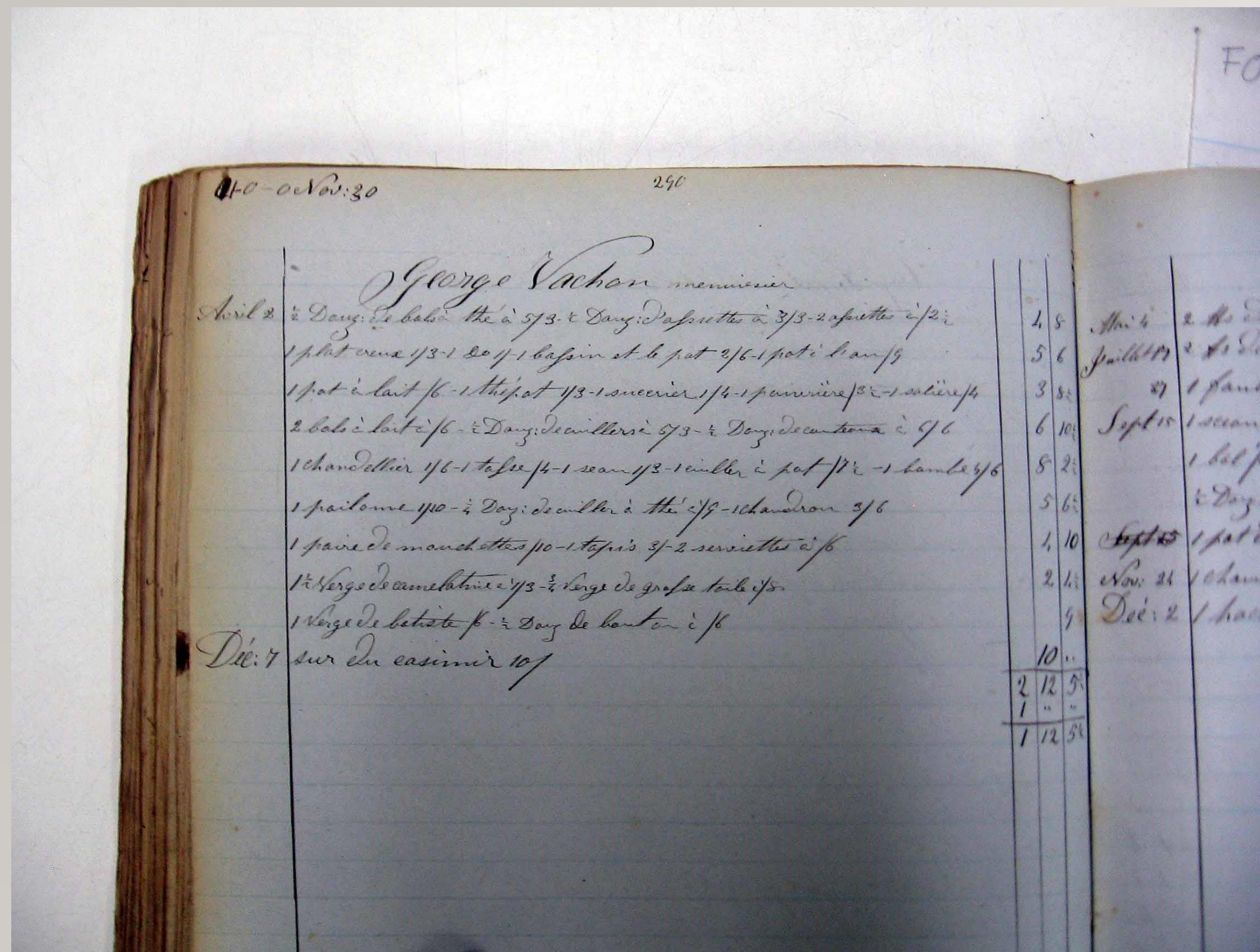


In the Parlour: Household Goods in 19th-Century General Store Records from Lower Canada

Questions

The image below shows a general store account book, open to the account of George Vachon. The store was located in the Lower Canadian town of Lotbinière, and the page shows everything that Vachon bought in 1857: candleholder, plates, teapot, napkins, sugar bowl, pepper grinder, and cutlery. It looks like he was buying items for a dining-room – a nicely-appointed room in which to entertain.

