

This document is an electronic copy of a book chapter published in:

Craig, B. (1992). Land transmission practices among nineteenth-century Northern Maine French Canadians. In P. Benes (ed.), *New England/New France 1600-1850* (pp. 69-81). Boston: Boston University.

Land Transmission Practices among Nineteenth-Century Northern Maine French Canadians

Béatrice Craig

Power and authority within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century families was largely dependent upon legal control over property.¹ Who owned it, who administered it, how it was transferred, and what the rights of widows were affected relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children. Control over property and rules of inheritance also had a bearing on the manner in which a family, or a group, preserved its position within the existing social and economic structure. Changes in the legal system could force a rethinking of family relationships and of the process through which the family preserved its social status. Several North American groups were confronted with this challenge before the mid-nineteenth century: the New York Dutch in the seventeenth century, Louisiana French, French Canadians outside the Province of Quebec, and southwestern Hispanics in the early nineteenth century. How did they respond? Did they assimilate, adapt, or resist?

This paper attempts to answer these questions by looking at a relatively little-known group of people subjected to the English common law in the early Republic: the Upper St. John Valley French who lived in what is now the boundary between northern Maine and northwest New Brunswick. This area was opened to settlement by a group of New Brunswick Acadians in 1785, and for the next century and a quarter it attracted a relatively modest but steady flow of French-speaking immigrants from the Lower St. Lawrence Valley. By 1850 the St. John Valley boasted 6,167 inhabitants and close to 15,000 by 1870. Its economy was based on subsistence agriculture until 1825 and agriculture and lumbering afterwards. The region was also the object of a dispute between Britain and the United States until the Webster Ashburton Treaty was signed in 1842. The treaty gave the right bank of the river, and its residents, to the Americans; jurisdiction over the disputed territory, and after 1842 over the left bank, was exercised by the Province of New Brunswick.² The local population paid scant attention to the boundary, though, and traded, bought land, and married across the river as they had always done.³

1. This study was made possible by a grant from the Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne française at the University of Ottawa.

2. Before 1842 this jurisdiction was exercised very cautiously in order not to worsen the unresolved diplomatic crisis.

3. For more details on this community, see B. Craig, "Immigrants in a Frontier Com-

The residents on both banks of the river were almost all French speaking, Catholic, and from Lower Canada, an area which followed the custom of Paris, and after 1866, a civil code which did not differ significantly from the custom. Nevertheless, whether they were British subjects or American citizens, the St. John Valley French were subject to English common law.

English common law operated under the assumption that the husband's and wife's property were separate and that all that had been acquired since marriage (except real estate inherited by the wife) was the husband's. Upon his death, the widow was entitled to support from his estate; this was her dower, which consisted of one-third of his personal estate and the income from one-third of his real estate. In the absence of a will, all heirs had to be treated equally, irrespective of sex or birth order. The husband was free, though, to write a will which could disinherit the children or curtail the wife's dower rights.

The French, on the other hand, treated property acquired by a couple after marriage as a joint possession, although administered by the husband. Upon the death of one spouse, the survivor automatically gained full ownership of his or her half; the other part was equally divided among the heirs unless the couple's marriage contract granted the survivor a life interest in the property of the deceased. Testamentary freedom was introduced in Lower Canada in 1774 but never used before the 1840s and seldom afterwards.

The philosophy of family relationships and control of property which underlay the civil law and the custom of Paris on the one hand, and common law on the other, were thus almost antithetical. English law was more patriarchal; it gave the husband a greater control over his wife and children, even after his death. It assumed that women, before or after widowhood, were economically dependent upon their husband and ignored their contribution to the family well being.

French law also perceived the family as a hierarchy headed by the husband but limited his power; it recognized the wife's participation in the family economy, considering it equal to the husband's; it also gave widows a chance to become independent.⁴

munity: Madawaska, 1785-1850," *Histoire sociale-Social History* 38 (November 1986): 277-97; and idem, "Agriculture and the Lumberman's Frontier in the Upper St. John Valley, 1800-1870," *Journal of Forest History* 32 (July 1988): 125-37.

