies of communities do not necessarily produce particularistic interpretations; indeed, despite differing political and religious institutions in various colonies of early North America, it now seems likely that daily life for the average settler was reasonably similar everywhere and perhaps not so different from Europe as has often been argued. Nevertheless, community study has produced a good deal of variation of its own, partly because of the uneven availability of records, and partly because of the focus of the particular student. Although a good deal of comparable data has been generated by this method, community studies up to now have de-emphasized comparability in favour of an imaginative reconstruction by the scholar of the totality of the community he has examined.

Because of these certain qualities of uniqueness and uncomparability in the conclusions of most community studies, we need to begin to consider some crucial points of similarity and difference that have been emerging from these works. A new synthesis of developments in early America is clearly required, and while we can hardly produce one in this paper, we do hope to suggest some of the directions this will take. Implicit in most of the new studies or explicit in some to a certain extent, are models for the first few generations of communities in early British North America, especially in New England. In Grant's pioneering study of Kent the model is fairly explicit, and Lockridge has suggested that Dedham and its neighbouring newly-settled communities had a "natural history."²⁹ But models are certainly implicit in the work of Greven, Rutman, Powell, and others.³⁰ Models, as theoreticians point out, have to be simple. They are developed on certain assumptions that are constants. Otherwise, everything degenerates into the unique. All

²⁸ Jackson Turner MAIN, *Social Structure in Revolutionary America*, (Princeton, N.J., 1966).

²⁹ LOCKRIDGE, *The Evolution of a New England Town: The First Hundred Years*, to be published by W. W. Norton & Co., New York, in 1969.

³⁰ For example, see BUMSTED's "Religion, Finance, and Democracy in Massachusetts: The Town of Norton as a Test Case," unpublished paper originally read at the 24th Conference in Early American History, March, 1967.

historians implicitly employ models in their studies, whenever they attempt to advance a thesis or ascribe a general pattern to events or developments. By a process of explicit model-building from available evidence, it may be possible to indicate the outlines of new syntheses. Two models of seventeenth and eighteenth century New England communities emerge from the studies we have reviewed, and these might be applicable elsewhere. Among several points of difference, the basic one between the two models is that one community — the predominantly rural-agrarian — continued to have a persistently high degree of subsistence agriculture, and the other — the urban-mercantile — was subject to rapid commercialization. Andover, Dedham, Sudbury, and Kent represent the former, and Boston, Salem, and Bristol the latter.

In general, new-settled communities in the rural model passed through three "stages" covering three or four generations: fluidity, stabilization, and stagnation.³¹ The first stage began with initial settlement and lasted for a generation of perhaps twenty-five years. This period was characterized by relative availability of inexpensive or free land in large quantities. Despite Puritan social philosophy and control by town managers, these communities were relatively open, and settlers had a sense of innovation and experimentation in forming institutions. First settlers reaffirmed many of the institutions of England (or subsequently New England) with which they were familiar, but they made alterations to suit their circumstances.³² The relative fluidity permitted some to gain in wealth more rapidly than others. But with the coming to local power of the sons of the founding settlers (most if not all native-born and raised), the community achieved stabilization. By this time the best agricultural land had been apportioned, and the availability of land declined as land prices rose. At this point, if the community did not significantly alter its economic patterns and remained fundamentally agrarian with little out-migration, some adjustments had to

³¹ Historians of nineteenth-century American immigration have postulated a three-generation model for minority groups. See M. L. HANSEN, *The Immigrant in American History* (Cambridge, 1941).

³² The New England settlement of Nova Scotia in the 1760's does not fit this model because the model assumes a relative absence of direct interference by the central government. Nova Scotia settlements give all indication of openness in their early history, but the central government quickly imposed strict controls over their freedom of action.

occur. In terms of local political and social practice, the sons consolidated and regularized, and innovation became increasingly difficult and unlikely.

With the coming to power of the grandsons of the first settlers — perhaps fifty years after the founding of the community — stagnation set in, and again if agriculture had not been commercialized to a greater degree or the economy industrialized, population pressure on available land was severe. The result was a process of social polarization and socio-economic discontent which produced a new impulse to found new communities to restore fluidity and opportunity. If the community was unable to throw off its excess population to new settlement, the result was likely to be some sort of socio-economic upheaval, expressed usually but not necessarily in political terms. Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia in the 1670's and Shay's Rebellion in western Massachusetts in the 1780's have been seen as just such upheavals, and it may be possible to apply the model to certain regions during the American Revolution and the Canadian Rebellion of 1837.³³ Socio-economic unrest was frequently associated with marked shifts in economic function (from agrarian to commercial or industrial) as the members of the society sought to adjust to new conditions. Thus the cycle was not likely to repeat itself in older regions, though it might re-appear in newly-settled areas.

The second model of mercantile-urban (or urbanizing) communities was more fluid in the early generations. Social and geographical mobility was more characteristic than in rural communities. Stagnation occurred from time to time, but largely because of external trade conditions, and a key difference between the rural community and the urban was the relationship with the outside world. Because rural communities, at least in New England, had little chance to commercialize their agriculture, developments were internal and relatively unaffected by external conditions; the major factor was natural population increase in generational waves which put pressure on available arable land. On the other hand,

³³ Robert MIDDLEKAUF, ed., *Bacon's Rebellion* (Chicago, 1964), and Grant, *Democracy in Kent*, p. 172 ff. The possibility of such an interpretation for Lower Canada is suggested by implication in W. H. PARKER, "A New Look at Unrest in Lower Canada in the 1830's," *Canadian Historical Review*, XL (1959), 209-217. The model might work in Pennsylvania, but Pennsylvania agriculture probably was more commercialized and people more mobile, though between 1693 and 1800 the rich did increase their share of the wealth in the area. See LEMON and Gary NASH, "The Distribution of Wealth in Eighteenth Century America: A Century of Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1693-1802," *Journal of Social History*, II (1968), 1-24.

mercantile communities by greater involvement in the outside world were subject to irregular cycles of economic prosperity and depression not based on the demographic factor of population expansion in generational spurts.

However tentative and imprecise such models must of necessity be, they open up possibilities for future synthesis and comparative study. Assuming that they are a reasonably accurate (though simple) statement of general developments, they can be used as yardsticks against which to measure future community studies and can also be employed to suggest similarities or differences with other regions or colonies (such as French Canada or Portuguese Brazil). In any case, they are clearly the most significant general patterns which seem to be emerging from community study in New England.