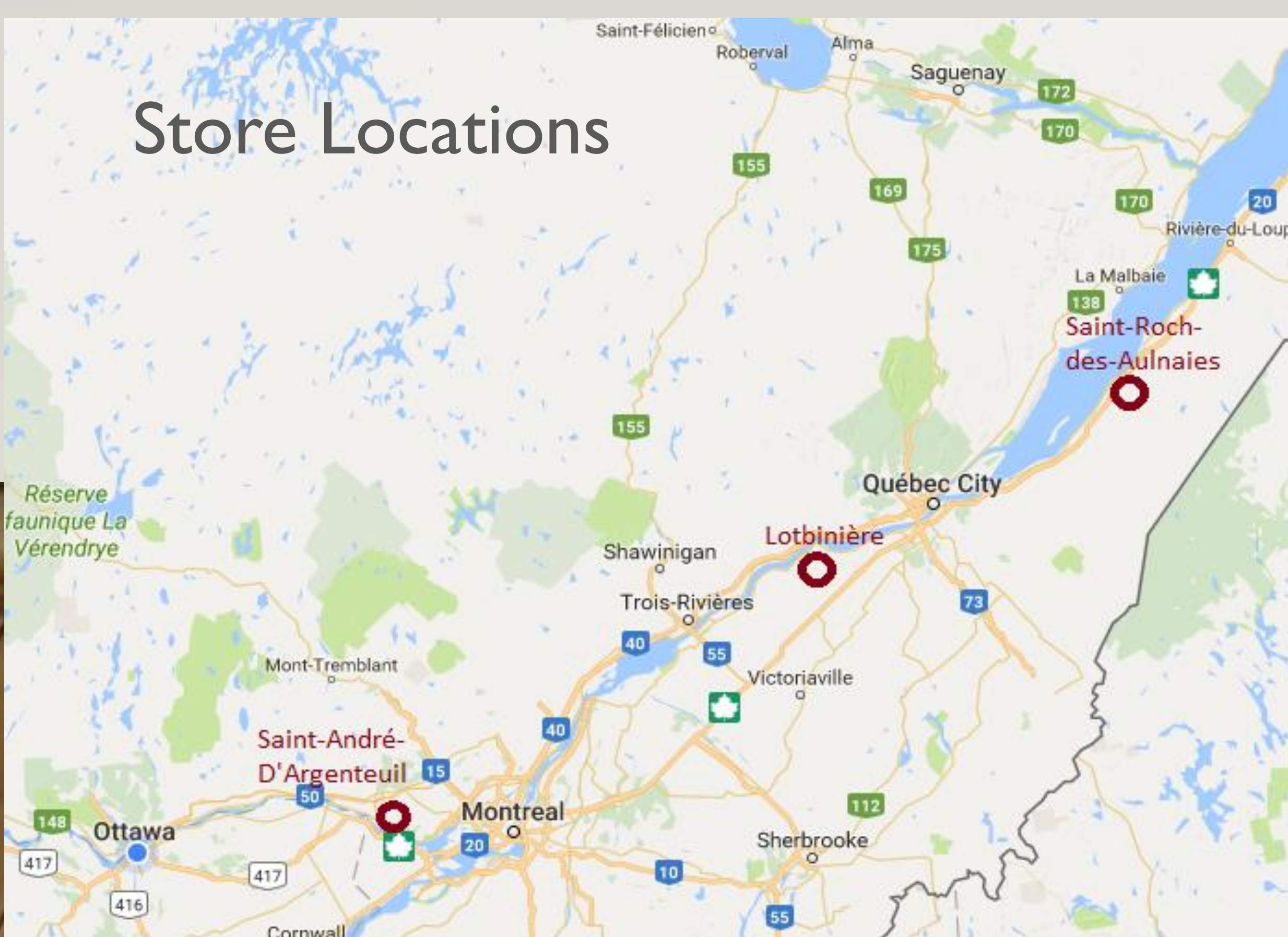


The rise of this kind of spending on household goods reflects the spread of items that were once typical of bourgeois homes in large towns into the country. Vachon was a cabinetmaker and lived in rural Quebec, but still saw value and perhaps prestige in these items. This project asks whether or not Vachon was a typical example – and so find out whether the trend towards gentrification, evidenced by household items was significant in 19th century Lower Canada.

Methodology

We analyzed prices, numbers of purchases and numbers of clients at the Blanchard and Wales, Dewar, Morin, and Villiers stores. Due to the shortage of bank notes, stores let their clients buy on credit and pay when they could secure the means. They kept track of all purchases in order to know how much they were owed. The data from these books were entered into spreadsheets then examined for trends. In order to trace certain trends, we created a list of selected household durable items which represent the trend of gentrification. These items included items with an aesthetic value and items which would fit into a dining room or parlour:

- Tumblers, glasses with stems, pitchers and carafes
- Curtains, blinds, carpets, table runners, tablecloths, cloth napkins, comforters and “tapisserie”
- Sugar bowls, salt and pepper holders, and crewet stands
- Mirrors, clocks, crucifixes (as wall decoration) and china figures
- Braziers and candleholders