4. See Carole Shammas, Marylyn Salmon, and Michel Dahlin, *Inheritance in America, from Colonial Times to the Present* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Jacques Boucher, "L'histoire de la condition juridique and sociale de la femme au Canada français," in J. Boucher and A. Morel, *Le droit dans la vie familiale*, vol. 1 (Montreal: Les Presses de l'université de Montréal, 1970); Susan Altschol and Christine Carron, "Chronology of Some Legal Landmarks in the History of Canadian Women," *McGill Law Journal* 21 (1975): 476-94; Richard Chused, "Married Women's Property Law, 1800-1850," *Georgetown Law Journal* 71 (1983): 1359-425.

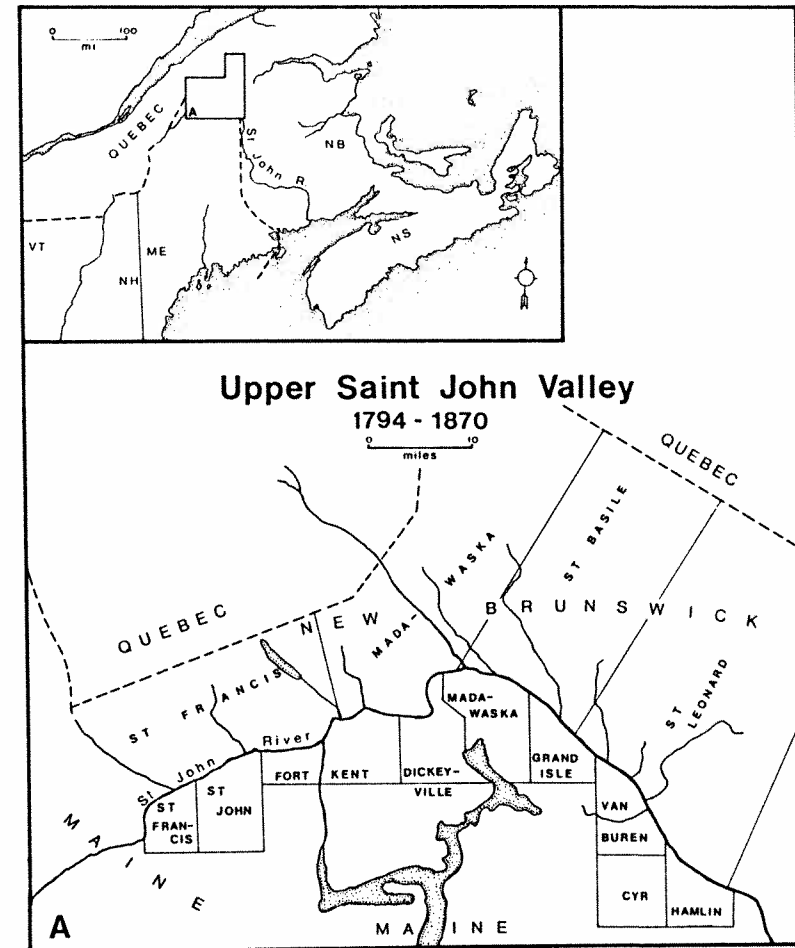


Figure 1. Townships and civil parishes in the upper Saint John Valley, 1794-1870. The initial settlement of the area took place after 1794 in Madawaska and Grand Isle on the American side, and in St. Basile on the New Brunswick side. By 1870, settlement extended on both sides of the St. John River from Hamlin to St. Francis, and up the Madawaska River tributary.

Norms and actual practices could be different though. French Canadian historiography, as well as studies of the northeastern United States and Upper Canada, suggests that practices were much closer to one another than lawbooks would have us believe. In each of these societies, successive generations of farm families confronted the same dilemma: how to establish many children using the resources of only one estate without jeopardizing the viability of the farm or one's security in old age. Intergenerational solidarity was a necessity: children depended on their parents for a start in life and parents on their children for support in their old age.⁵

The land transmission strategies described by American and Canadian historians are very similar.⁶ Parents tried to acquire additional pieces of land through purchases or clearing and deeded them to their sons as they married. If additional land were not available locally at a price the father could afford, the parents could help their children in other ways. They could sell their holdings in an older settlement for a good price and use the proceeds to buy several lots on the frontier

5. One should not entertain a romantic vision of this solidarity. It was more a set of mutual social obligations than the spontaneous expression of feelings of empathy towards others. Self interest dictated that one fulfill these obligations when required, lest one be ignored in times of need.

6. For French Canada: Léon Gérin, "L'habitant de St Justin, Contribution à la géographie sociale du Canada," in *Léon Gérin et l'habitant de St Justin*, ed. J. C. Falardeau and Philippe Garigue (Montreal: Les Presses de l'université de Montréal, 1968), pp. 49-128; Gérard Bouchard, "Family Structures and Geographic Mobility at Laterrière, 1851-1935," *Journal of Family History* 2 (December 1977): 350-69; Gérard Bouchard, "Les systèmes de transmission des avoirs familiaux et le cycle de la société rurale au Québec du XVIIe au XXe siècles," *Histoire sociale-Social History* 31 (May 1983): 35-60; Gérard Bouchard and Régis Thibeault, "L'économie agraire et la reproduction sociale dans les campagnes saguenayennes, 1852-1871," *Histoire sociale-Social History* 36 (November 1985): 237-58; Louis Lavallée, "La transmission du patrimoine dans la seigneurie de Laprairie, 1667-1760," in *Evolution et éclatement du monde rural*, ed. Joseph Goy and Jean Pierre Wallot (Montreal: Les Presses de l'université de Montréal, 1986), pp. 341-52; Louis Michel, "Varenes et Verchère, des origines au milieu du XIXe siècle, état d'une enquête"; *ibid.*, pp. 325-46. For Upper Canada: David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers, Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981) and Herbert May, "A Place to Stand: Families, Land, and Permanence in Toronto Gore Township, 1820-1890," *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers* (1980): 185-211. For the American Northeast: James Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser. 35 (1978): 3-33; John J. Waters, "Patrimony, Succession, and Social Stability: Guilford, Connecticut, in the Eighteenth Century," *Perspectives in American History* 10 (1976): 131-60; J. J. Waters, "The Traditional World of the New England Peasants: A View from Seventeenth-Century Barnstable," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 30 (January 1976): 3-21; J. J. Waters, "Family, Inheritance, and Migration in Colonial New England: The Evidence from Guilford, Connecticut," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser. 49 (January 1982): 64-86; Philip Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Mass.* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972); Christopher Jedrey, *The World of John Cleveland: Family and Community in Eighteenth-Century New England* (New York: Norton, 1979); Alexander Keyssar, "Widowhood in Eighteenth-Century Mass.: A Problem in the History of the Family," *Perspectives in American History* 8 (1974): 83-119; Daniel Snyder, "Kinship and

where land was inexpensive. The father could also pass all his land to one son, who, in addition to supporting him, had to compensate his siblings. The latter could use this capital to start life in a newly opened area. Girls normally did not receive land but were not excluded from the distribution of their parents' estate; they received movable goods at marriage or at the death of the parents. Establishing more than three sons remained a hard to reach goal for most parents; the average was two or three.

Table 1. Land transactions in the Upper St. John Valley in Maine and New Brunswick before 1845.

Year	Sales Exchanges	Mortgages	Deeds of Maintenance	Total
1827	1	0	0	1
1828	2	0	0	2
1829	5	0	1	6
1830	3	0	0	3
1831	2	0	0	2
1832	3	0	1	4
1833	9	1	0	10
1834	4	1	0	5
1835	7	0	0	7
1836	22	1	2	25
1837	6	0	0	6
1838	8	0	0	8
1839	4	0	0	4
1840	9	0	0	9
1841	7	1	0	7
1842	12	0	1	13
1843	8	1	1	10
1844	10	0	3	13
Total	122	5	9	139

A total of 3,336 real estate transactions was registered on behalf of the Upper St. John population in New Brunswick and Maine between 1790 and 1870 (see *Tables 1 and 2*).⁷ Most were dated after 1842. In

Community in Rural Pennsylvania, 1749-1820," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (Summer 1982): 41-61; James Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Toby Ditz, *Property and Kinship: Inheritance in Early Connecticut, 1750-1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

7. This analysis is based on land transactions and wills recorded in the Registries of Deeds and Probate Courts in Maine and New Brunswick. Wills for the American side are at the Houlton Probate Court, Houlton Maine; on the New Brunswick side, they are at the York County Surrogate Court for the period ending in 1833; at the Carleton

Table 2. Land transactions in the Upper St. John Valley in Maine and New Brunswick 1845 to 1871.

Year	Sales Exchanges	Mortgages	Deeds of Maintenance	Total	M*
1845	19	1	3	23	
1846	140	4	5	149	93
1847	91	10	6	107	123
1848	98	5	9	112	108
1849	95	9	7	111	110
1850	70	4	7	81	90
1851	69	3	7	79	102
1852	133	7	8	148	116
1853	110	5	6	121	135
1854	111	14	11	136	134
1855	124	10	11	145	128
1856	90	8	4	102	114
1857	80	8	7	95	106
1858	108	5	7	120	101
1859	71	8	9	88	106
1860	53	5	9	109	107
1861	153	7	12	124	115
1862	90	8	14	112	114
1863	96	5	5	106	121
1864	111	11	21	146	123
1865	103	3	11	117	132
1866	104	10	19	133	132
1867	125	13	9	147	154
1868	157	8	16	181	152
1869	111	9	84	128	145
1870	105	5	9	119	135
1871	128	15	15	158	
Total	2,742	200	255	3,197	
Percent	85.76	6.25	7.97	100	

* Moving average over three years.

1790 and in 1794, the New Brunswick government granted 74 lots on both sides of the river, averaging 200 acres each.⁸ No more land was granted afterwards, on account of the boundary dispute. This did not stop people from immigrating into the area, and the new settlers and

County Surrogate Court for the period 1833-1850; and at the Victoria County Surrogate Court for 1850 to 1873. Deeds records for the American side are at the Northern Registry of Deeds, Fort Kent, Maine; New Brunswick deeds are available on microfilm at the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (York County Registry Office until 1833, the Carleton County Registry Office until 1850, the Victoria County Registry Office from 1850 to 1873, and after that date the Madawaska County Registry Office.)

8. Province of New Brunswick, Crown Land Office, Survey Maps of the Mazzerolle and Soucy Grants, 1790 and 1794.

Table 3. Forms of land transmission among 180 families whose head died between 1845 and 1860, Upper St. John Valley in Maine and New Brunswick.

No information or insufficient information.....	8	4%
Landless.....	53	30%
Co-heir deed*.....	11	9%
Transfer to wife/widow.....	23	19%
Wills.....	13	11%
Disposed of all land before death.....	79	63%
(including 42 deeds of maintenance)		

* The last four categories overlap.

the children of the charter families occupied 520 lots by 1831.⁹ They exchanged them, sold them, and left them to the children as if they owned them. Most of these transactions went unrecorded. After the 1842 treaty, however, 563 deeds were issued on the American side, and 505 on the British side in 1845 and 1848.¹⁰ A local registry of deeds opened on the American side in 1845; a local county registry office was established on the New Brunswick side in 1850.

Looking specifically at heads of families who died before 1870 (Table 3), two-thirds of the male heads disposed of their land before their death, and of these most exchanged all or part of their property for a deed of maintenance. *Inter vivos* transfers, then, seem to have been very common. About one in ten of those transferring their land left a will. Because the number of land-disposing testators is so small, we cannot compare the "typical" will writer with the "typical" father who gave up ownership of his land during his lifetime. It seems, however, that testators included more remarried men than the population at large. In only a small proportion of the cases were the heirs left to fend for themselves. These intestate successions were unsupervised by the courts, and in most cases either one of the children or the widow bought the shares of the various heirs. The American registry labelled those transactions "co-heir deeds."

A more detailed picture emerges from those families whose heads were most likely to have transferred their land between 1845, when the land registries become reasonably complete and 1865, when the data are still reasonably reliable (Table 4). This group includes the men who were born locally or outside between 1785 and 1805 and who

9. "Report of John G. Deane and Edward Kavanagh to Samuel E. Smith, Governor of the State of Maine, and other Documents, 1831," New Brunswick Historical Society Collections 3 (1907).

10. Province of New Brunswick, Crown Land Office, Maps of the Madawaska Survey conducted by Land Commissioners J. A. MacLaughlin and John C. Allen to settle the claims arising under the Treaty of Washington, 1844-48; University of Maine, Fogler Library, Special Collection. "Report of the Commissioners appointed under the Resolve of February 21, 1843 to locate grants and determine the extent of possessory claims under the late treaty with Great Britain."

Table 4. Quantity of land owned by heads of households born between 1785 and 1805, Upper St. John Valley in Maine and New Brunswick. N = 308. Died before 1845 = 25. Remainder = 283.

Quantity	Number	Percent
Landless	53	19
One lot	95	34
Two to three lots	80	28
Four to five lots	24	9
Six to ten lots	14	5
Eleven to sixteen lots	4	1
Insufficient information	13	5

therefore had reached the age of sixty between 1845 and 1865.¹¹ While not representative of the whole population (it is almost entirely made of residentially persistent families) this group is important because established and permanent people are far more likely to own land and to develop land transmission strategies than transients and emigrants. The group includes 308 heads of family, 25 of whom died before 1845. Fifty-three of the remainder were never mentioned in the land records but did appear in the census; they were probably landless journeymen or tenant farmers. In terms of landownership, almost one-third of the heads of family had only one lot, varying in size between 100 and 150 acres. (A few single lots were larger, but they were not common.) Two-thirds had between one and three lots; less than 10 percent had more than five.

Analysis of this latter group of landowners suggests that the goals of the St. John Valley French may have been different from those of Lower Canadians and northeastern American farmers alike. The conjugal unit, not the lineal family, stood at the center of their economic and social existence. Children were entitled to room and board until marriage and to a modest settlement at that time. Parents were more preoccupied with providing for their old age than with establishing their children on farms, and the independence of widows was not routinely subordinated to the needs of the children. Parents do not seem to have sold their improved land in order to relocate in newly settled townships where they could establish all their sons. People who married in one of the St. John Valley parishes before 1850, or who had lived there more than five years, were very unlikely to emigrate; some of their children did, but they themselves did not. After 1850 some married people did emigrate — almost always newlyweds.

11. When an individual's birthdate was not determined either from the parish register or the census, it was estimated from date of marriage: locally born men married on the average at twenty-five and the others at thirty. Excluded from this group were immigrants who left before 1845 as well as families who ceased to appear in the parish registers, who were not enumerated in the census, and who had not been granted any land between 1845 and 1848.

Moreover, fathers seldom granted their property to a son who subsequently had to compensate his brothers and sisters with land or other forms of capital. Grantees' obligations towards their siblings were always very modest and limited to the children who still lived at home at the time of the transaction. Fathers often mentioned that the others had already received what was due to them. The youngsters were entitled to room and board until their majority or marriage, provided they worked for their brother. Little ones were expected to be given the opportunity to attend catechism and take their first communion. When the young person left home or married, he or she was entitled to a modest settlement. Girls always received a cow as a dowry, and sometimes a bed with bedding, a spinning wheel, or a couple of ewes. Boys were entitled to a young horse and perhaps some pieces of furniture. Often it was stipulated that these settlements had to be similar to the ones received by the eldest of the children.

Forty-three percent of fathers did acquire additional lots which they sometimes transferred to their children during their lifetime. They did not do so when the child married: there is no correlation between transfer and marriage. Girls were not systematically excluded from these transactions either, although they were far less likely to receive land from their fathers than their brothers. The child who received a gift of land from his father was very lucky indeed (less than 0.5 percent of the transactions were gifts). Parents sold land to their children for what seemed to have been the market price. They seldom asked for a mortgage, which does not automatically mean the sale was a cash sale; parents could have been satisfied with a promissory note which would not have been recorded in the land registry.

Parents also sold land outside the immediate family. Twenty-nine percent of the heads of household never sold a piece of land to any of their children during the period of observation, preferring non-family buyers; yet they had children old enough to farm. Only 22 percent of the parents sold land exclusively to children (see Table 5). The image of the father who patiently and painstakingly accumulated property to establish his children when they married, therefore, does not accurately reflect this population. Fathers who accumulated land did so for reasons which included the desire to have a larger homestead, to invest, and in some cases, to speculate, besides helping the children get a start in life.

Forty-three percent of the heads of household transferred land through deeds of maintenance. The proportion climbs to 54 percent if we exclude families who did not transfer any land or fathers who decided to grant all their property to their wives. The procedure was not so straightforward as some studies of Lower Canada suggest. The homestead was not always granted to one of the youngest sons. Daughters could receive it, for example, and even strangers. If the father's

Table 5. Means of land transfer (in percentage) made by heads of households born between 1785 and 1805, Upper St. John Valley in Maine and New Brunswick.

Number	1 lot 95	2-3 lots 80	4-5 lots 24	6 lots + 19	T 218
No transfer or transfer after death	27%	10%	4%	5%	17%
Transfer only to children	23%	23%	21%	5%	22%
Never transferred to child	33%	31%	17%	16%	29%
Transfer to child or non-child	12%	27%	58%	74%	28%
Residual/transfer to wife	6%	9%	0%	0%	4%
Deeds of maintenance as percent of total	37%	39%	72%	52%	43%
as percent of 3,4,5	50%	47%	75%	55%	54%

holdings were important enough, they could be divided between two children, each responsible for half the parents' maintenance. Payments were normally in kind, but rents in cash, or "store products," appeared in the 1860s.

Deeds of maintenance did not necessarily ensure peaceful and worry-free retirements. Quite a few were cancelled; the parents regained ownership of their land and entered into a new contract with a second party, and sometimes the procedure was repeated a third time. Or, the grantee sold the land, and the old couple (who nonetheless had to consent to the transaction) were contracted to a third party. Starting in the 1860s, some deeds of maintenance were converted into cash sales.

Why these arrangements were so difficult to carry out is uncertain. In some cases, parents and children did not get along. Less personal reasons could explain other cases. Parents favored deeds of maintenance for security: they were guaranteed maintenance for as long as they lived and the children could not sell the land without their permission. This very security is probably what made the deal unattractive to the children: they did not know how long they would have to pay for the land and they were physically tied to the farm. They could not freely sell it to purchase a better one or move away. We may surmise that it was the younger couple who pressured the older one into turning maintenance deeds into outright sales; in those cases the parents tended to make them pay dearly for the favor.

The overall impression derived from this analysis is, then, not one of strong intergenerational solidarity. Parents and children sought both

security and the improvement of their material conditions. The two parties involved used strategies that were not perfectly compatible. Profit seeking by one generation could diminish the degree of security the preceding or succeeding one could enjoy.

Parents seemed to pursue two successive goals: first, to raise their numerous children (an average of eleven per completed family before 1850) and provide them with a modest dowry or settlement, and afterwards, to try to attain material security in their old age. The fate of widows, especially widows with minor children, reinforces this impression. Before 1845 families may have dealt with the problem of providing for widows with minor children in a very straightforward fashion. The 1831 land report listed four men claiming landownership rights through wives who had derived it from their previous husbands. Five additional widows with young children were running the family farms alone. No land was claimed, directly or indirectly, by minor children. Those nine women (who represented 40 percent of the pre-1845 widows for whom reliable information is available) had a very personal view of dower right or community share: survivor takes all!

Men who wanted to keep control of their property during their lifetime, but ensure the economic security or independence of their wives after their death, could write a will. On the whole, wills written by residents of the St. John Valley were more favorable to the widow than those written under either English or French law. Of twenty-three wills involving property transfers, fifteen gave the widow full or partial ownership of the real estate though sometimes limited to her natural life or the coming of age of the children. Personal estate was distributed in the same manner as real estate: a widow who inherited all her husband's land also inherited all his personal goods. Most testators therefore placed the needs of the widow above those of the children; they did not wish to see their estate divided before her death. Jean Baptiste Daigle III's will is a good example. He left his wife a 20-rod-wide section of his homestead, with house, barn, furniture, stock, and equipment, forever. The rest of his real estate, a 10-rod section of the homestead and a 100-rod-wide farmland to be cleared, was left to his sons; he bequeathed \$25 to each of his daughters when they came of age. The property he left his wife was very likely worth more than half his estate; in addition, he left her the use of the entire estate to raise the children. Anastasic Daigle was probably glad her husband had been so cautious and so realistic, because he died two years later, leaving her with nine children aged two to sixteen.

Death sometimes caught the family unprepared, especially if the husband were still young. In that case, his estate was not divided until the youngest child came of age. At that time, the widow could buy back the children's share and possibly exchange the property for

a deed of maintenance. For instance, Gallant St. Onge died in 1840 at age forty-nine; the youngest child was one. St. Onge's estate was not distributed until 1853, when the widow bought the children's shares. Jean Baptiste Daigle II left children ranging from nine to nineteen when he died in 1846. The widow and the children continued as co-owners of his extensive holdings until 1858 when they sold out for a substantial amount. If the father died young, land was used to raise the children; subsequently, it was often used to provide for the aging mother. In 1860, Louise Albert, a fifty-eight-year-old widow, purchased the nine lots which comprised her husband's estate for the relatively small price of £50 (\$200). She later sold them to her sons for much more realistic amounts.

The Married Women's Property Act also enabled husbands who possessed land on the American side to provide for their wives in the event of widowhood through an *inter vivos* transfer (invalid under common law in the absence of such an act). Eighteen men in the larger sample of 308 put some land in their wives' names — usually a half lot. Again, the number is too small to draw a composite portrait of those husbands, but three of them were remarried. Some married women also bought land from strangers, from their fathers, or from their fathers-in-law. Leon Bellefleur's transactions involving his son and his daughter-in-law Susan are intriguing; he sold the young man a lot of land, bought it back for \$1,200, and immediately sold it to his daughter-in-law for \$400. Men outside the sample also gave land to their wives. One did so under the condition she pay his debts — which were not negligible. We may surmise from these scattered examples that men took advantage of the Married Women's Property Act to protect their property and the economic position of their wives in cases of premature widowhood. The act offered possibilities which could be appealing to remarried men; their wives were usually much younger than they and more likely to be left alone with children to raise; an outright grant would ensure their economic independence, free from any interference from the children of the first marriage. On the negative side, a gift of property meant the wife could do whatever she wanted with it. Those husbands obviously were not very inclined towards patriarchy.

In sum, wills and land records convey the same impression. Families were concerned with ensuring the economic security or independence of their most vulnerable members: orphans, widows, and old people. Their needs were frequently put above the interests or even the legal rights of young adult children who were often left to fend for themselves. This society believed in social security, but not in intergenerational solidarity. Parents felt they had a right to dispose of their property as they saw fit; the children had no moral lien on it. Sales and

deeds of maintenance were the most common way to provide for one's old age; a multiplicity of strategies, including some that used newly passed legislation, were used to ensure orphans and widows would not be left destitute.

The discriminating variables were the availability of land and the structure of the job market, taken in a very broad sense. St. John Valley children had several alternatives to assuming ownership of their fathers' land. They could improve a lot on the outskirts of the settlement. The land was mediocre but relatively cheap, especially for the estimated six hundred families who decided to squat on lumbering and railroad land after 1850. Sons could work in the lumber industry, a seasonal activity which left time to cultivate a small plot the rest of the year. Again, the income was modest, but fairly reliable in the long term. More ambitious sons emigrated. The St. John Valley was on the path of one of the major migration routes from the Lower St. Lawrence to industrial New England. Every inhabitant had relatives and neighbors who had gone to seek their fortunes further south and as far west as Michigan and Montana. Parents were free from worrying that their children would become destitute if they failed to settle them on a farm and could redirect their energy elsewhere. For their part, children were free from waiting for the good will of their parents to become independent and could strike on their own when they wanted.

French Canadians who moved to the St. John Valley did not face an alien legal system or different customs relating to property and inheritance. But they did engage themselves in an economic system in which independent farming, wage work, and migration were equivalent, sensible, and realistic options. This altered their relationship to land and the power they could derive from its ownership. As the link between economic opportunities and inheritance weakened, so did intergenerational solidarity. In this respect, the St. John Valley farmers were very similar to their contemporaries in the American Northeast and in British North America.