LITERACY, SCHOOLING, AND FAMILY REPRODUCTION IN RURAL ONTARIO AND QUEBEC

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Introduction

During the past twenty years, a central ambition of researchers in Canada has been to analyze the history of education in terms of social change. The result is a long list of works which, as observers have noted, brought educational history into the mainstream of socio-historical research.[1] However, historians of education in the 1970s and early 1980s faced formidable research obstacles. When they looked to situate their topics within the larger historical context, they often found very few relevant studies on important topics such as immigration, settlement, economic change, and social formation.[2] The paucity of such studies inspired some scholars such as Michael Katz to launch major projects of social history but the pressure to undertake contextualized research was so great that most educational historians used whatever studies were already available in an effort to go beyond the traditional internalist approach. Moreover, when no relevant research on a particular topic could be found for Canada, scholars imported findings from other times and places in the belief that generalized patterns of thought and behaviour characterized the social history of countries such as Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and to a lesser extent, France.

The decision to accept the available socio-historical studies on Canada and to complement this literature with research from elsewhere is certainly understandable, and was probably unavoidable at the time. From the vantage point of the late 1980s, however, the resulting interpretations of educational change deserve careful scrutiny. Indeed, recent studies have called into question many of the conclusions of earlier work on Canada's social history. New research has challenged the established literature on crucial processes such as immigration, urbanization, industrialization, capitalism, and proletarianization. In addition, this research discourages the assumption that findings from one setting can be assumed to be relevant to another; rather, scholars are now emphasizing the need to respect the integrity of each historical context. A central question for historians of education thus concerns the ways in which current research findings in social history undermine the available interpretations of educational change. To what extent are these interpretations based on conclusions about historical context which no longer seem valid?

This paper addresses this question by way of a comparative discussion of recent research on rural society in Ontario and Quebec. The focus is in keeping with an increasing recognition of the importance of rural history not simply as the background to urban industrialization but as a continuing part of social formation, the predominant one for most of the population as late as the early 1900s.[3] During the past decade, researchers have rewritten this rural history by

reconstructing the changing experience of particular regions such as the Saguenay, the Mauricie, Peel County, and the Ottawa Valley. The studies now available challenge the familiar image of a fading and uninteresting countryside easily undermined by metropolitan forces as early as the 1840s. Rather, historians have discovered dynamic historical processes with considerable diversity across time and space. Rural society was neither homogeneous nor passive. Even more importantly, perhaps, rural areas were expanding in Ontario and Quebec throughout the decades when public school systems were established and literacy rates rose dramatically. General interpretations about educational change are plausible only if they relate this change to the character of rural as well as urban society.

Recent work suggests that the concept of family reproduction is an appropriate way of understanding the ambitions and experiences of rural residents in the nineteenth century. This concept emphasizes that individuals lived their lives as parts of family and kinship networks which often extended across North America as well as over the oceans. The older notion that frontier conditions engendered individualism is not entirely supported by the recent findings of strong family and kin attachments associated with economic, ethnic, and social bonds. A central component of family reproduction which relates directly to educational history involves the process of inheritance. Surprisingly, this phenomenon has been largely ignored by educational historians. Nonetheless, specific studies on inheritance in Ontario and Quebec now permit at least tentative speculation about the complex relationship between the changing context of family reproduction and the educational history of rural society. This evidence is especially revealing of the ways in which the ideology of families reflected the social meaning of age and gender.[4] Males and females experienced quite differently the process of transmission between generations, and not surprisingly, evidence from wills indicates both the reality of and potential for conflict among family members. In this sense, the changing role of schooling within family reproduction must be understood as part of the larger social reconstruction of individual identity.

It should be emphasized that recent socio-historical research not only discourages the importing of conclusions from one setting to another but also questions the value of generalized comparisons between Quebec and Ontario as a whole. In fact, studies now show that major differences characterized the evolution of rural society across regions within both Quebec and Ontario. The character of Ontario as a collection of regions is less acknowledged than in the case of Quebec although research findings clearly point to a similar internal diversity. Eastern Ontario is not simply another example of Peel County any more than the Saguenay is another version of the Eastern Townships. In this sense, evidence from Ontario and Quebec permits considerable exploration of the diversity and similarity of recent findings in both rural and educational history.

Unfortunately, the research basis of this exploration is not similar; more detailed study has been undertaken on rural Quebec while the educational historiography is presently richer for Ontario. The following discussion reflects these characteristics while also suggesting possible directions for future research. The major challenge is to respect the historical complexity apparent in recent research while also offering a way to understand its origins. An examination of educational change in the context of family reproduction in rural Ontario and Quebec may help to respond to this challenge.

Education, Rural Society, and Family Reproduction in Ontario

Two assumptions related to rural Ontario have characterized historical debate about the origins of public schooling in Ontario. First, scholars from various vantage points have agreed that rural society was in crisis or at least in decline for most if not all of the Ryersonian years. In the earlier studies of the 1970s, rural Ontario was considered largely irrelevant to the central story of educational change as directed by urban school promoters. Historians viewed public schooling as an urban idea which emerged from a more general "urban outlook" characteristic of mid-nineteenth-century social leaders despite the numerical predominance of the rural population around them.[5] These leaders, it was said, perceived the new importance of urban, industrial growth, and thus they promoted school systems as a way to facilitate this growth and to maintain social stability during the transition. While historians of education certainly did not all agree on the details of this perspective, most early studies did focus on cities as scholars explored the relationship between patterns of schooling and literacy, and urban, industrial development.[6]

Quite quickly, however, scholars found that even Canada's major cities did not experience the industrial revolution until the end of the formative school-building decades. Hamilton proved to be a commercial city with manufactories as late as 1861; the first signs of industrialization only appeared in the following years.[7] Similarly, research on Toronto identified the 1870s as the time of industrial change while other cities remained fully commercial with few factories and little automation.[8] Educational historians responded to these research findings by re-situating patterns of literacy and schooling within the context of a wage-labour economy related to the development of capitalism. This revised interpretation maintained an urban focus but placed new importance on proletarianization. This process was considered to be well under way by the mid-nineteenth century as a result of land shortage and the cultural baggage of new immigrants who gravitated to cities. School promoters were now said to be inspired by deep anxiety over the social implications of increasing numbers of propertyless labourers who lacked the appropriate *mentalité* for the new social formation. Public schooling thus aimed to socialize the future generations of these proletarians especially with respect to new definitions of "time, work, and discipline."

The second major assumption characteristic of studies on the social history of education in Ontario concerns immigration, especially the rapidly increasing Irish population. The basic argument of educational historians has involved the ways in which poverty-stricken and ill-prepared Irish immigrants descended on Ontario cities in the mid-nineteenth century, thereby threatening not only the established social order but also future prospects for "improvement." Depicted as hanging on the bottom rungs of the urban hierarchy,[9] these immigrants were identified as the principal targets of school promotion in the mid-nineteenth century. This image was not only consistent with the general emphasis on cities as the real focus of Ontario's educational history but it also enriched this interpretation by adding the ambition of acculturation.

Studies since the early 1980s, however, have completely undermined these socio-historical assumptions concerning the formative decades of public schooling in Ontario. The most surprising evidence concerns the state of rural society during the mid-nineteenth century. Rather than being in the process of decline, rural Ontario was prospering throughout the period. Rather than decreasing as a part of the occupational structure, the relative importance of farmers was, in fact, growing. While the absolute number of propertyless labourers was increasing, their *relative* importance was in fact decreasing during the 1860s. While a greater and greater population was indeed placing pressure on the land, the dream of independent farming was still realistic even in central Ontario as late as the early 1870s. In other words, Ontario's social formation was far removed from that of even an emerging urban, industrialized society during the Ryersonian years. Moreover, the evidence does not support the view that public schooling took root in the midst of a burgeoning wage-labour economy. In fact, Ontario's rural society not only continued to be based on successful independent farming but also was growing at least as fast as urban areas throughout the 1840-1871 period.[10]

Similarly, recent studies have rejected the established portrayal of Irish immigration to Ontario. Many of these immigrants did come with few material possessions but they were by no means ignorant and incapable. In addition, and perhaps most surprisingly, these immigrants did not get trapped in cities; the vast majority sought and achieved land for the establishment of farm households. The Irish farmers were no less successful than any other ethnic group in rural Ontario, and there is no evidence that they failed to meet the challenge of their new agricultural environment. The image of destitute Irish immigrants huddling on the bottom of urban society can no longer be considered appropriate for mid-nineteenth-century Ontario. Rather, the Irish must be recognized as the largest ethnic group in Ontario's predominant petit-bourgeois and rural social formation. An overall emphasis on their victimization by other groups appears to be very misleading. Indeed, the Irish immigrants may have constructed as much as used the schools of mid-nineteenth century Ontario. The Irish immigrants certainly cannot be considered the major educational target of a culturally foreign institution.[11]

In this way, recent socio-historical studies encourage educational researchers to reconsider the relationship between educational change and rural society in mid-nineteenth-century Ontario. Arguments about urban growth, industrialization, immigration, and a developing wage-labour economy must be considered secondary to the more important explanation of rural patterns of education. The establishment of mass education in Ontario occurred in the context of continuing agricultural expansion, the increasing relative importance of property-owning farmers, and successful rural settlement by the majority of immigrants including those from Ireland. Cities such as Toronto and Hamilton were certainly growing; the transition from manufactories to factories had begun by the later years of the Ryersonian period; and the absolute number of wage-labourers was increasing. However, these trends do not represent the principal characteristics of the period. Ontario was not Massachusetts.

A point of departure for re-interpreting educational change in terms of the predominant petit-bourgeois and rural social formation of the Ryerson years concerns patterns of school participation and literacy. In all the studies on these patterns, historians have been consistently surprised to find that going to school and learning to read and write were considered rather important in rural communities. Overall school enrolment was fairly similar between rural and urban areas although fewer children in the countryside continued in school after they became teenagers. In addition, daily attendance in rural areas was closely linked to the seasonal labour requirements of agriculture. The result was that the total amount of formal schooling received by rural children was less than that of their urban counterparts although the proportion of youths who received some formal instruction was similar for the two groups. Throughout the decades of the mid-nineteenth century this proportion steadily increased, so that even before compulsory attendance laws the vast majority of Ontario children in rural as well as urban areas went to school for at least a few years.[12]

Studies have also shown that school participation was directly related to a socially and ethnically differentiated rural society. The children of merchants and other village leaders attended more often than those of independent farmers who, in turn, were in classrooms in greater proportions than the offspring of tenant farmers and labourers. This pattern appears to have been related to the different labour needs of different families. Similarly, school participation often depended upon whether or not the ethnic identity of the teacher was considered appropriate to instruct the children of specific parents. Certain studies suggest that religious affiliation and, in some regions, language determined the extent to which teachers were considered appropriate to instruct various children. While ethnically based patterns of settlement meant that a single teacher could sometimes reflect the identity of most potential pupils in a given area, the creation of official school sections often disrupted this pattern by attempting to force together children of different backgrounds. This attempt did not always succeed as some parents sought alternatives including not sending their children to any school.[13]

The general impression that emerges from the school attendance patterns of rural areas suggests that many parents and children were increasingly interested in formal education but that their participation reflected both the importance of other priorities and the material possibilities of their situations. Rural families actively calculated the ways in which local schools responded to their own needs; parents did or did not send their children for their own reasons and as a result of their own circumstances. The result was a great diversity of educational experience although schooling was certainly not a high priority for the majority of families seeking agricultural security.

This evidence is also consistent with recent findings of educational conflict and controversy in villages and townships. Parents not only contested the appointment of teachers on linguistic or religious grounds but they also paid attention to the nature of classroom activities extending from the selection of books to sexual harassment.[14]

Perhaps the most surprising finding related to education in rural society concerns literacy rates. While very little research has yet been undertaken, the available studies indicate that rural communities had achieved at least basic literacy levels to the same extent and perhaps more than urban areas. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, the vast majority of rural residents considered themselves able to read and write. This proportion increased so that by the end of the Ryersonian period, almost all rural adults claimed to be literate.[15] Significantly, no satisfactory explanation has yet been offered for this pattern. How and why did rural society achieve basic levels of literacy so early and to such an extent?

Taken together, the evidence on school participation and literacy encourages analysis of rural educational change at the level of families. Three aspects of family reproduction are particularly relevant to this discussion. First, researchers have now shown that fertility was declining from at least 1851. Rural families were consciously limiting the number of their children in response to changing circumstances in the second half of the nineteenth century. Second, the age of marriage for men and women increased during the 1850-1880 period. The increase contributed to decreasing family size and altered the process of family formation. Rural parents thus had fewer children but they were responsible for them for a greater number of years. From the point of view of children, they had fewer siblings, and a longer time before their own establishment of households.[16]

In turn, these demographic changes directly affected the process of inheritance which is a central mechanism of family reproduction.[17] Very little research has yet been done on this topic in Ontario but the limited evidence now available supports the hypothesis that schooling became an increasingly important component of the strategies of transmission between generations. Most recently, the research of Bruce Elliott suggests that this component was not new but rather a familiar part of early nineteenth-century wills. He cites numerous examples of children receiving "cash and an education" as their inheritance. For instance, the will of George Clarke, who died in 1839, included detailed specifica-

tions about the education of his children. Such concern was generally expressed for both sons and daughters in keeping with the ideology of parity. Elliott suggests that attention to the education of girls especially increased after mid-century as the traditional expectation that daughters would marry farmers became less certain. One will in 1877 provided daughters with $80 and schooling for at least six months per year to age fifteen. After 1870, Elliott observes that it became "fairly common [in wills] to insist that daughters receive an education."[18]

Increasing attention to education as part of inheritance thus appears to have become particularly important to rural families who did not want to migrate away from established areas in order to aid family cohesion. The demographic adjustments of lower fertility and an increased age of marriage relieved some of the pressure on these families but the tension between a reluctance to subdivide land and a commitment to all children continued to grow in established regions. In this context, the traditional recognition of the importance of education for certain heirs expanded inexorably despite the continued prosperity and growth of rural society. For the Ryersonian years, this expansion was steady but slow since the ambition of independent farming remained realistic for most of the population. The school promoters were thus correct in perceiving only a modest level of popular enthusiasm for schooling. They did not appreciate the more important fact that changing demographic and social conditions were, indeed, encouraging families to extend provisions for schooling within their strategies of inheritance.

The increasing importance of education within the process of family reproduction suggests that literacy and schooling were defined by rural families in terms of the practical advantages which they might give to the future pursuit of material security by their children. The association of education with cash compensation for not receiving land implies that parents believed that the future well-being of certain offspring depended upon formal training. In this sense, the connection for boys between the decline of apprenticeship and the growth of schooling may be stronger than generally assumed in recent research. Quebec scholars have used notarial records to examine apprenticeship in detail but very little research has been done on the system in Ontario. Clearly, the nature of preparing for different occupations evolved in distinct ways during the nineteenth century with apprenticeship remaining strong in some trades and declining in others. Parents could not have fully appreciated the character of this pattern but there may have been an increasing sense that some formal instruction would be of general value to their sons' future productive possibilities. By studying the changing nature of apprenticeship in Ontario, educational historians can help clarify the ways in which parents came to view literacy and schooling in the traditional terms of preparing young males for trades.

A similar interpretation of the practical motivations behind popular support for education can be offered in the case of daughters since the probate records reveal a recognition that teaching was becoming one of the most important paid positions for young single women. In the context of an increasing average age at marriage, being able to seek such positions became more and more relevant

for females both to individual security and the process of family formation. However, as with apprenticeship, research is needed on the changing character of dowries, and particularly on the ways in which education evolved as an element of preparation for marriage. The hypothesis that the traditional provision of household furnishings and perhaps livestock for brides slowly gave way to inheritances of "cash and education" calls for a great deal of further research on its extent and rationale.[19]

In emphasizing the extent to which parents viewed education in terms of the future material security of their children, the evidence from inheritance practices offers a different perspective on the role of the moral, cultural, and political ambitions of school promoters in explaining why the ability to read and write, and school participation, became characteristic features of Ontario society. Whatever support families gave to public schooling during the formative decades of the system appears to have been related to their own "projects" in the face of changing material circumstances as well as to the "project" of elite school promotion. The fact that education increased as a priority but did not become a dominant familial concern reflected the evolving demographic and social conditions of the Ryersonian years. More and more parents did decide to provide formal education for their children but only to a limited extent and only when other responsibilities had been met. Over time, the role of education within the equation of family reproduction became increasingly important but for reasons quite distinct from those articulated by people such as Ryerson.

This interpretation, it should be emphasized, does not question the agency of school promoters in defining the new terrain of formal schooling. Rather, it emphasizes the diversity of projects behind the construction of mass schooling. Attitudes toward formal education in nineteenth-century Ontario should therefore not be evaluated simply in terms of the ambitions of those in official power. Unfortunately, the character and variety of educational projects as they developed among women, men, and children in different social, ethnic, and regional groups remain largely unexplored at least partly because Ontario's public school system continues to be often seen (despite the growth of social history) as "The House that Ryerson Built."[20] However, this process of construction only becomes understandable if it can be related to the evolving context of popular experience.

One apparent weakness of this perspective involves the fact that parents ensured that almost all children became literate and received at least some schooling despite their anticipation that only a minority of young men and women would not achieve independent farming even in 1871. Given this context, parents might be expected to have adopted a system where certain children were prepared for certain futures. Interestingly, though, factors such as birth order have not been found to have determined school attendance patterns. The family farm tended to be passed to the youngest son who characteristically came of age when the father was prepared to give up this responsibility, but otherwise strategies of family reproduction appear to have treated children in surprisingly similar ways given the larger context of gender and age inequalities. In this sense, the usual decision

to send all children to school for a few years is consistent with the ideology of relative parity evident in inheritance practices. Parents did not try to control completely which children would follow which paths; in the case of sons, for example, the identities of those in the majority who would farm and those in the minority who would pursue non-agricultural occupations was only specified as they became young adults. Bruce Elliott's research even suggests that parents could sometimes accept the particular preferences of their children as individuals; for example, one father gave his daughter the option of attending Normal School. Even rural craftsmen did not always insist that sons continue the trade. Samuel Hawkshaw, an Ottawa Valley shoemaker, had seven sons, three of whom became carpenters, two blacksmiths, and two who may have farmed or entered another trade. Presumably, the sons' decision to avoid shoemaking reflected their own orientations, and was accepted by their father whose most important concern was not occupational continuity but rather the transmission of material security. At the same time, parents may have retained more influence over their children by not fully specifying at an early stage what was planned for them. Thus, the logic of supporting some education for all children may have related to the advantage of postponing decisions about the exact details of inheritance. This relationship would help resolve the apparent paradox of quite universal and limited education in a prosperous rural society in which independent farming was the dominant activity.

This stylized description of the ways in which recent socio-historical research suggests that education came to be situated within the process of family reproduction does not do justice to the complexity of the relationship. The myriad methods through which different families articulated the general goal of security and continuity for the next generation reflected an array of distinctions within the evolving social formation. Material circumstances and cultural traditions specified the parameters of all decisions about the timing of marriage, family size, inheritance, and education. Within these parameters, however, families devised an imaginative variety of ways to seek stability in the inherently unstable world of capitalism. Not surprisingly, these strategies defy easy categorization. In maintaining the ideal of land while also marrying later, beginning to limit family size, and investing somewhat more in education, families in Ontario were attempting to grapple with the challenge of reproduction in a society undergoing transformation.

A Case Study from Quebec: The Saguenay Region

A comparative perspective on nineteenth-century Ontario is provided by the evolution of the Saguenay region, situated in the northeastern part of the province of Quebec. Despite the cultural differences which set them apart from each other, in both rural regions the dynamics of family reproduction weighed heavily on the development of literacy and primary education. However, in comparison with most Ontarian regions, the Saguenay experienced a different pattern of settlement

and economic development. Moreover, the coexistence of heterogeneous groups in Ontario certainly had various effects on the development of the school system, which was not the case in the Saguenay where the population has always been made up of at least 95% officially Catholic francophones. The Saguenay, not unlike several other regions of Quebec, also did not truly begin to undergo its schooling revolution until the middle of the twentieth century. Thus, a comparative discussion of the Saguenay example offers an excellent opportunity to begin exploring the internal relationships which arise among social and economic as well as cultural characteristics in a given setting.

While the Saguenay's educational "revolution" only dates from recent decades, the preceding century was marked by educational developments which have now been measured in terms of literacy and school attendance. The study of the signatures appended to the 83,937 marriage certificates of the Saguenay over the period stretching from 1842 to 1971 reveals uniform upward momentum in literacy, starting with the decade between 1862 and 1871. The proportion of men and women able to sign their own marriage certificates at that time was 25% as opposed to 8.1% in the preceding decade. The percentage rose to 50% at the turn of the century and reached virtually 100% between 1922 and 1931. With the exception of the 1842-1861 period, urban or semi-urban figures are not higher than those for rural parishes, as has been already noted for nineteenth-century rural Ontario. The margin between men and women, however, is clear-cut; up to the period 1911-1931, women were more literate than men both in town and country.

The use of signatures on marriage certificates does not allow for analysis beyond 1922-1931, since the measure reaches its theoretical maximum value of 100% during that period. A second, more refined index has been developed by SOREP researchers which takes into account the proportion of signature-bearing certificates of any sort (baptisms, marriages, burials) contained in a family file. With the help of this index, it has been possible to extend the analysis of literacy up to 1971, and to confirm the progressive rise of literacy throughout the period under investigation, before as well as after the decade between 1922 and 1931.[21] A slight difference between rural and urban rates has been discovered at the beginning of the century, but it disappears after 1931.

For the years 1871, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, and 1931, Canadian census figures make it possible to estimate illiteracy, that is to say, the percentage of individuals unable to read or write. For each of the above-mentioned years, women once again show better literacy with a lead of between 3 and 11 percentage points over men. These data, moreover, confirm the gradual advance made by literacy in the Saguenay (except for the decade between 1921 and 1931; however, one suspects here an artifact of the data source).

As regards primary education, data derive mainly from census figures as well as reports presented by the "Surintendant de l'Instruction Publique" for the province of Quebec.[22] To begin with, statistical tables of enrolment figures for the 5-24 age group display a slow, almost regular rise between 1847 and 1956,

at which date the general reform of the whole school system (actually initiating the Quiet Revolution) caused the enrolment rate to soar right up until 1971. As far as the Saguenay region is concerned, this phenomenon can be ascribed mainly to external factors operating at the level of Quebec society. Beyond the number of enrolments, however, an examination of the duration of school attendance discloses another, no less considerable change. Until 1931, more than 90% of the children who attended school were concentrated between the first and fourth years (from grades 1 to 4). The break in the pattern appears as of 1936 when, in the space of a scant ten years, the percentage drops by 25 points, and a growing number of students advanced to secondary school and beyond. This second shift is so much the more remarkable when viewed in the light of the fact that it occurs well before the establishment, in 1943, of mandatory school attendance for 7-14 year olds. According to all evidence, it must be attributed to changes unfolding within Saguenay society itself. Furthermore, school attendance figures reveal a repetition of the gap between boys and girls in favour of the latter, at all events until 1941-1945; as of that date, the gap was reversed. It is worth drawing attention to the striking coincidence of this third change with the preceding one. Finally, considering the percentage of enrolment, it is noteworthy that there is no significant difference between cities and the countryside, even for the period covering the years 1931-1966 (54.2% and 52.1% respectively).[23]

It is obviously necessary to place these findings in a wider context so as to bring out their specificity. The available data for all Quebec, however, do not allow for carrying comparisons very far. With regard to literacy, the indices for the Saguenay appear to be lower, over the same periods of time, than those which were calculated for Saint-Ours, Trois-Rivières, Rivière-du-Loup, and the city of Québec.[24] These indices are also lower than those based on a sampling of marriage certificates taken over the St-Lawrence valley countryside.[25] Lastly, and as expected, they also reveal distinct differences between anglophones and francophones. Such comparisons are, nevertheless, misleading given the fact that they involve populations which are markedly heterogeneous as regards their stage of economic development and, in particular, the age of their settlement. In keeping with the central idea of this article, such characteristics must be strictly controlled if comparisons are to be enlightening.

For the same reason, it is difficult to interpret the comparative data relating to the disparity between men and women. According to most European data, this disparity favours the men. In Quebec the situation is not so clear-cut, where some cities and rural parishes duplicate the Saguenay model while others do not. In certain cases too, the divergence may undergo a succession of inversions from one decade to the next within the same parish. Clearly this disparity between models may be imputed to local contingencies and structures, as yet unknown to us, thus preventing a more precise comparison.

In sum, with respect to school attendance, as well as literacy, the women of the Saguenay were distinctly in the lead over the men, at least up until the decade between 1936 and 1945. Likewise, until that period of time, urban and rural

populations displayed quite similar behaviour. Moreover, the analysis of school attendance records makes it possible to bring out two simultaneous changes which are particularly revealing with respect to the development of rural society. Between 1936 and 1945, curricula vitae began to extend much further than primary school, while the enrolment rate for boys began to prevail over that of girls. In other respects, the attempt to relate the Saguenay data to evidence from other regions cannot be taken too far since the comparative findings cannot be placed in their proper economic and social contexts.

The aggregate educational trends of the Saguenay are directly linked to the organization of rural society, to the stage of economic development, and especially to the demands imposed by the family reproduction system.[26] To begin with, it must be emphasized that the rural context of the Saguenay between 1840 and 1930 was a settlement of a frontier society. An abundance of land to be cleared for cultivation encouraged immigration after 1840 when the region was typified by a lack of formal institutions and minimal formalized social organization outside the family. Somewhat by way of a substitute, the family group played a leading collective role. It became at one and the same time a place of mutual assistance and a root of power, a source of labour force, and a means of gaining access to and control of land ownership. Not surprisingly, the population grew rapidly, due especially to a very high fertility rate.

The Saguenay was a remote region, a fact which hampered the development of agricultural markets and entailed an acute scarcity of currency. The general rule as to landholding was the settling of independent farmers spurred on by relatively easy access to farm ownership. Prior to 1920-1925, there did not exist a large enough industrial and urban structure which could have acted as an outlet for the rural economy. In this context, a characteristic system for handing down family property arose, but far from being exclusive to the Saguenay, numerous examples of this system can be found in settlement societies. The system retained elements of the three well-known European systems (multi-heir, stem-family, community). Considering the low cost of uncleared land, parents managed to set up three sons out of every four as farmers, while their daughters were married off in a similar ratio to young men settled elsewhere.

The process by which property was handed down started long before the head of the family retired. It was set in motion upon the marriage of the firstborn children, and after going through several stages it came to an end with the death of the last surviving parent, whether father or mother. It followed that the extent of the family assets or landed property was subject to a succession of fluctuations depending on the number and size of bequests. Moreover, most of the children who had been established by their parents tended to reside close by. Taken all together, these practices provided a means for achieving some vital goals: having grown old, the parents could depend on the help of their children; a concern for equality tended to sacrifice the sustained growth of the family asset to the need for establishing a maximum number of children; the original property owned by the parents at the outset remained more or less intact in spite of a succession of

additions and depletions, and it formed the core of an *ad hoc* bequest once the parents had retired; and lastly, the system ensured the upholding of family ties as well as the continuity of the line of descent.

There were setbacks, to be sure, and failures, which were most frequently dealt with by emigration from the Saguenay or from the province itself. Most of the families that persisted in the region conformed to the model just described, though this did not always entail resorting to the same strategies. One common approach involved what can be called "reallocation."[27] In the Saguenay, the first settlement parishes were founded eastward around Baie des Hahas. As a result of immigration and natural growth, the best lands were soon taken. Several families in the third generation were unable to provide for the establishment of their children due to an increase in the price of land. These families were well supplied with manpower but lacking in financial assets. Reallocation for these families meant selling the property they owned in a full-fledged parish in order to acquire much larger pieces of land in an uncleared area. There, they were able to benefit from their children's labour so as to then be able to set them up adequately when the time came. Thus, a large number of children was at one and the same time the causal factor of the reallocation process and what made it possible.

In such a transaction and what followed from it, both the parents and children honoured a kind of unwritten agreement by virtue of which the latter would devote themselves to the family interests for a period of ten to fifteen years, in return for which they would be entitled to receive substantial assistance upon their getting married. This was the material basis of a powerful ethic which was manifested by the children in the form of genuine dedication to the welfare of the family. On leaving school at about eleven or twelve years of age (see below) up until a marriageable age (about 22 years old for girls, and 25 years old for boys), each child had to devote all his or her time either to clearing and developing the family land or to earning a wage, locally or further afield, which was then handed over to the head of the family. The second alternative was a particularly opportune way of contributing to the family because of limited markets and the chronic scarcity of money.

In this way a genuine type of community dynamic took shape out of the family group. Owing to the long isolation which obliged local people to exchange goods and services and to depend upon each other, the community dynamic grew to include neighbourhood interdependence and family networks. Its fundamental aim was to protect the integrity and autonomy of the family unit as a primary source of authority, decisions, and social interaction.[28]

This is the context in which the interpretation of the data on literacy and schooling should be made. So long as settlement was in progress (up till 1930-1940), especially in the areas or micro-regions directly concerned, it sustained the type of family organization which has just been described.[29] This is to say that as of the age of six or seven years, children began to carry out minor tasks around the house and on the farm. As soon as they had completed

elementary religious education and had been received for their first Holy Communion, around the age of eleven or twelve, boys were withdrawn from school and were thrust into the adult working world, in response to the demands of service to the family. Pursuing any more elaborate forms of education would have been of no use to them in a situation where surviving as settlers meant learning by experience, and it would also have deprived the family farm of precious manpower. The daughters, who were less urgently needed for heavy farm work, were left in school for a while longer.[30] This was undoubtedly one of the main reasons for the lead they maintained in literacy over the boys. Another reason arose from the division of roles between father and mother within the family; writing, accounting, and the teaching of the children fell to the mother's share.

The foregoing sheds light on the status of schooling. Attendance was sought for religious training and the rudiments of reading and calculation; otherwise, school was considered a place of useless knowledge where material survival and security had nothing to gain. The demands of land clearing and existence in a harsh environment may also explain why the school system was in such poor condition, especially in the first decades of the existence of a parish. Inspectors' reports, life histories, and the local press all amply attest to the sorry state of schoolhouses, the absence of student motivation, the confusion which reigned in the classrooms, and the incompetence of the underpaid teaching staff.

Once again, because of the existence of unequal stages of development from one place to another, we do not believe that these features prevailed simultaneously in all the parishes of the Saguenay. On the regional scale, however, the decade between 1935 and 1945 was marked by decisive changes. On the one hand, these may be attributed to influences such as government policy and changes in attitude at the provincial level, and to influences from outside the scope of rural society, such as the rise of industrial towns and the diffusion of new cultural patterns. On the other hand, the changes derived as well from the decline of the traditional family structure and its characteristics, a decline itself caused by the saturation of arable land and the spread of agrarian capitalism.

Conclusion

Further research on the relationship between educational change and family reproduction faces continuing methodological obstacles. The study of demography and inheritance poses serious problems of evidence as well as questions about the representivity of resulting analyses. Parish registers, the census, and wills all present difficult interpretive challenges. Moreover, the detailed data now available on the Saguenay is based on fifteen years of intensive work involving an interdisciplinary team; it is unlikely that truly comparable evidence from other Quebec regions will be forthcoming in the near future. At the same time, a great deal more research is needed about Quebec's educational history. In the case of Ontario, some cause for optimism about the prospects for further

socio-historical research can be found in current projects, but the challenge of understanding the full complexity of the province's social evolution will certainly remain on the agenda for years to come. Without such an understanding, the rich educational historiography will continue to have only fragile contextual links.

Nonetheless, it is already clear that the internal dynamics of families experiencing social change deserve far more attention than given heretofore in the established historiography. The evidence now available clearly encourages increased emphasis on the changing ways in which parents viewed education as an element of material security for the next generation. Similarly, recent socio-historical research supports continued study of rural society. The predominance of the countryside for much of the histories of Ontario and Quebec calls for caution in importing models and assumptions from other places and times where urbanization was more extensive. Whatever the level of the study, it seems necessary to relate the history of literacy and schooling to the social fabric: institutions and groups, demographic and economic constraints, and the various projects resulting from the pursuit of particular goals. This view places increased emphasis on social history, either at the macro-level (state, classes, societal decision-making processes) or at the micro-level (community, family, individual life course as emphasized in this paper).

Along with the influence of metropolitan forces, rural societies had their own dynamics. The study of rural culture and social life reveals a strong emphasis on family, kinship, neighbourhood, and parish bonds. Through interdependence, these components combined to secure and to perpetuate a noteworthy level of local, internal independence. Specific motives—including those such as religious and economic—led local elites to militate in favour of schooling, sometimes in concert with urban activities, sometimes in the pursuit of different goals. In this regard, the study of family reproduction might be an effective way to embrace the dynamics of the rural society and its cultural expressions. Doubtlessly, the coincidence between disjunctures in family reproduction systems and the shifts occurring in school attendance in the Saguenay or various parts of Ontario represent one particular instance of a widespread, multifaceted phenomenon.

It is also clear that, beyond a few basic, controlled assumptions, generalizations are easily defeated by the contextual diversity of local dynamics; hence the necessity of detailed local investigations. In addition, studies now show that similarities in global evolution at the macro-level can be achieved through very different processes and situations in specific settings. Thus, sectorial comparisons focusing on one or two cultural variables may be totally misleading if they are not properly related to their social context. Differences in levels of literacy or school attendance may simply reflect a time difference in the inception of the settlement process, or a structural specificity rather than a collective choice or a cultural trait.

Finally, the study of social reproduction and educational choices in rural (as well as urban) areas opens new prospects for analysis of family strategies. Such

analysis rejects as ahistorical the image of families harmoniously maintaining ways to achieve collectively-defined goals as defined by social leaders such as school promoters. Rather, this approach reveals the complex array of values and ambitions, senses of identity and responsibility, and distinct capacities to adjust and to allocate resources within families experiencing social change. The evolving meaning of education appears to be a central dimension of these features of family reproduction in nineteenth-century rural Ontario and Quebec.

NOTES

1. J. Donald Wilson, "Some Observations of Recent Trends in Canadian Educational History," in *An Imperfect Past: Education and Society in Canadian History*, ed. J. Donald Wilson (Vancouver, B.C.: Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, U.B.C., 1987); and Chad Gaffield, "Back to School: Towards a Fresh Agenda for the History of Education," *Acadiensis* 15, 2 (Spring 1986).
2. One of the few works was Michiel Horn and Ronald Sabourin, eds., *Studies in Canadian Social History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974).
3. The increasing attention to rural history is illustrated by Robert Swierenga, "The New Rural History: Defining the Parameters," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1 (1983); Hal S. Baron, "Rediscovering the Majority: The New Rural History of the Nineteenth-Century North," *Historical Methods* (Fall 1986); and the volumes edited by Donald Akenson entitled *Canadian Papers in Rural History*.
4. The relationship between individual identity and "family" has become an important focus of recent debate; see, for example, Leslie Moch et al., "Family Strategy: A Dialogue," *Historical Methods* 20 (1987).
5. The most important of the now-classic works is Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly, eds., *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1975). The expression "urban outlook" was proposed by Susan Houston in "Politics, Schools, and Social Change in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 53, 3 (September 1972).
6. Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); and Harvey J. Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1979).
7. Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975); Michael Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).
8. Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism: 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).
9. H.C. Pentland, "Labour and the Development of Industrial Capitalism in Canada" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1961); and Kenneth Duncan, "Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 2, 1 (1965).
10. A. Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein, "Ethnicity and Class: Transitions over a Decade, 1861-1871," C.H.A. *Historical Papers*, 1984; Gordon Darroch, "Class in Nineteenth-Century Central Ontario: A Reassessment of the Crisis and Demise of Small

Producers during Early Industrialization, 1861-1871," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 13, 1-2 (1988).

11. Donald Harman Akenson is the leading scholar in this field; see *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), and *Being Had: Historians, Evidence, and the Irish in North America* (Port Credit, Ont.: P.D. Meany Publishers, 1985).

12. As examples, see David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); and Chad Gaffield, "Schooling, the Economy, and Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982).

13. Chad Gaffield, *Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict: The Origins of the French-Language Controversy in Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987).

14. Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ont.: Althouse Press, Falmer Press, 1988).

15. The most informative study continues to be Harvey J. Graff, "Literacy and Social Structure in Elgin County, Canada West, 1861," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 6 (April 1973).

16. Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers*, and R.M. McInnis, "Childbearing and Land Availability: Some Evidence from Individual Household Data," in *Population Patterns in the Past*, ed. Ronald D. Lee (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

17. David Gagan, "The Indivisibility of Land: A Microanalysis of the System of Inheritance in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *Journal of Economic History* 36 (1976); and Bruce Elliott, "Sources of Bias in Nineteenth-Century Wills," *Histoire sociale/Social History* (May 1985), and *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

18. Elliott, *Irish Migrants*, 202.

19. Marjorie Griffin Cohen studies a sample of wills as part of her examination of the patriarchal relations of production within the family economy in *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

20. Hugh Oliver, Mark Holmes, and Ian Winchester, eds., *The House that Ryerson Built* (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1984).

21. Gérard Bouchard, "Nouvelle mesure de l'alphabétisation à l'aide de la reconstitution automatique des familles," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, forthcoming.

22. The school reports have been examined by Jacques Ouellet in *L'instruction publique au Saguenay (1876-1966) à travers les rapports du surintendant de l'instruction publique* (M.A. thesis, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, 1984).

23. Nevertheless, data from the 1981 census reveal pronounced differences among urban areas (index = 101.1), suburban areas (61.0), and rural areas (30.0). The base value (index = 100.0) pertains to the entire province of Quebec; see Carmen Bouchard and Frances Markowski, *Profil socio-sanitaire du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean*, vol. 8 (Synthesis) (Chicoutimi: Département de santé communautaire, Hôpital de Chicoutimi, 1988).

24. Allan Greer, "The Pattern of Literacy in Quebec, 1745-1899," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 11, 22 (November 1978); and Pierre Hamelin, *L'alphabétisation de la Côte-du-Sud, 1680-1869* (M.A. thesis, Laval University, 1982).

25. Michel Verrette, "L'alphabétisation de la population de la ville de Québec de 1750 à 1849," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 39, 1 (1985).

26. The following discussion is based on Gérard Bouchard, "Introduction à l'étude de la société saguenayenne aux XIXe et XXe siècles," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 31, 1 (June 1977); Christian Pouyez et al., *Les Saguenayens. Introduction à l'histoire des populations du Saguenay, XVIe-XXe siècles* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1983); Gérard Bouchard, "Sur la reproduction familiale en milieu rural: systèmes ouverts et systèmes clos," *Recherches sociographiques* 28, 2-3 (1988); Bouchard and Jeannette Larouche, "Origines et destin des familles pionnières d'une paroisse saguenayenne au XIXe siècle," *Cahiers de géographie du Québec* 32, 85 (April 1988).
27. Gérard Bouchard, "Co-integration et reproduction de la société rurale: Pour un modèle saguenayen de la marginalité," *Recherches sociographiques*, forthcoming.
28. Local society was not, of course, cut off from the exterior. On the contrary, the region kept up numerous connections with extra-regional markets (of a very specific kind, however); see Gérard Bouchard, "La dynamique communautaire et l'évolution des sociétés rurales québécoises aux 19e et 20e siècles: Construction d'un modèle," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 40, 1 (Summer 1986).
29. At this stage, our analysis is limited to a regional scale. However, it goes without saying that in future research, it will be necessary to take a micro-level approach in order to account for intra-regional variations.
30. Later on, of course, when schooling became indispensable as universal leverage for social advancement, it was the boys who would be kept in school longer.

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