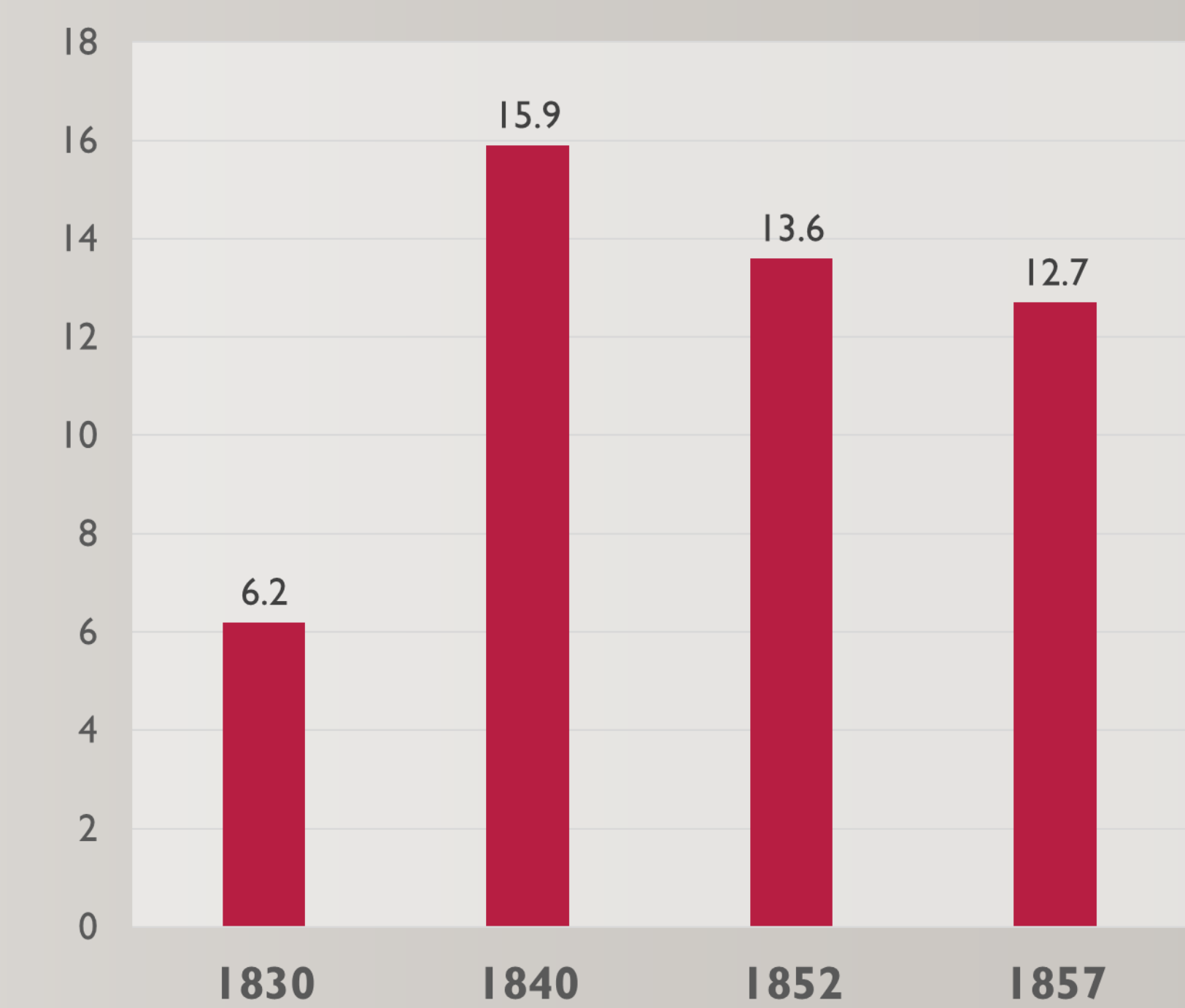
De Villiers Store, Lotbinière

The De Villiers store was owned by François-Xavier de Villier, who took over the store from his father in the 1840s. He was one of the town's *notaires*, and seemed to concentrate more on his legal business, as the store's client base became smaller after he inherited the business.

