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FAMILIES, INHERITANCE AND PROPERTY TRANSMISSION IN RURAL CENTRAL CANADA IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES¹

B É A T R I C E C R A I G

University of Ottawa

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of Canadians lived in rural areas and most of those lived on farms. Until the 1950s, one-third of the Canadian labour force was engaged in agriculture. Farms and families were inseparable. The ownership of a farm allowed the constitution of a family—but a family was needed to operate a farm profitably. Farm couples thus had strong incentives to have large families, but when the children grew up, they faced difficulties providing them with a start in life because the supply of land was limited. Finding farms for all the children, even for all the boys, was no easy task.

Yet, parents wanted to see their children established on farms, and in many cases believed they had a duty to do so. The main reason for this was economic. Farm ownership was viewed as a dependable source of support. Until World War I, opportunities to make a living outside farming were neither numerous nor attractive. The demand for rural craftsmen (carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmith, wheelwrights etc...) was limited. Wage work, either as a farm hand, a lumberer, a day labourer or a factory worker, was badly paid, often dangerous and always subjected to seasonal and cyclical unemployment. Professional careers (doctors, lawyers, ministers, priests, surveyors etc...) were attractive, but one needed a costly education to enter them. Unless one was born into a middle- or upper-class family, farming was the most desirable occupation. It guaranteed food, shelter, firewood and basic clothing in the worst case, and

tidy profits at the end of the year in the best ones. In addition to providing support in the short term, farm ownership also provided protection against destitution in old age. In the days before old age pensions, a farm was capital that could be converted into support in one's declining years.

A farm of one's own was therefore a very widespread goal, not only for oneself but also for one's children. If children could not get their own farms, what would become of them? Until the middle of the nineteenth century, this goal was relatively easy to achieve. Land was abundant and cheap, and the younger generation could secure farmsteads in the vicinity of their parents without much trouble, and with only limited help from their families. But as the century progressed, the goal became harder and harder to reach. The supply of unoccupied land, especially of good unoccupied farm land, was dwindling rapidly, while the population was growing at a dramatic rate. Establishing children on their own farms, while providing for one's old age security, became increasingly difficult. Transferring land from one family to the next, therefore, became a critical process entailing carefully weighted strategies.

Towards the end of the century, new options began to emerge. The opening of Western Canada to white settlement offered opportunities for Eastern Canadians willing to migrate. Industrialization and urbanization accelerated opportunities for employment. Not all of these were low paid factory jobs. "Lower middle-class" jobs (banking, insurance, office work, retail sale, teaching etc...) had appeared and grew rapidly. After World War I, urban jobs were no longer inevitably poorly paid, dangerous, unstable and devoid of opportunity for promotion. Progress in education, especially the introduction of compulsory education in English Canada in the 1870s, guaranteed that a large proportion of the population had the skills and knowledge required for at least low-level, white-collar positions. Short-term commercial courses allowed more ambitious youngsters to improve their chances in life. Farming, therefore, was no longer the only desirable option for people of modest means.

Simultaneously, the emergence of social programs like old age pensions in the 1920s made farm ownership less critical for support in old age. Farm ownership usually disqualified individuals from receiving a government old age pension, as the recipients had to meet a means test. Family strategies to establish children in adulthood and to provide for old age security changed again. Whereas increased population pressure had made parents and children more dependent upon each other to achieve their goals in the nineteenth century, the new context of the first half of the twentieth century allowed more individualistic survival strategies to develop.

FAMILIES AND PROPERTY TRANSMISSION: THE PIONEER PHASE

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Canada was very sparsely populated. Unoccupied land belonged to either the Native population or to the Crown, and the latter quickly extinguished the claims of the former, clearing the way for European settlement. The various governments wanted to attract settlers. Therefore, until 1827, *bona fide* settlers could obtain 200 acres of public land from the colonial governments for only the cost of the survey and paper work. In Quebec, then called Lower Canada, a large proportion of the available land was not in the hands of the Crown but of the seigneurs. The seigneurs were required by law to grant land to any farmer who wanted some. In return, farmers had to pay yearly dues to the seigneur. These dues were lower than rents, and the farmers could dispose of their rights to the land as if they owned it: they could sell it, rent it or bequeath it in their wills. After 1828, would-be settlers had to purchase Crown land at auction; they had to pay 25% of the price at the time of purchase and could pay the rest in three yearly instalments. Some provisions were made to facilitate land acquisition by people without resources. After 1837, the Imperial government tightened access to land further and allowed cash sales only. It was only after Confederation that quasi-free Crown land again became available.

