

# Children, Schooling, and Family Reproduction in Nineteenth-Century Ontario

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southern banks.<sup>101</sup> At the Chatham poll during the summer holidays, the great 'armies' postured themselves by playing a war game. Men brought weapons for symbolic purposes: 'treenails,' pitchforks, revolvers, and cannons surfaced at various times but failed to be used, with the exception of the clubs. Instead, rivals chose to fight with less deadly implements such as rocks, sticks, and their own fists. No report surfaced of a shot being fired during either election, and with the exception of Ryan and a few others, casualties tended to be superficial.<sup>102</sup> Obviously, given the range of weaponry, men and women did not intend to kill one another for the election of a candidate. Far from being fights to the death between bitter enemies, the campaigns might more properly be characterized as ritualistic struggles — the manifestations of a continuing saga of interregional rivalry.

Thus election crowds shaped Northumberland County's campaigns of 1842–3. Instrumental in determining the outcome, they often achieved their goals with violence. Crowds were also part of the economic rivalry that had plagued the Miramichi for years, and their composition typically paralleled the entrepreneurs' lumber empires. While these campaigns might be considered minor incidents in New Brunswick's hinterland, they provided excellent examples of the importance of election-related collective behaviour. Miramichi's 'fighting elections' help us to understand the phenomenon of social violence in nineteenth-century British North America.

WHY DID CHILDREN go to school in increasing proportions during the nineteenth century? This seemingly straightforward question has given rise to a rich and diverse historical debate in Canada during the past two decades. An increasing number of researchers now suspect that an understanding of the origins of mass schooling is an essential part of general explanations of the making of twentieth-century Canada. Unexpectedly, though, every proposed response to the question of school attendance has raised at least as many issues as it has resolved. Each new interpretation has widened the scope of the topic and has shown additional ways in which the growing importance of classrooms related to large-scale social change. One positive result is a more sophisticated appreciation of the complexity of both educational history and the history of children.

The following discussion traces the evolution of recent historical debate in the case of nineteenth-century Ontario in order to outline a reinterpretation of mass schooling. This reinterpretation is based on the changing position of children within the process of family reproduction. In the early work of the 1960s and 1970s, scholars generally studied 'childhood' in terms of the perspectives, ambitions, and actions of adults. The result was a series of stimulating studies that documented the changing ways in which adults attempted to define and control children. A smaller proportion of studies focused on actual children, especially for topics such as school attendance and work.<sup>1</sup>

This paper has benefited greatly from valuable comments on an earlier version by Gordon Darroch, Harvey Graff, Susan Houston, Jack Little, Lynne Marks, Dianne Newell, Michael Piva, Eric Sager, Neil Sutherland, and the CHR readers.

<sup>1</sup> The now classic and as yet unsurpassed study is Neil Sutherland, *Children in*

101 Bryan Palmer developed the twin concepts of ritual and recreation in his interesting study of mobs and social custom in the United States and Canada, 'Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America,' *Labour/Le Travailleur* 3 (1978): 5–62. Cross also investigated the recreational nature of violence in the Ottawa Valley in 'The Shiners' War,' 24–5. Arthur M. Schlesinger discussed ritualistic punishments in 'Political Mobs and the American Revolution, 1765–1766,' *Proceedings of the American Philological Society* 105 (1977): 247; while John Runcie suggested that recreational aspects underscored race riots in "'Hunting the Nigs" in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834,' *Pennsylvania History* 39 (1972): 217–8.

102 The secretive removal of dead and wounded by both factions engaging in riots was clearly evident in the Saint John riots of 1847 and 1849. See Scott W. See, 'The Orange Order and Social Violence in Mid-Nineteenth Century Saint John,' *Acadiensis* 13 (1983): 84–5.

Recently, historians have begun concentrating on the need to situate the experiences of children within the larger process of family reproduction. By defining this process both in biological and material terms, researchers have begun exploring the links between macro-level and micro-level transformations, especially those related to the changing positions of children in social and economic organization. The findings of local studies based on individual-level data are now being related to the evidence of regional and national research based on aggregate patterns and high-level policies. In pursuing the implications of such micro-history for general analyses of historical change, this approach is demonstrating the need to relate large-scale configurations to the articulations of individual experience in growing up.<sup>2</sup>

Historians have also found, however, that the study of children in terms of family history can be problematic. One key issue concerns the implications of patriarchy both in terms of formal structures and ideology. Feminist scholars have effectively challenged the assumption of cohesive, harmonious family units in which collective goals have been collectively defined and pursued. The reality of gendered positions within families (with the consequent inequalities of power and distinctions in perspective) is now recognized to require sophisticated analyses of the ways in which individuals viewed and experienced family life. In this view, the history of males and females cannot simply be collapsed within the history of family economies, family strategies, and family structure.<sup>3</sup>

In a similar way, studies have shown that age must be considered

*English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1976). Research undertaken in the 1970s is listed in the bibliography of Joy Parr, ed., *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1982), and more recent studies can be found in the bibliographical work of the Canadian Childhood History Project at University of British Columbia under Sutherland and Jean Barman.

<sup>2</sup> The pioneering work in the Canadian context was Parr, *Childhood and Family*. More recent collections of essays that examine the United States experience include N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, eds., *Growing-Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1985), and Harvey J. Graff, ed., *Growing Up in America: Historical Experiences* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Rayna Rapp et al., 'Examining Family History', *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979): 174-200. Recent perspectives on this issue are offered in the special section of *Historical Methods* 20 (1987): 113-25 entitled 'Family Strategy: A Dialogue'. For an example of recent research which assumes this perspective see Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Ptman 1988).

an essential distinction within analyses of family history. This distinction goes beyond descriptions of divisions of labour or patterns of school attendance. Just as women can be seen as being 'at odds' with families, historians are coming to grips with the limits of viewing children as contented (or at least passive) members of cohesive family units. Within the patriarchal family, children, youth, and adults did not simply share the same interests or experience family life in undifferentiated ways.<sup>4</sup> The results were far from uniform; rather, family reproduction appears to have led to both conflict and cooperation, accommodation and alienation, success and failure.<sup>5</sup> These internal dynamics of families are, of course, very difficult to study; historical sources reveal far more about parents than children, and more about sons than daughters.

The problems of viewing families as unitary bodies has engendered considerable support for life-course analysis. By combining the more familiar concept of life cycle with an emphasis on historical context, this approach seeks to reconcile an appreciation of individual identity (especially gender and age) with the importance of family setting.<sup>6</sup> Some European historians have been reluctant to adopt this perspective since it implies significant variation in the experience of members of the same cohort. Since such variation depends on the ability to exercise individual choice, life-course analysis is considered inappropriate for settings where family and communal imperatives are all-encompassing.<sup>7</sup> Even in such societies, however, individual identity can be considered important if only as a strand in the 'knot' of family life.<sup>8</sup>

In this sense, the history of mass schooling raises questions about the individual identities and activities of children within the changing context of family experience. What were the familial structures and values which framed the lives of children and how and why did these

<sup>4</sup> Recent thoughts on this issue include those of Ian Davey presented in 'Rethinking the Origins of British Colonial School Systems', *Historical Studies in Education* 1 (1989): 149-59.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner offer a valuable review of the conceptual issues in 'Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives', presented to the Social Science History Association, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Glen H. Elder, 'Families and Lives: Some Developments in Life-Course Studies,' in Tamara Hareven and Andrejs Plakans, eds., *Family History at the Crossroads* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Martine Segalen, 'Life-Course Patterns and Peasant Culture in France: A Critical Assessment', *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Peter Laslett, 'The Family as a Knot of Individual Interests,' in R.M. Netting et al., *Housholds: Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1984).

structures and values change over time? Given this framework, what was the range of educational experience which can be observed among these children, and how and why did its relative importance change over time?

While these questions have become familiar in studies of children and youth, scholars have tended to isolate a certain dimension in keeping with the trend towards specialized subfields of socio-historical research. In contrast, this paper explores the origins of mass schooling by bringing together three distinct fields: the history of education, demographic history, and economic history. In each of these fields, recent research has brought into question basic assumptions about the origins of contemporary Canada.<sup>9</sup> The available research specifically related to children remains uneven, and any attempt to identify the changing meaning of structures or the varying ranges of ideas and behaviour is fraught with difficulty. And, of course, the vastness of these fields precludes comprehensive treatment in a single paper.

The publication of three major books between 1988 and 1990 attests to the current vitality of research activity in Ontario's educational history. In their own way, each of these studies, by Bruce Curtis, Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, and R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, builds on earlier work while also constructing new interpretations. The strongest link with earlier scholarship involves the continued emphasis on the thoughts and actions of the 'school promoters,' most notably, of course, Egerton Ryerson. However, these three books go well beyond this focus in addition to offering revisions to earlier characterizations of educational leaders.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to previous work, Curtis and Gidney/Millar stress the opposition those like Ryerson faced in attempting to establish their school system. Interestingly, though, these researchers come to quite

<sup>9</sup> Historiographical essays on these fields include Douglas McCalla and Peter George, 'Measurement, Myth, and Reality: Reflections on the Economic History of Nineteenth-Century Ontario,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 (1986): 71-86; J. Donald Wilson, 'Some Observations on Recent Trends in Canadian Educational History,' in Wilson, ed., *An Imperfect Past: Education and Society in Canadian History* (Vancouver: Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, UBC, 1986); and Chad Gaffield, 'Theory and Method in Canadian Historical Demography,' *Acadiensis* 14 (1982): 123-36.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1896-1871* (London, Ont.: Falmer Press and Athlone Press 1988); Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988); and R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1990)

different conclusions about their actual role. In discovering a variety of instances in which 'school supporters' (and sometimes students) opposed educational officials, Curtis implies that the builders of the 'Educational State' were a more formidable group than heretofore recognized; their ultimate victory was not an easy win over a passive or collaborating population. In turn, Gidney/Millar describe considerable struggle among distinct groups of school promoters who did not form a homogeneous force; indeed, at least in the case of secondary schooling, Ryerson and his allies often lost to other educational leaders, including those representing small towns and villages.

Houston/Prentice do acknowledge various examples of opposition to the school promoters and of debate among proponents of educational reform, but they are more impressed by evidence of general approval of the official project of mass schooling. While their own research led to this conclusion as early as the 1970s, they no longer insist on the overwhelming power of the school promoters to establish a public system. Rather, their reinterpretation involves an insistence on complexity, on an historical 'fabric tightly woven of multiple intentions and effects.' The lack of opposition was, thus, not the result of consensus or bourgeois hegemony. Quite different individuals and groups came to support mass schooling for their own reasons.

If viewed in terms of intellectual history, these three books could be seen as rejecting rather than building on the 'new social history' launched during the 1970s. For example, A.B. McKillop believes that Houston and Prentice have belatedly undergone a 'professional loss of innocence.' As a result, they can now admit the need to abandon the legacy of Michael B. Katz, who inspired scholarship that 'produced fewer answers, historical and ideological, not more.' In this view, the 'difficult lesson' Houston and Prentice had to learn was twofold: the need to avoid 'any substantial use of quantitative methods' and the need to be 'critical of the "social control" model.' Their eventual success in learning these lessons has allowed them to write a book with a 'richness of texture and tentativeness of tone' appropriate to a work of 'substantial scholarship and mature judgement.' Since neither Curtis nor Gidney/Millar make 'substantial use of quantitative methods' and both attack the social control thesis as formulated in the 1970s, their works could also be seen, if judged by these criteria, as implicit attacks on the era of the 'new social history.'<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A.B. McKillop, 'Culture, Intellect, and Context: Recent Writing on the Cultural and Intellectual History of Ontario,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 24 (1989): 16-17

This view, however, represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the evolution of historical debate, and a misreading of the current literature. These problems stem from a failure to perceive the ways in which continued socio-historical research pushed forward scholarly debate from the 1970s through the 1980s. It is this research that inspired ongoing reconsideration of the origins of mass schooling. During the past two decades, scholars have had to re-evaluate their interpretations constantly in light of new and often surprising findings in social history.

In the 1970s, many scholars (notably Houston and Prentice) interpreted the actions of public school promoters in terms of social control nourished by fear of dislocated (and thus potentially dangerous) 'traditional' mentalities in an emerging modern world of cities and factories. Children and youth were seen to be particularly at risk, and thus schools were designed for the purpose of moral, social, and economic order. In this view, the definition of children as pupils was intimately related to the importance of urban industrialization. The implication was that rural society, and its assumed lack of interest in education, was rapidly declining in the face of increasing metropolitanism, with its enthusiasm for educational reform. The school systems reflected the new social organization of cities, the new demands for industrial workers, and the need to integrate the numerous immigrants into their new society. In other words, traditional educational forms became outmoded by the dawn of modern society as engendered by the Industrial Revolution; the result was massive institution building, beginning with schools.<sup>12</sup> This assumption was the rationale for the urban social history projects that were undertaken by certain educational historians to examine the type of new industrial city dictating ideas and behaviour by 1850.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars of the early 1970s built their arguments on two key characterizations of Ontario in the mid-nineteenth century. First,

while emphasizing the growth of cities, researchers accepted the argument (made most effectively by Leo Johnson) that land speculators and government policy successfully discouraged a certain proportion of the population from rural settlement in an attempt to expand the wage-labour force.<sup>14</sup> The perceived result was increasing proletarianization; many of the new proletarians were forced into the cities where, in the absence of proper education as children, they became potential threats to society, especially as paupers and criminals. This phenomenon was said to fuel the activities of school promoters, led by Egerton Ryerson, who perceived the crumbling of traditional society with a mixture of nostalgia, glee, and anxiety.

The second key characterization of mid-nineteenth-century Ontario involved the nature and impact of immigrants, especially the famine Irish. The massive immigration of these years added to high natural increase to produce unprecedented population growth, particularly, it was said, in the new industrializing cities. This growth encouraged formal educational activity designed to prevent the potential social chaos represented by increasing masses of penniless proletarians uprooted from traditional ties and poorly prepared for the new rhythms of factory work and urban life. Historians thus explained the origins of public schooling as a response to a new social formation in which youth needed institutional supervision and socialization either in terms of social control (as argued in the early 1970s) or Gramscian hegemony (as argued by the latter 1970s). The key assumption in these interpretations was that rural depopulation and heavy immigration were flooding cities in ways that social leaders saw as threatening to the otherwise desirable elements of progress.

Almost immediately, social historians (most notably David Gagan) began pointing to an essential problem with these images of the historical context of children in the mid-nineteenth century – the predominantly rural character of Ontario. Despite the growth of cities

<sup>12</sup> A significant contribution of this work was the challenge it posed to the established 'staples' approach to Canadian history. By focusing on Canada's Industrial Revolution, scholars of the working-class brought the Canadian experience into the mainstream of Western social and economic change. Extensive notes provide a valuable guide to the best of this literature in Bryan Palmer's 'Social Formation and Class Formation in North America, 1800-1900,' in David Levine, ed., *Proletarianization and Family History* (New York: Academic Press 1984).

<sup>13</sup> The most important was Michael Katz's Hamilton Project, which led to *The People of Hamilton: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1975), and, with Michael T. Doucet and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1982).

<sup>14</sup> The most influential article for Ontario was undoubtedly Leo A. Johnson, 'Land Policy, Population Growth, and Social Structure in the Home District, 1798-1851,' *Ontario History* 63 (1971): 41-60. The classic work, which still looms large despite sustained criticism, is H. Clare Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1850* (Toronto: Lorimer 1981). The critics include Donald Akenson, 'H. Clare Pentland, the Irish, and the New Canadian Social History,' in his *Being Had: Historians, Evidence, and the Irish in North America* (Port Credit, Ont.: P.D. Meany 1985), and Allan Greer, 'Wage Labour and the Transition to Capitalism,' *Labour/Le Travail* 15 (spring 1985): 7-22. The continuing relevance of Pentland's argument is supported by Palmer in 'Social Formation and Class Formation,' and in 'Town, Port, and Country: Speculations on the Capitalist Transformation of Canada,' *Acadiensis* 12, 2 (1983): 131-9.

such as Toronto and Hamilton, the vast majority of Ontario's population lived in the countryside throughout the Ryersonian years.<sup>15</sup> This pattern was early recognized by educational historians but was not emphasized for several reasons. Susan Houston, for example, argued that, despite geographic distribution, most social leaders were developing an 'urban outlook' as early as the 1840s.<sup>16</sup> Influenced by developments elsewhere (especially in the United States and Britain), these leaders were said to be anticipating the future as much as reacting to the present. Thus, while Ontario was still very rural, the urban developments were taken as sufficient evidence that the balance was being tipped in favour of a new world of clocks, machines, and potential social chaos. Children everywhere, even those still in rural areas, had to be prepared to 'improve' or else all the benefits of progress would be lost forever.

At the same time, other scholars, especially R.D. Gidney and the late Doug Lawr, pointed out that the school promotion of the nineteenth century was, in many ways, a continuation of earlier educational activity in an indisputably rural society. Many of the centralizing and systematizing ambitions associated with Ryerson might be said to have had histories of their own, and, therefore, should not be seen as the specific result of urban growth from the 1840s.<sup>17</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, this apparent attack on the interpre-

tive relationship between substantial school promotion and a new urban-based social formation stopped short of calling for an explanation of educational history in rural areas. Ryerson's predecessors were characterized as either groping towards what he was ultimately able to achieve or desperately trying to stave off the early winds of change.

Debate about the urban/industrial nature of educational activity in mid-nineteenth-century Ontario took a new turn in 1975 when Michael Katz published his first major study on Hamilton. The most unexpected finding was that the supposed 'steel city' was, in fact, not yet even industrial in 1851; rather, Hamilton was a commercial centre comparable to Salem, Massachusetts, in 1800. Later work showed that early industrialization was apparent in Hamilton by 1871, but the evidence implied clearly that the social context of educational reform was not exactly as had been anticipated; indeed, the suggestion that even Hamilton was only like a commercial city of the United States in 1800 was quite startling. This study further undermined the belief that industrializing cities were the relevant context within which to situate the origins of an institutional society characterized first and foremost by mass schooling.<sup>18</sup>

In place of the urban industrial focus, scholars such as Katz began emphasizing the emergence of a wage-labour economy resulting from rapid capitalist development. In this view, the key phenomena were not machines and factories but rather those related to the growth of proletarian society. This emphasis defused the interpretive impact of the finding that cities such as Hamilton were not yet industrialized; it also weakened to some extent the need to see educational reform as primarily an urban development, since agricultural labourers could be included among the increasing proletarians. Thus, the initial explicative triad of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration came to be reconceptualized within a different chronology. The impact of industrialization was relocated in the 1860s and 1870s while the independent meaning of urbanization in the 1840s and 1850s was reinterpreted in terms of merchant capital and a general process of increasing wage labour. For its part, immigration took on added significance, especially in concert with rapid natural increase. The swelling ranks of the wage-labour force provided, it was said, a new context in which the idea of mass education found strong appeal.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, most educational scholars continued to offer arguments based on urban-industrial or wage-

<sup>15</sup> The key importance of land in nineteenth-century Ontario was at the heart of David Gagan's research in the 1970s, which led to *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1981). Only a relatively small number of scholars (including John Clarke, Peter Russell, Randy Widdis, and Brian Osborne) have continued this interest in rural society. Allan Smith offers a fascinating discussion in 'Farms, Forests and Cities: The Image of the Land and the Rise of the Metropolis in Ontario, 1860-1914,' in David Keane and Colin Read, eds., *Old Ontario: Essays in Honour of J.M.S. Careless* (Toronto: Dundurn 1990). Researchers in Quebec have consistently used the countryside to pursue socio-historical questions in the nineteenth century. The ongoing renewal of debate is evident in, for example, Serge Courville, 'Villages and Agriculture in the Seigneuries of Lower Canada: Conditions of a Comprehensive Study of Rural Quebec in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,' *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 5 (1986): 101-23.

<sup>16</sup> Susan E. Houston, 'Politics, Schools, and Social Change in Upper Canada,' *Canadian Historical Review* 53 (1972): 249-71.

<sup>17</sup> Many important articles have been written by R.D. Gidney, the late D.A. Lawr, and W.P.J. Millar, including 'Bureaucracy vs. Community? The Origins of Bureaucratic Procedures in the Upper Canadian School System,' *Journal of Social History* 13 (1980): 438-57, and 'From Voluntarism to State Schooling: The Creation of the Public School System in Ontario,' *Canadian Historical Review* 66 (1985): 443-73.

<sup>18</sup> Katz, *The People of Hamilton*; and Katz, Doucet, and Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*.

labour characterizations of Ontario despite new indications of interpretive problems related to chronology. The first major study of Ontario's rural society revealed substantial growth throughout the 1850s even in Peel County. In fact, David Gagan found that the most significant movement among occupational groups in Toronto's hinterland at this time involved the ambition of farming.<sup>19</sup> This evidence did not have a dramatic impact on interpretations of the origins of mass schooling because Gagan emphasized that the acquisition of land was, indeed, fast becoming less feasible. While still hungry for land, more of the population were seen to be trapped in cities or forced to migrate there from the saturated countryside. The Peel County example suggested that independent farming was rapidly fading as a realistic ambition as the rising price of land engendered a larger mass of wage labourers. In this sense, the apparent chronological problem of associating mass schooling with a large urban-based wage-labour economy was not serious since rural society was said to be moving into 'crisis' during the Ryersonian years. More credit simply had to be given to the school promoters' ability to recognize the early warning signs of social change.<sup>20</sup>

In the last few years, however, new research has raised questions about this depiction of rural society in nineteenth-century Ontario. Was the countryside actually in an economic and demographic crisis during the Ryersonian years? Were rapidly increasing proportions of children suddenly confronting the new urban industrial world? Conclusive answers to these questions cannot yet be provided but certain studies cast considerable doubt on fundamental aspects of the established arguments concerning the immediate and widespread impact on children of urban industrialization and immigration. Moreover, these studies suggest a quite different way of understanding the changing character of growing up.

The extent of land availability is a major issue in the debate about rural society in the mid-nineteenth century. At what point did the attainment of property in Ontario become an unrealistic dream? This question is quite complex. How is 'available land' to be defined? Lurking behind most answers to this question are assumptions about objectively defined minimum farm sizes and soil quality. Until very recently, scholars consistently pointed to 1850 as the time when Ontario was 'filled up,' although the evidence for this claim was limited to statements about the south-central core of the province.

<sup>19</sup> Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers*.

<sup>20</sup> Houston and Prentice discuss many additional examples in *Schooling and Scholars*.

However, rural Ontario in the mid-nineteenth century was not one homogeneous region.<sup>21</sup> For example, at least until the early 1870s, considerable tracts of land were still available in the initially bypassed counties of the eastern corner of the province. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s in this area, settlers could acquire quite reasonably priced land where households could be established on the basis of both farming and seasonal or market participation in the lumber industry. This region was disregarded in earlier decades in favour of south-central Ontario, but with the expanding timber and sawmill operations and the development of Ottawa, the area became more attractive, especially to families from neighbouring Quebec counties. The result was dramatic rural growth until the 1870s, when the retreating forest frontier began leaving the region behind.<sup>22</sup> This example illustrates that 'land availability' reflects a subjective evaluation; the land of the easternmost counties that was first considered unattractive was re-evaluated in light of the development of the lumber industry.

The view of rural Ontario as a differentiated collection of regions is further suggested by the evidence that even central Ontario retained a predominantly rural social formation at least through the 1870s. Despite the rapid growth of Toronto and Hamilton, the apparent rural crisis in Peel County and the perceived massive proletarianization in the Home District, the routinely generated sources examined by Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein show that central Ontario experienced rural expansion throughout the Ryersonian years. A systematic comparison of the enumerations of 1861 and 1871 reveals that commercial and bourgeois occupations did increase during the 1860s but that this increase was relatively modest

<sup>21</sup> In his recent work, Ian M. Drummond analyses the province in terms of five regions; see, for example, table 3.13 in *Progress without Planning: The Economic History of Ontario from Confederation to the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987), 378.

<sup>22</sup> 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), chaps. 2 and 3. A different perspective on the settlement of easternmost Ontario is offered by Fernand Ouellet in his essay reviewing this book published in *Ontario History* 81 (1989): 59-68. Unfortunately, the tables of empirical evidence Ouellet proposes are marred by errors of transcription or typography and thus should only be used with extreme caution. More importantly, though, Ouellet's aggregate-level approach requires readers to suspend belief in the ecological fallacy. This requirement seems unreasonable given the nature of the issues, and, happily, is unnecessary given the availability of individual-level data (as used in *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict*).

in comparison with the increasing proportion of farmers and artisans.<sup>23</sup> This evidence seems consistent with the appearance of widespread rural depopulation only during the last two decades of the century.

It also appears that the expansion of rural society during the Ryersonian years was based on complex economic changes; however, these changes were quite distinct from the frequently cited British example of proto-industrialization. Rather, agriculture was being transformed by a broad range of developments, including the shift from wheat to mixed farming, the significant rise of dairying, some consolidation of farms, and increasing mechanization. And, perhaps most interestingly, rural industry was growing rapidly, especially sawmilling and gristmilling.<sup>24</sup>

This transformation of rural society did engender a growing demand for wage labour; indeed, certain establishments hired hundreds of workers, who were often paid by the day or month.<sup>25</sup> However, the meaning and character of this wage labour appear to have varied considerably.<sup>26</sup> In the case of the eastern counties, these workers often appear to have been young single men who were supplementing land-based family economies on a seasonal basis; they were 'proletarians' only part of the year while they still also laboured as members of property-owning families.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, wage labour

was becoming increasingly important in rural society, but in complex ways that do not seem to be captured by the familiar categories of analysis developed for England.<sup>28</sup> Rather than 'family wage-economies' replacing 'family economies' based on labour, economic change in mid-century Ontario may have been associated with a differentiated integration of some wage labour into families, most of which still laboured on their own property.<sup>29</sup>

The possibility that rural capitalism and rural industrialization depended on wage labour but did not immediately engender massive proletarianization is consistent with evidence that occupational mobility continued to be mainly in the direction of becoming a farmer during the supposedly crisis years of the 1860s. Rather than substantial rural depopulation in all regions of Ontario, much of the countryside was continuing to develop as immigrants and substantial numbers of the emerging generation acquired land. The monolithic image of a worn-out agricultural heartland simply cannot be applied to Ontario during the years of public school system construction.<sup>30</sup> The most compelling evidence is that the proportion of the labour force considered to be labourers within the occupational structure of central Ontario actually declined during the 1860s; at the start of the decade, 26.9 per cent of the male labour force were labourers, and this group declined to 18.7 per cent in 1871. The largest relative increase in occupational importance was experienced by farmers, whose ranks rose from 31.8 per cent to 37.7 per cent. Moreover, 60 per cent of the labourers from 1861 who stayed in central Ontario became farmers or entered other non-labouring occupations. As

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein, 'Ethnicity and Class: Transitions over a Decade, Ontario 1861-1871,' *Historical Papers* (1984): 111-37.

<sup>24</sup> The most valuable research includes the work of Douglas McCalla, such as 'The Wheat Staple and Upper Canadian Development,' *Historical Papers* (1978): 34-45 and 'The Internal Economy of Upper Canada: New Evidence on Agricultural Marketing Before 1850,' *Agricultural History* 59 (1985): 375-416. For the later period see Marvin McNinn, 'Marketable Surpluses in Ontario Farming, 1860,' *Social Science History* 8 (1984): 395-424; John Isbister, 'Agriculture, Balanced Growth, and Social Change in Central Canada: An Interpretation,' *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 25 (1977): 673-97; D.A. Lawr, 'The Development of Ontario Farming 1870-1919,' *Ontario History* 64 (1972): 239-51; Robert E. Ankli and Wendy Millar, 'Ontario Agriculture in Transition: The Shift from Wheat to Cheese,' *Journal of Economic History* 42 (1982): 207-15; and John McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Peter A. Russell, 'Wage Labour Rates in Upper Canada, 1818-1840,' *Historie sociale/Social History* 16 (1983): 61-80.

<sup>26</sup> On those in agriculture see Joy Parr, 'Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective,' *Labour/Le Travail* 15 (1985): 91-103.

<sup>27</sup> Chad Gaffield, 'Boom and Bust: The Demography and Economy of the Lower Ottawa Valley in the Nineteenth Century,' *Historical Papers* (1982): 172-95. McCalla and George wonder about the degree to which the Ottawa region in

particular was relatively independent of the economy of the rest of the province,' in 'Measurement, Myth, and Reality,' 78. While this is an important question, it does not say that the 'rest of the province' was one region.

<sup>28</sup> This perception is also at the heart of one of the best studies of industrialization in North America: Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts 1810-1860* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1983).

<sup>29</sup> The term 'semi-proletarian,' or some other version, has been used by Canadian historians to capture (usually from the point of view of individuals rather than their families) the combining of wage labour with work on one's own account. An early example is Michael Cross, 'The Dark Druidical Groves,' (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1968); more recently, see James Sacouman, 'Semi-Proletarianization and Rural Underdevelopment in the Maritimes,' *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 17 (1980): 232-45.

<sup>30</sup> The complexity of rural land-holding is becoming increasingly evident as a result of work such as William L. Marr's careful study of the small but significant role of tenant farms in 'Nineteenth Century Tenancy Rates in Ontario's Counties, 1881 and 1891,' *Journal of Social History* 21 (1988): 753-63.

Darroch observes, 'this is hardly evidence to encourage an interpretation of widening proletarianization.'<sup>31</sup>

Taken together, the continued opportunity for land acquisition in certain regions of Ontario and the declining proportion of labourers even in the central counties during the 1860s undermines the familiar portrayal of the social context of the origins of mass education in Ontario. Instead of widespread rural crisis and a linear, quite sudden transition to urban industrial capitalism, the Ontario Ryerson knew was characterized by widespread property ownership and a rural and petit-bourgeois social formation coming to grips with capitalism and industrialization in the countryside. Throughout the different articulations of this process across the various townships, land remained the basis of most family economies.<sup>32</sup>

This point is worth emphasizing since the central theme of Houston and Prenice's recent book concerns the ways in which family life came to be increasingly structured around schooling rather than economic activity. By the 1870s, the 'myriad family responsibilities that had absorbed so much of the waking hours of children and young people in earlier times had diminished. When once the time spent at school was fitted around the demands of family time, now the situation was reversed.'<sup>33</sup> Houston and Prenice are certainly correct in noting the increasing importance of school attendance in children's lives, and their study contributes significantly to a better understanding of both the school promoters' ambitions and the actual experience of formal education. However, the changing thoughts and behaviour that increasingly inspired and allowed families to send children to school receive much less attention. These authors clearly move away from the earlier insistence on urban industrial forces and a singular emphasis on 'social control,' but they do not offer an

<sup>31</sup> Gordon Darroch, 'Class in Nineteenth-Century Ontario: A Reassessment of the Crisis and Demise of Small Producers during Early Industrialization, 1861-1871', in Gregory Kealey, ed., *Class, Gender, and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology* (St. John's: Committee on Canadian Labour History 1988).

Darroch places this specific evidence within an argument about the long-term change of Canada's social formation in 'Class and Stratification,' in L. Tepperman and J. Richardson, eds., *An Introduction to Sociology*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill 1989).

<sup>32</sup> The complex issues involved in the conceptualization of family farms, wage-labour, and the market are grappled with in insightful ways, with some reference to Canada, by Harnett Friedmann in 'World Market, State, and Family Farm: Social Bases of Household Production in the Era of Wage Labour,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (1978): 545-86.

<sup>33</sup> Houston and Prenice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 344

alternate interpretation of why schooling did, in fact, gain popular support.

Moreover, the conclusion that schooling took over from economic activity as an organizing force of family life does not seem to fit chronologically in the case on Ontario. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, families were still primarily structured around economic life; in the predominantly rural world of Ontario, family economies remained the basis of most children's lives. Nonetheless, school attendance was becoming quite important for the majority of children (as carefully surveyed by Houston and Prenice). The interpretive challenge is, thus, to explain increasing school attendance at a time when family economies continued to be characteristic of Ontario society.

A further dimension to the recent revision of Ontario's social history concerns the character of Irish immigration. The established view in the 1970s, which portrayed the Irish as bedraggled urban labourers ever ready to attack the social order through crime and ignorance, has been rejected by research that emphasizes the rural and relatively successful settlement of both Catholics and Protestants. In repeated studies, Donald Akenson has stressed that the Irish immigrants to Ontario should not be confused with those who went to the United States. The Irish who arrived before and during the Ryersonian years did not congregate in cities, trapped either by restrictive land policies or by their own cultural and psychological deficiencies. Rather, these immigrants quickly and quite smoothly settled in the countryside. Akenson questions the impact of land speculation on rural development at any point during the formative decades of the nineteenth century, and he argues that the Irish were just as successful farmers as other groups. Interestingly, Akenson also suggests that, instead of being the targets of educational promotion, the Irish themselves built schools as institutions in keeping with their own cultural traditions. In this view, schools were not an elite response to urban proletarians, especially those from Ireland, but rather were a natural result of cultural transfer within rural society.<sup>34</sup>

The rehabilitation of the Irish immigrants within Ontario historiography has recently continued with the work of Bruce Elliott. By studying the pre- and post-migration contexts of the immigrants who came from Tipperary, Elliott takes aim at the notion of the Irish

<sup>34</sup> Donald Harmond Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1984), and *Being Had*

emigrant as a 'failure, a belligerent rebel, and a fundamentally emotional and irrational soul.'<sup>35</sup> By tracing the identity, migration, and experience of those who came mainly to Ontario, Elliott insists not only on the rural character of this settlement but also on the importance of family and kinship as the constant context of individual destiny. Rather than uprooted from traditional ties and floundering in a completely foreign social formation, these Irish settlers operated within complex networks of relatives who often contributed to material security in both eastern and western Ontario. They usually acquired land and were able to settle in close proximity to other immigrants from their family or at least from Tipperary. The result was an uneventful adjustment and accommodation to the new world, certainly not one that should have inspired established leaders to devise drastic new measures such as public school systems to ensure social control.

While the recent studies of the Irish immigrants tend to emphasize success, it is also clear that the townships did not simply include happy farm families successfully raising their children. Just as the perception of crisis seems unwarranted, an emphasis on success does not capture the complexity of rural change in mid-nineteenth-century Ontario. Indeed, rural industrialization and agricultural transformation appear to have had different meanings for different groups in various regions. The relative importance of wealth and poverty across time and space in rural society clearly requires additional micro-historical research.<sup>36</sup>

Taken together, new findings now raise major questions about the structures within which the lives of children were transformed in nineteenth-century Ontario. School promoters may have perceived families in crisis, dislocated individuals gravitating to cities, and frozen traditional mentalities, but the actual evidence does not appear to justify this monolithic characterization. The required framework of analysis is one that accommodates not only urban growth but also the uneven and complex processes of rural expansion and transformation.

Given the urban preoccupation of historians engaged in micro-history or in the various subfields of social history, it is not surprising that research on rural schooling and literacy has been quite limited.

<sup>35</sup> Bruce S. Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1988), 5.

<sup>36</sup> David P. Gagan, 'Class and Society in Victorian English Canada: An Historiographical Reassessment,' *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 4, 1 (1989): 74-87.

However, several studies suggest that, from the time of earliest settlement and long before the educational promotion of the mid-nineteenth century, rural communities characteristically constructed school houses or paid teachers to instruct children in their homes. This activity was not, however, a major priority. Over time, an increasing proportion of rural children went to school, but only after other priorities had been respected. The main obligation of both boys and girls was to contribute to the family economy, and even with the establishment of public schooling and centralized inspection, the primary role of youths as producers was not disregarded by rural parents. This priority is particularly evident in the age structure of school enrolment and in the seasonal nature of daily attendance. Only a small minority of rural teenagers ever went to school, and almost all children were absent during productive times of the year when every extra hand was valuable.

Within this general pattern, studies have found important variations and change over time. The extent of participation in schools reflected the fact that rural society was not a homogeneous mass but rather was characterized by differences in occupation, wealth, and ethnicity. The sons and daughters of petit-bourgeois parents, who were usually the village officials, attended school more frequently and for a longer period than did other rural children. In turn, the children of independent farmers were more often in class than those of rural labourers. This pattern appears to have continued throughout the Ryerson years, although the participation rates of all rural children increased during this time. As the years went by, more and more rural children received formal instruction such that their schooling between the ages of seven and twelve was never dramatically different from that of their urban counterparts, whose participation was also directly related to the occupational structure.<sup>37</sup>

A key question is why there was any similarity in the educational experience of rural and urban areas. Historians have emphasized the fact that with the decrease in frontier conditions, rural children became less important as producers. Whereas every available hand could be put to some use in the labour-intensive work of pioneer settlement, youths in older agricultural areas were more easily made available for the classroom. In other words, there was a rural counterpart to the considerable economic dislocation of children in an urban wage-labour economy. This interpretation stresses the import-

<sup>37</sup> The literature on school attendance is now quite massive. The best overview is in Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 214-23.

ance of immediate circumstances in the decision to attend school; from the parents' point of view, their calculations primarily reflected the present rather than the future. The question was simply whether the children were needed at home for the immediate survival and security of the family. As will be suggested, parents may not have been as present-minded as this explanation implies.

But within material considerations, the importance of ethnoreligious differences is also clearly indicated by those studies which show that rural parents were well aware that schooling was not value-free. Although the countryside was characterized by ethnic clustering, this pattern was hardly neat or complete, with the result that the nearest school could often reflect the cultural orientation of another group. Many parents who wanted to send their children to school had to choose between a teacher and curriculum they found inappropriate and a more distant school that reflected their own background. This decision became more problematic with the establishment of the public school system, which often disregarded ethnoreligious settlement patterns in creating school sections. More and more parents found themselves forced together within school boundaries that denied the earlier decisions of settlers to maintain ethnic ties by living in close proximity. The starkest example of the results of this development comes from eastern Ontario, where the attendance rates of francophone and anglophone children related directly to the availability of the appropriate language of instruction in the local school. But less dramatic evidence has also been found for other rural areas, especially with regard to the religion of the teacher. The conclusion is that economic constraints were not the only factors in preventing rural children from attending school more consistently and for longer periods. Parents appear to have watched quite attentively what went on in classrooms, and their decision to send their children was more than an immediate material calculation.<sup>38</sup>

The evidence of quite active but differentiated rural school attendance is similar to the findings of studies on literacy. Initial dichotomies of rural/urban, illiterate/literate have not been supported by research on areas such as Elgin County. As part of his major study of literacy in mid-nineteenth-century Ontario, Harvey Graff showed in the 1970s that almost all residents in the Elgin townships considered themselves able to read and write by 1850. In fact, the

proportion of literates exceeded the percentage in cities such as Hamilton. The pattern of higher literacy rates in rural areas was not unique to southwestern Ontario but rather extended to most regions of the province. Graff remarked that literacy was less relevant in a rural economy, and thus this ability had to be related to other activities and processes including 'social stratification and social control.' Conversely, lower urban literacy rates were explained by the congregation of poor Irish Catholics in the growing cities.<sup>39</sup> However, as discussed earlier, this explanation does not seem as attractive as it did fifteen years ago; the relationship between literacy and the evolution of rural society calls for an explanation rooted in the experience of families in the villages and townships.

One major obstacle to a better understanding of rural literacy is the paucity of sources. The census evidence used by Harvey Graff is certainly problematic but it is still the best data given the comprehensiveness and systematic nature of the enumerations. Other possible sources such as church registers are difficult to use effectively for community or regional studies, which would have to confront the problem of finding the records of the numerous nineteenth-century denominations. Thus, educational historians of rural society in Ontario have access to a much more extensive literature on school attendance than on literacy. However, the evidence that the proportion of rural residents who could read and write was actually somewhat greater than that of their urban counterparts poses an interpretive challenge, especially if the assumption of predominantly urban and often illiterate Irish immigrants is misleading. High literacy rates and quite active school participation are not the expected hallmarks of a rural society in need of educational transformation by urban progress.

It is in this context that R.D. Gidney, Doug Lawr, and W.P.J. Millar have attempted to offer province-wide interpretations of mass schooling. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Gidney and Lawr renewed interest in the villages and concessions by focusing on the attitudes and concerns revealed in the letters sent by parents, trustees, and others to educational officials. In reading through the vast amount of this correspondence, these researchers became convinced

39 Harvey Graff's first major work was *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City* (New York: Academic Press 1979). H.J. Mays and H.F. Manzl believe that Graff overestimates the extent of literacy as a result of inappropriate interpretation of census data; see their lively debate in 'Literacy and Social Structure in Nineteenth Century Ontario: An Exercise in Historical Demography,' *Histoire sociale/Social History* 7 (Nov. 1974): 331-47.

38 The evidence on eastern Ontario is presented in Gaffield, *Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict*, and other relevant examples are offered in Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State*.

that a centralized and bureaucratized school system was not imposed on rural areas but developed in response to the self-acknowledged need in the townships for mechanisms and policies to administer schools. This need was especially pronounced in the context of the inevitable local disputes resulting from 'human nature' as much as from social or ethno-religious circumstances. In this view, a popular consensus in both rural and urban areas underlay the success of the official school promoters in establishing a public system; in fact, Ryerson was following as much as leading the direction of educational reform.<sup>40</sup>

In more recent work, Gidney and Millar locate educational agency more specifically in the 'middle class.' In their definition, the middle class was not simply urban but rather came from all areas of Ontario. They argue that the central process underpinning mass schooling was an emerging belief among middle-class parents that voluntary and private schooling was no longer adequate to their needs. Over time, these parents built a compulsory and public system which offered universal accessibility in theory but which actually best served their own interests.<sup>41</sup> In their book on secondary schooling, Gidney and Millar pursue this argument by detailing the educational actions and attitudes of 'merchants and other proprietors, professionals, public officials, and clerks, along with substantial farmers and those artisans and craftsmen who had won some degree of prosperity from their work.' Considering this middle class 'essentially identical' with Michael Katz's 'business class' studied in Hamilton, Gidney and Millar argue that Ryerson may have been the most important educational leader in this social group but that he often could not control the nature and pace of school administration, given the extent and diversity of middle-class involvement.

This research is appealing since it attempts to accommodate evidence of support for mass schooling in both urban and rural areas. By using a broad definition of 'middle class,' Gidney and Millar seek to capture the basis of school building across the province. But can this interpretation account for the actual dimensions of support for schooling? While Gidney and Millar do not specify the relative

importance of their 'middle class' within Ontario's social structure, the data Katz offers indicates that this class was about one-third of industrializing Hamilton. If this proportion can be hypothetically extrapolated to all of Ontario, the educational values and behaviors of two-thirds of the province remain to be described. Did this majority share the 'middle-class' decision to sacrifice immediate material concerns in order to send their children to school in hopes of securing their 'occupational future'? And if so, why? These questions indicate the continuing need to make sense of mass schooling in terms of all social groups.

In his recent book, Bruce Curtis addresses this challenge but he rejects the notion that public schooling sprang from province-wide origins. