

Shelburne. It is unhistorical for her to complain that male-dominated society two centuries ago was not more accommodating to women.

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Catharine Anne Wilson — *A New Lease on Life: Landlords, Tenants and Immigrants in Ireland and Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994. Pp. xiv, 313.

During the past decade Canadian historians have challenged the assumption that nineteenth-century settlers from Britain were randomly dispersed throughout the British North American countryside. Detailed local studies by Marianne McLean, Bruce Elliott, and others have revealed the importance of chain migration from particular communities in Scotland and Ireland to specific localities in the colonies. Catherine Anne Wilson's *A New Lease on Life* adds another piece to this jig-saw puzzle of pioneer settlement by tracing the migration of over 100 Irish families from the Ards Peninsula on the northern coast of Ireland to Amherst Island in the St. Lawrence River near Kingston. Dismissing the stereotype of the dour, self-assertive, individualistic "Ulster Scot" immigrant, Wilson asserts that "familial and local loyalties were just as important, and sometimes more so, as individual gains" (p. 5). Indeed, the two factors were inextricably intertwined: "Group solidarity promoted success in Canada as credit, jobs, shelter, and emotional support could all be had within the community of one's friends and relatives" (p. 5).

This study's most original feature, however, is its questioning of another commonly held assumption, namely that British immigrant settlers, fleeing the oppression of parasitical landlords, aspired above all to the independent status of landowners. Wilson argues that the practice on Amherst Island of renting land holdings from an absentee Irish landlord did not represent an anomalous or atavistic old world transfer to the new world frontier. Tenancy actually represented a pragmatic means for newcomers with little investment capital to become established. According to the 1848 census, a surprising 45 per cent of landholders in Upper Canada rented land. This was clearly a transitional phenomenon, however, for the 1871 census suggests that the ratio of tenants had declined to 15 per cent.

As its subtitle suggests, this study is about landlords and tenants in Ireland as well as in Canada. The evangelical Lord Mount Cashell and his successor as landlord, Major Robert Perceval Maxwell, were major landowners in Ireland as well as influential social and political figures in their own right. Their 21,000 acres on Amherst Island were a relatively minor concern for both men. Mount Cashell appears to have had some grandiose dynastic, patriotic, and religious ideas about the island's development, but he failed to organize migration from his own overcrowded estates. If the impecunious Mount Cashell thought of the island primarily as a financial investment, the financially astute Maxwell also took particular pains to ensure that his investment in it returned a profit. Even Maxwell was not a particu-

larly oppressive landlord, for he deliberately set the rents at a low level with long-term leases so that his tenants would be encouraged to invest in improvements and eventually purchase the land.

The most interesting part of this study from my perspective is Wilson's demonstration that the boundary between ownership and tenancy was far from distinct even under the British system of freehold tenure. She discusses in detail the Irish concept of "tenant right" which allowed tenants to sell their improvements or remaining leases, thereby gaining the full increased value of their leaseholds. The landlords were consequently left with only the fruits of the annual rent which, in the case of the commonly held long-term leases, would represent only a small fraction of the property's value. It was the attempt to limit this customary practice by several landlords on the Ards Peninsula (particularly Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada from 1872 to 1878), which helped to foster the migration to Amherst Island.

Furthermore, the custom was transferred to the island, where a major incentive to renting land was the money to be made from escalating tenant-right values. Between 1835 and 1855 rents remained at £15 per hundred acres while land values increased eightfold from £100 to £800. The three recorded cases of tenant right show that the sum exchanged could represent nearly the full assessed value of the property. The persistence of this custom helps to explain why Maxwell was eager to sell his land outright once the tenants had improved it, going so far as to offer them the same mortgage rate as they had been paying in rent. An alternate strategy would have been to raise the rents and shorten the leases once population pressure on the land had increased, but Maxwell realized that this was not a viable option as long as the North American frontier remained open.

In the final analysis, then, this excellent case study (which also includes a wealth of valuable information on rural society and culture in Ireland and Canada) has not shaken my belief that immigrants came to North America primarily to establish a greater measure of independence and control over their own lives by eventually acquiring title to a piece of land. Wilson questions whether land ownership was important to the immigrants from Ards but she also notes that most of the original settlers on Amherst Island moved away to purchase land elsewhere. Tenancy may have been commonplace in North America, but the findings in this study suggest that even where tenant right was tacitly acknowledged settlers conceived of renting as a temporary strategy on the route to proprietorship.

I also remain somewhat sceptical about Wilson's implication that the tenants of Amherst Island ultimately benefited from the tenancy system. Mount Cashell did upgrade roads, build two piers, and operate a general store and forge, as well as send out a surgeon and clergyman. But he was also rewarded with an increase in property value from the purchase price of £10,000 in 1835 to £80,000 22 years later, representing an annual return of nearly 10 per cent. Likewise, Maxwell did advance \$13,708 in personal loans and \$154,988 in mortgages, all at comparatively low rates of interest and flexible terms. His profits were invested in Kingston and area mortgages and provincial debentures, providing an annual return by 1895 of over \$21,000, or more than three times what his rental income had been. Whether

the contributions these two men made to the island's economy matched the capital they drained from it is open to question. Perhaps the best that can be said for the tenancy system is that, like its seigneurial counterpart in French Canada, it could provide an efficient means of colonizing a new land, though the experience of Prince Edward Island suggests that this was not always the case. While he never visited North America, Maxwell himself was astute enough to appreciate the long-term limitations of the landlord's role in the colonies. A good deal more research will certainly be needed before we gain a clear idea of the role that tenancy played in Canadian rural society, but Wilson's study represents an excellent start in that direction.

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Brian P. Clarke — *Piety and Nationalism: Lay Voluntary Associations and the Creation of an Irish-Catholic Community in Toronto, 1850–1895*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993. Pp. xii, 340.

This work by Brian P. Clarke, taken from his doctoral dissertation, was awarded the Catholic Historical Association's John Gilmary Shea Prize. A well-researched and documented study of the Irish Catholics in Toronto, it focuses on two of the most important issues in the history of the nineteenth-century Irish: religion and nationalism. The author contends that the consensus among most historians, that religious renewal emanated from the Church hierarchy and orders, casts the laity into an acquiescent mould. Clarke sets out to demonstrate the vitality of Toronto's Irish immigrants who, while adopting a subculture of religious identity, exhibited a strong initiative that supported the group's social interaction, independent of clerical influence.

Clarke provides insight into the conditions encountered by the Irish immigrants, their reaction to the devotional renewal that followed, the subsequent emergence of devotional organizations, and the outgrowth of national associations. One wonders, however, how much Clarke was inspired in his perspective by the work of Emmet Larkin on the rise of devotional organizations in Ireland.

The chapters on Irish nationalism are erudite. Of particular note is the concept that the clergy's reluctance to participate fully in advancing the cause of national organizations promoted lay leadership in associations that became disassociated from, if not confrontational to, the Catholic Church. One exemplary organization Clarke examines in great detail is the Hibernian Benevolent Society, which had its heyday in the 1860s. Closely aligned with the Fenian movement and denounced by both the Church and the Canadian government, it subsequently declined. Clarke also gives some consideration to the various organizations that replaced the Hibernian Benevolent Society. These societies were more moderate, no longer radical in philosophy, and tolerated some ideological diversity, but above all they forged closer ties with the Church and espoused constitutional nationalism.