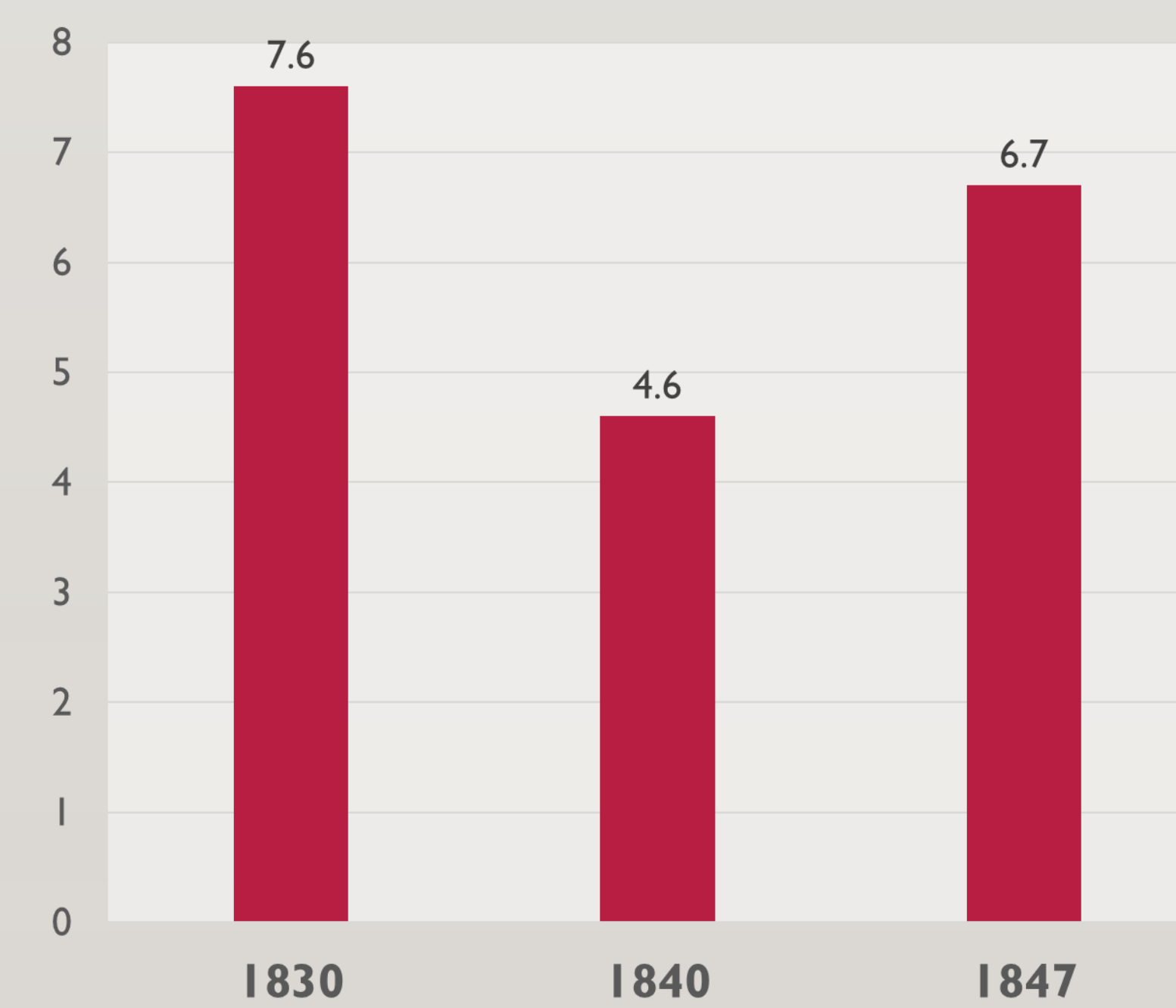
The account books from De Villiers demonstrate an **increase in consumption of household durables** between 1830 and 1840, as demonstrated by the percentage of account holders who made such purchases. As in the other stores, many of the frequent purchasers of these items were **farmers**, according to census data.

Interestingly, almost everyone who purchased household items from De Villiers bought candles as well as oil for lamps. This shows that both forms of lighting technology were used in Lotbinière.

Percentage of Account Holders who Purchased Selected Household Durables, De Villiers



Percentage of Account Holders who Purchased Selected Household Durables, Morin



The Morin Store was owned by Amable Morin, who was also a *notaire*. The purchases of household goods in Morin's store actually decreased throughout the years, possibly because other stores opened nearby. However, the store's selection of household durables increased over time, including fabric products like **carpets**, “**tapisserie**”, and **curtains** were available there (an example of a 19th century carpet used in Lower Canada is displayed to the right).

Examining the accounts of individual purchasers shows that many of Morin's customers were purchasing sets of items to complete their table setting or to furnish their parlours. In 1847, over a dozen customers purchased such **sets of items**. The graph on the left indicates the percentages of the stores' clients who bought selected household durables; the items were bought by less than ten percent of the population. However, considering that the store had competitors in the same town which sold similar items and that the store closed down in the beginning of 1848, the decrease might not indicate an actual drop in consumption.



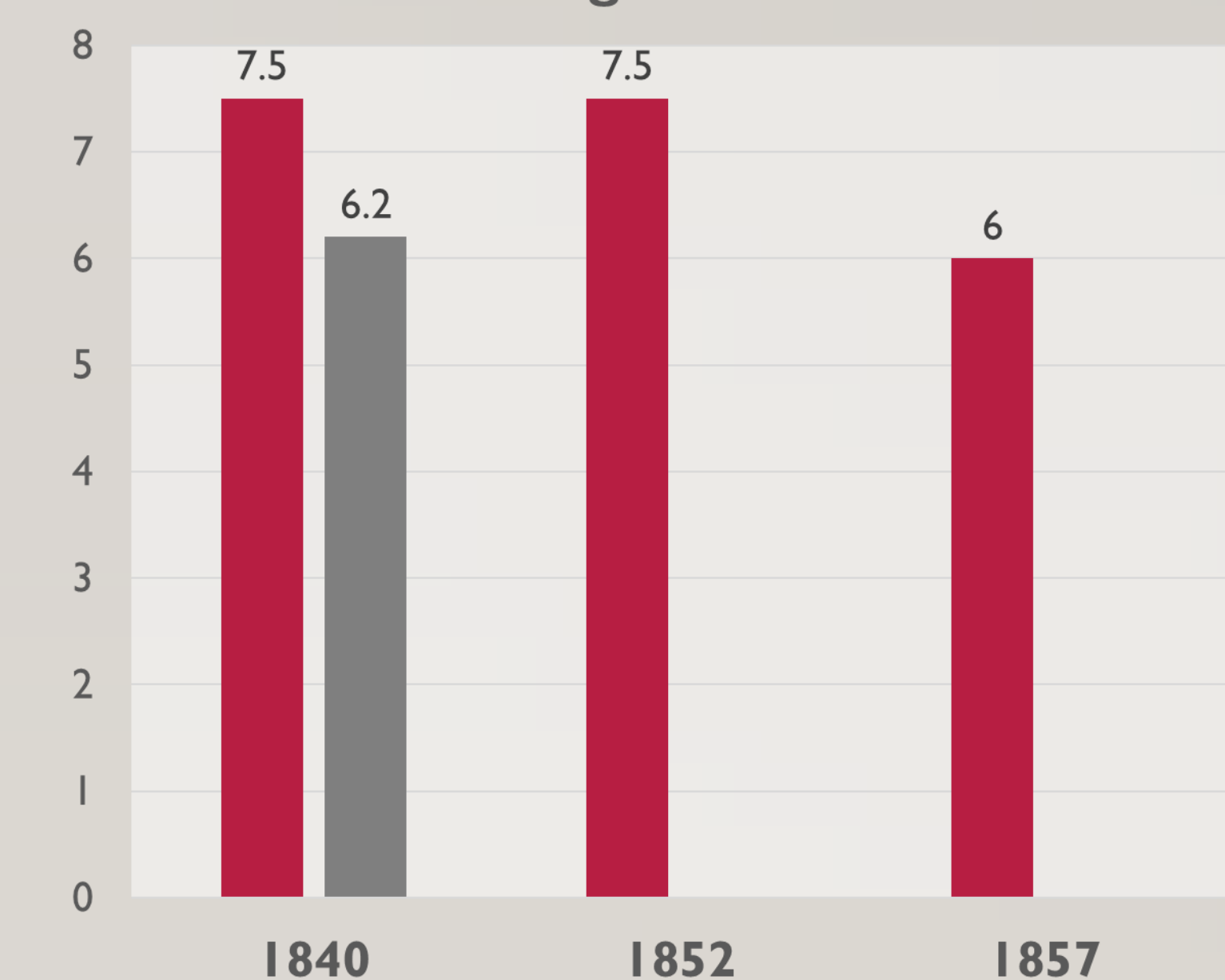
Dewar and Blanchard & Wales stores, Argenteuil



The village of St. Andrew-East (Saint-André d'Argenteuil) had two stores, one of which was the Blanchard and Wales store, for which only one year's data survived (shown in grey on the graph at right). The majority of the population of the village was made of immigrants from Scotland; the rest was French-Canadian. The cultural differences were visible in customers' purchasing decisions: tea was much more popular among English-speaking Canadians, as were accoutrements like sugar bowls which would go with tea sets. There was also a greater variety of **tableware**, including crewet holders, pitchers and carafes.

Like the stores in the other villages, the highest percentage of account holders purchased household durables in 1840, which is also the earliest year for which we have data. However, the number of people buying the selected household durables which we used to analyze consumption **remained fairly steady** throughout the period surveyed.

Percentage of Account Holders Who Purchased Selected Household Durables, Argenteuil



Conclusions

We found that while prices for most products remained stable, the lower prices of a few products did not result in more people purchasing them. However, the number of customers who purchased household goods increased over the years, suggesting that the market for those items broadened. The variety of goods on offer also increased, as household items like table runners, carpeting and glassware became available from the late 1840s onwards. In addition, a few clients purchased sets of kitchenware or living room objects, suggesting that some Lower Canadians created well-appointed “parlours” which expressed their respectability and afforded new home comforts.

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