The first few generations of settlers thus had easy access to land but to uncleared land. It took, on average, ten years to improve a holding sufficiently for the support of a family. Pioneers had slow starts, but when their sons reached their teens, they were in a position to increase production beyond the requirements of the household and to make profits. The more children one had, especially the more sons, the more profit one made—as long as the children were willing to work without pay for their parents. They usually did so because there were not many alternatives and also because they expected a delayed payment in the shape of a piece of land when they married.

Provident fathers acquired additional acreage while their sons were young. They might have the boys begin to clear and improve the property. When the sons married, they would receive some of this land from their father, and the gift would compensate them for all the years of unpaid labour on the parental farm. Girls normally were not given land. Instead, they were given what was needed to start their own households: a bed and bedding, linen, a cow, an ewe, chickens, perhaps a bit of cash. Except where land was particularly cheap, a girl's dowry was worth less than a boy's portion, and the discrepancy increased with time. Few protested this situation: both French and English Canadians viewed land as male property and this belief was buttressed by law. If fathers

had no land to spare for their sons, they could at least help them acquire and clear some nearby crown land, lending draft animals, seeds and sending younger sons to help with clearing, cultivating and harvesting. Dividing the parental farm was rarely an option unless it was unusually large: farms had to be big enough to support a family, and no one was willing to create units that were not viable.

By the time the younger sons were ready to marry, the parents were usually in their sixties and beginning to find farm work rather difficult. It was time to retire. Of course, ordinarily they would not have been able to save cash for their old age. The farm was their only capital and, somehow, they had to turn it into support in their old age.

In Quebec, the law made provisions for the transfer of property in exchange for maintenance. The old couple gave the title to their property to another person in exchange for support until they died. The exact nature of this support was usually spelled out in great detail, even down to the number of candles at one's funeral. One should not rush to conclude that parents and children distrusted each other, however. The terms of transfer, or donation, as it was called, reflected a consensus between the two parties, but also some broad community norms concerning what was fair. The donation contract was written by a local lawyer who was also aware of the local norms appropriate to the level of wealth of the family. The following description of a donation, supposed to have taken place in the eighteenth century, was written in 1846 by a lawyer-novelist who very likely described a ceremony over which he had presided many times.

On the appointed day, the father, the mother and their son got ready to go and visit the notaire. As this was a matter that concerned the entire family, Marguerite was invited to go with them; also invited, according to custom, were a few relatives and some neighbours who were close friends of the family; and all together they took the road towards the notaire's house (...) we came, said Chauvin, to give ourselves to our son here, and sign the acte de donation (...). While speaking the notaire had taken a sheet of paper, and had marked it with his thumb print, and then, after trimming his quill, he dipped it in the inkwell and started:

- In front of the Notaires Publics etc., etc.
- Were present J.B. Chauvin, formerly farmer, etc., and Jusephte Le Roi, his wife, etc., etc.
- Who have given completely and irrevocably and in the best manner in which a donation may be drafted, to J.B. Chauvin, their eldest son, present to the proceedings and agreeing to

them, etc., a message located in the parish of Sault au Recollet, on the Rivière des Prairies, etc., with a stone house, barn, stable and other out-buildings, etc., etc.

- And the conditions of this donation are such that J.B. Chauvin junior shall provide and deliver the following articles yearly and every year:

600 pounds in cash

24 bushels of merchantable wheat suitable for bread

24 bushels of oats

20 bushels of barley

12 bushels of pease

200 bundles of hay

15 cords of maple for the fire, delivered at the door of J.B.

Chauvin senior, sawed and split.

- J.B. Chauvin junior will provide his father and mother with 4 mother sheep and the ram, which will be sheared at the expense of J.B. junior

12 dozen of eggs

12 pounds of good Canadian tobacco, in plugs

A milch cow

Two...

- Excuse me sir, interrupted Chauvin senior; You only say: a milch cow; but I told you that in case of death, we had agreed, my son and I, that he would replace it with another one.
- This is true, said the notaire; Let us add this:
 - A milch cow that will not die
- Good, that's right, said those present.
 - Two gallons of rum
 - Three gallons of good white wine
 - A fat pig, weighing at least 200 pounds
 - One...
- But, father, interrupted the son, look, the payments are already so high. Let us say a lean pig; it will not cost you much to fatten it.
- No, no, said the father, we agreed on a fat pig, let us stick with it.
- And then, a long discussion ensued, in which all those present took part. Finally, the notaire seemed struck with a sudden idea:
- See, he exclaimed, I am going to reconcile you; You, Chauvin senior, are demanding a fat pig; you, Chauvin junior, you find this too much; well, let us say, a reasonably fat pig.
- That's it, that's it said all those present in a chorus.

After this came the important clauses concerning incompatibility of character and inability to cohabit, share of board, horse and cart in health as in sickness, and at the end, the funeral of the donors when it would please God to call them to Him.

We will spare our readers the rest of the payments, clauses and conditions of this contract, which were again debated at length and which stretched the procedure well into the afternoon

The discussions that took place at the notaire, during the transfer, had been so frequent and lengthy that, as we have already mentioned, the sun was ready to set when Chauvin and his friends came back home. He invited all of them to spend the rest of the day and the evening at his place; Other neighbours and friends were also invited as is the custom in such circumstances, and all congratulated father and son on the transaction that had just taken place; and the day ended happily with a groaning table where the culinary talents of Mother Chauvin and her daughter were prominently displayed.²

The Chauvin contract involved only a son and his parents. Sometimes, however, not all children had left home when the parents decided to pass the land to a son. Young people still at home were normally guaranteed room and board as long as they worked for their brother, and a portion or dowry to match those of older siblings when they married or left home. The donation implied that the old couple would live with the young one. Sometimes cohabitation did not work and the donation contract anticipated this possibility. In such cases, either the son had to build a separate dwelling for his parents, or the contract was void and the parents would seek another person to take care of them. When the old couple died there was usually little property left to distribute and this would be shared equitably amongst the children.

The common law, in force in English Canada, made no provision for maintenance contracts. English Canadians, however, tried to reach the same goal as their French Canadian counterparts, but through a slightly greater range of means. Some let a son use their farm, but retained title and wrote a will bequeathing it to him. The will also normally obligated the son to support his widowed mother should she survive the head-of-household. Some transferred title in exchange for maintenance, but obliged the son to post bond or take a mortgage with the parents. This gave them some leverage if the sons did not fulfil their part of the bargain. Some sold the land to one of their sons; others gave it to a son, but leased it back from him for the rest of their lives. And some rented farms to their sons and made such sons the beneficiaries of their wills. All practices had the same purpose: to give one of the sons the use of

the farm so that he could support himself and his aging parents, while at the same time providing the parents with some protection against an irresponsible son.

The property transfer strategies of farmers in pioneer settlements aimed at establishing as many sons as possible on the land and at providing a secure old age for the parents. In the early nineteenth century, parents were able to establish most children on the land. Peel county (Ontario) farmers, for example, were able to establish an average of four sons. In the Saguenay, three-quarters of the sons of farmers married before 1861 became farmers themselves.

The situation described above was, of course, the ideal. If fathers died prematurely, none of this would happen. Usually, the oldest son would take over the family farm and raise his siblings and it would be his responsibility to give them a start in life and to provide for his mother. In Ontario, primogeniture, in force until the mid 1850s, stipulated that in the absence of a will the eldest son would inherit his parents' property. The widow was entitled to a dower, the revenue from one-third of the real property her husband had owned. In Quebec, the community of property put half of the family property in the hands of the widow and the rest was to be distributed equally among the children. It made sense for an elder son to buy his sibling's share and for the mother to turn over her half to this son in exchange for maintenance. If no son was old enough, the widow had to keep the farm going herself and provide for her children.

ESTABLISHED RURAL COMMUNITIES

The situation described above could only occur in new settlements. Farm families were very large and this, coupled with land hungry immigrants, filled up the available space very quickly. By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was not much good land left in the St Lawrence valley and in southern and eastern Ontario. What were parents to do?

One solution consisted of selling one's farm in a well-established settlement, where it would fetch a high price, and using the proceeds to buy a large acreage in a new settlement, where land was still abundant and cheap. One could then provide for one's sons. French Canadians thus moved from the St Lawrence valley to the Ottawa River, the Mauricie, the Eastern Townships, the Lower St Lawrence, the Saguenay, and eastern Ontario. English Canadians moved from the St Lawrence-Lake Erie-Lake Ontario shores towards the Ottawa valley, the eastern shore of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. From the mid-1870s till the 1920s, the Prairies provided a new outlet for farm seekers. In Quebec, the provincial government started "colonization" schemes aimed at preventing people from

leaving the province by settling them on Crown land. The land was provided almost free of charge. The problem was that the only land left was in outlying areas, where the soil was poor, the climate brutal and the means of communication inadequate. The Abitibi-Temiscamingue, the Saguenay and the back of the eastern Townships, for instance, were amongst the regions that were populated under these schemes. This resettlement strategy was a good one if one did not mind starting from scratch again, clearing land in a distant settlement, and if one did not intend to establish any child in the community of their birth. In the areas that received these immigrants, the situation that had prevailed in the early years of the old settlement was repeated in the new one for a generation or two. Bruce Elliott, for instance, found that in the Ottawa valley in the 1880s, three-quarters of the sons were able to secure farms in the area. But even at that stage, families and individuals already followed a variety of strategies to access land (see Table I).

Table 1*
Establishment of Sons in 1881 in 141 Families on the Upper Canadian Side of the Ottawa River

Land from father, grandfather or stepfather	231
in father's lifetime	134
by inheritance	88
both	2
Free grant	16
Married heiress with land	3
Purchased land	74
Tenant farmers	5
Labourers	7
Trade	52
Profession	17
Migrated without securing land before going	46
Total	675

* Bruce Elliot, *Irish Immigrants in the Canadas*, p. 213.

Often parents in older settlements could still establish one or two sons locally, and the prospect of felling trees in their middle age did not appeal to them. So they tried something else. One strategy consisted of acquiring land at

a distance to provide for some of the sons who would then have to migrate. More commonly, the parents provided the sons with the means to migrate and, possibly, with the means to acquire land in their new place of residence. Well-to-do farmers, of course, could buy the farms of those who were leaving.

Sons could provide for themselves too, renting a farm until they had accumulated some capital, or hiring themselves out where employment opportunities existed. With their accumulated capital they could purchase Crown land at a distance or improved land sold by departing families. They may have been helped in the process by their families, but this is hard to document.

Migration became a strategy of heirship. Those who did not receive the family farm left and out-migration from old settlements became a widespread phenomenon. In Peel county (Ontario), for instance, 60% of the heads of families listed in the 1851/52 census were gone by 1861 and two-thirds of those listed in 1861 were no longer there in 1871. In Quebec, out-migration was not as important, but still significant: St Damase, a parish south of Montreal, lost 32% of its households to out-migration between 1852 and 1861.

Strategies to transfer the parental farm to the next generation were also altered to reflect the new, more constricted, environment. In Peel county, parents began to leave their farms to one son who had to compensate his "non-inheriting" siblings. This usually meant giving them the equivalent of one year of the farm's income. In addition, the "inheriting" son had to provide for his aging parents. Being the recipient of the family farm was then a mixed blessing because one started life heavily indebted to other family members. But at least the family farm provided for the support of the old couple and a modest start-up capital for all the children.

Parents also began to consider alternatives. After 1870, English Canadian girls, for instance, were more likely to receive their dowries in cash or cash and a formal education. Girls with education who could not marry because the boys had emigrated could at least make a living teaching or working at one of the emerging white-collar occupations. (Until then, domestic service had been almost the only form of employment available for women). Education, except for the professions, was not a favoured alternative for boys. Usually, it was a last resort strategy used, for instance, when the father died young or when there were really too many boys in the family. Ironically, at the end of the nineteenth century, sons with trades ended up faring better than their siblings left on farms, who faced even greater pressures than had their parents to provide for their own children.

English Canadian families also began to modify their demographic behaviour. In Peel county, difficulties in getting a farm led to later marriages. This, in turn, resulted in smaller families, in part because women were married

fewer years and also because the ability to conceive decreases with age. There is even some indication that families started to deliberately have fewer children: the average age at which women had their last child dropped from their early 40s to their mid 30s. French Canadian families took much longer to try to limit their family size. Instead, from the 1860s they resorted to large-scale migrations to the urban-industrial centres of New England in search of work to raise the capital needed to purchase farms back home. The first generation of migrants intended to come back—very few did. Their children, understanding they would enjoy a higher standard of living in New England than on a farm back home, did not even intend to return to Quebec. This migration did not involve negligible numbers: about 1,000,000 people left Quebec for the United States every ten years between 1860 and 1920.

In well-established farming settlements, then, parents pursued the same goals as their counterparts on the frontier, but with less success. Out-migration, to new settlements, to the west, to cities, and to the United States, was the inevitable consequence of population pressure. Too often the alternative to out-migration was staying home as a day labourer and being condemned to a life of poverty.

PROPERTY TRANSMISSION IN A CHANGING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that had the greatest impact on Canadian farmers and on family strategies of property transmission were the commercialization of agriculture, the growing availability of acceptable alternative occupations and the emergence of social programs for the elderly.

The commercialization of agriculture was a drawn out process that started at the beginning of the nineteenth century in some regions and was not fully completed until the 1960s in others. People have always farmed to support their families. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, most of that support was derived directly from farm production as food, shelter and clothing. Some farm produce was also sold to buy items one could not grow or raise (salt and spices, metal tools and window panes, tobacco, tea, alcohol, for instance), to pay taxes or to support the church. Gradually the proportion of farm production taken to the merchants increased and the proportion consumed on the premises diminished. By the 1960s, farmers were jumping into their store-bought trucks to go to buy milk, bread, potatoes and hamburgers at the supermarket and merchants were taking the entire production of farms. As agriculture became commercialized, farm families' standards of living increased. Increased

productivity, made possible by an increased use of machinery, had paralleled the shift to commercial agriculture.

Commercial agriculture meant that a larger, well-stocked and well-equipped farm was becoming a necessity if one was to be competitive. This had an impact on family strategies. No longer was it possible to turn over the farm to a son who had to support his elderly parents and to provide a start in life for his siblings. This would have been too great a financial burden and would have made the farm uncompetitive. Consequently, farmers began to transfer their farms to one of their sons in exchange for maintenance for themselves, but they no longer required the son to compensate his siblings. This shift occurred as early as the 1830s in the Richelieu valley, a region involved in the wheat trade. A little over one hundred years later, the same situation predominated in the Saguenay region, where agriculture commercialized very late. When farmers became deeply involved in the market, the farm became a business and ceased to be a long running source of start up capital for a succession of sons.

The commercialization of agriculture did not stop the farm from being a source of support in old age, however. Deeds of maintenance remained frequent among French Canadians until after World War II. In the 1950s, strategies shifted again. In the St Lawrence valley deeds of maintenance were replaced by sales, sometimes below market prices, to one of the children. The old people also stopped living with the young. They either moved to "granny suites" on the farm or moved to the village.

The Saguenay also witnessed a shift from deeds of maintenance to outright sales in the same period. Sons, knowing they would not get a piece of land from their fathers, became less willing to work for them without being paid. The increased use of equipment, however, made their departure less of a problem. They were replaced by machines.

When coupled with alternative occupational opportunities, the commercialization of agriculture led to a complete disintegration of the inheritance system. In some regions this occurred early and was not a serious obstacle to sons becoming farmers. The upper St John valley, the boundary between northwestern New Brunswick and northern Maine, provides an example of such a community in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its economy rested on agriculture for subsistence, for local trade and for sale to the lumber camps, and on the forest industry. Because of its location, the St John valley attracted lumber barons from Quebec, New Brunswick and New England, who competed with each other to the benefit of local suppliers and local labourers. Wages were relatively high: a small farm cost the equivalent of ten months' wages in

the woods at mid century. Wages were often paid in cash, even in gold, which was unusual at the time.

Between 1850 and 1870, half the landowning farmers turned at least some of their property to a son or son-in-law in exchange for maintenance. After 1860, the detailed list of goods to be delivered every year at Christmas was more and more often replaced by an annuity in cash or store credit. More interesting, however, was the fact that parents sold most of their holdings, and not always to their children: a quarter of the parents transferred no land to any of their children. When they did sell to the children, it was at market price. The amount of land one owned made no difference; owners of several lots did not transfer them to their sons as they married.

Intergenerational solidarity was therefore weak in this region. Parents were primarily concerned with raising their large families; they gave each child a modest dowry or portion when she or he married. And they secured their own support in old age, ideally by exchanging some land for maintenance, selling other lots and keeping a homestead until they died. Adult children were left to fend for themselves in acquiring land. A large proportion succeeded, normally by buying farms from established farmers. Children shunned the relatively inexpensive public land still available in the area and if they could not acquire farms to their liking, they emigrated, either to the mill towns of New England or to lumbering states like Wisconsin or Montana.

Parents in this region obviously believed that they had a right to dispose of their property as they saw fit: it was not a 'family' patrimony and the children had no moral claim on it. A similar attitude could be found several generations later in Quebec. In the 1950s in St Justin de Maskinongé, near Trois Rivières, the farmers considered their farms to be the equivalent of pensions: they had been unable to save money for their old age because they had spent most of their prime working years raising families. Consequently, they felt justified in using farms as they saw fit to provide for their old age and this right extended to the widow:

The people interviewed agree to state that when the father dies, his wife is often his heir and the son cannot take any decision without her agreement. In all the cases mentioned, the people stated that the farm belong to its owner who can dispose of it as he sees fit.³

By the 1950s, however, it was the sons' opportunities to earn a living off the farm that precipitated the disintegration of the older inheritance system. St Justin's youngsters preferred going to work in Montreal. The son who took

over from his parents was often the only one willing to stay on the land. By the 1970s, children's reluctance to become farmers was widespread and old couples would sell their land to remaining farmers and move to town, sometimes taking their houses with them. And, more and more, what was valuable was not the land but the milk or chicken quota. This could be sold to another farmer and the land to city people looking for summer homes.

We know little about the impact of agricultural commercialization and alternative employment in twentieth-century Ontario, as very few people have yet studied the matter. It seems, however, that a pattern similar to the one found in Québec prevailed here too. Children had become less dependent upon their parents for a start in life, and the parents had therefore lost some of their leverage upon them. But they became freer to dispose of their property in the ways best suited to their own interests. The practice of transferring farms (and in urban areas, real estate) in exchange for maintenance or an annuity continued but could become problematic. What if the recipient of the property did not live up to the terms of the agreement, or was unwilling to use the property as the elderly couple had intended, for instance, by managing it carefully? More and more, elderly people turned to the courts to ensure that maintenance agreements were respected; this is evidence that the force of custom was weakening. The different generations had not only diverging goals but diverging values as well.

At the beginning of the twentieth century reduced fertility and off-farm employment opportunities meant fewer and fewer old couples had sons willing to take over when they were ready to retire. Instead of giving the farm to a child, they turned their assets over to the local government in exchange for support. This arrangement differed from the old ones on one significant point: after the death of the parents, the farm was no longer in the family but passed to strangers. This practice had been permitted by an act of the provincial legislature in 1912, which remained in force until the 1950s. It was not necessarily a good deal for the municipalities; for instance, in 1941, the city of London decided to discontinue the practice.

Old Age Pensions also altered property transmission patterns in Ontario. Old Age Pensions were a cost shared program between the federal and provincial governments started in 1927. Pensions provided for the support of the elderly aged seventy or more who lacked sufficient resources to survive. Pensioners could not have an income higher than \$365 and pensions were capped at \$20 per person per month. Farm ownership disqualified people from receiving a pension. Maintenance agreements usually did as well. In this context the transfer of property from parents to children became a tricky issue.

Bureaucrats administering the plan often viewed transfers as a means of hiding assets to qualify for a pension. Officials more familiar with rural culture, on the other hand, were willing to accept that the transfer was often no more than compensation given a child for many years of unpaid work alongside his parents. Some were keenly aware of the potential conflict between the traditional rural culture and new bureaucratic regulations:

you are aware that it will be very hard to discriminate and doubtless some who I think should be supported by their families especially the son who has now the old farm and paying a rent of less than \$365 a year therefore. I might say also that in the very nature of things the Proposed Pension scheme will discriminate against the farmer as in order for a farmer to keep his sons on the land it is necessary for him to save a sufficient amount to give his sons a start on a farm which requires to be a considerable amount then in his old age make him an annual payment as rental while he lives.⁴

An unexpectedly high number of elderly applying for the pension, the extreme reluctance of the province of Ontario to join the scheme in the first place, the 1921 Ontario Parents Maintenance Act that obliged children to support their parents and the Great Depression which decimated government budgets, all combined to keep elderly farm couples from receiving the pension. They were thrust back onto the hands of their children for support. Parents devised their own tactics around this difficulty and transferred their land at least five years before they were to become eligible for the pension. The circumstances prevailing in the province between the wars, then, complicated family strategies devised to provide for aging people. We know little about their impact, however, and nothing at all about their impact after World War II. No historian so far has looked at this aspect of the problem.

CONCLUSION

As long as life chances were contingent upon access to land, families did their best to provide their sons with some acreage. Patterns of property transmission between the generations reflected this preoccupation. On pioneer settlements parents helped their sons acquire and improve nearby public land and passed their own farms to younger sons in exchange for support in old age. Older communities usually suffered from land shortages. Migration, of children or of entire families, became a widespread strategy for acquiring land. Under those conditions family help became even more critical.

When alternative opportunities, to make a decent living or to raise capital to buy farms, appeared and expanded, the intergenerational dynamic changed. The broadening of occupational opportunities coincided with the growing commercialization of agriculture, which changed the farm from a continuing source of start-up capital into a business preoccupied with costs and profits. Knowing their parents were no longer able to provide all of them with help in getting their own land, most sons became unwilling to work on the family farm for free, or even unwilling to become farmers altogether, preferring easier and better paid urban jobs. Parents were then forced to devise alternative strategies to provide for their old age, strategies that had to take into account rules governing existing social programs.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ This study is based on the titles listed in the bibliography.
- ² Patrice Lacombe, *La terre paternelle*, introduction by A. Vanasse, Montréal, Hurtubise HMH, 1972, p. 65-73, cited in Louis Lavallée, "La transmission du patrimoine dans la seigneurie de Laprairie, 1667-1760," dans *Evolution et éclatement du monde rural*, éd. par Joseph Goy et Jean Pierre Wallot. Montréal: Presses de l'université de Montréal, 1986, p. 344-346. tr. mine.
- ³ Philippe Garigue, "St Justin, une réévaluation de l'organisation communautaire," p. 137.

⁴ Ontario Archives, RG8, Series II-10-F, box 12. File Arthur Twp (Wellington). A. Hellyer to J.A. Ellis, Kenilworth, Ont., 10 July 1928, cited in James Snell. "Maintenance Agreements for the Elderly." p. 205.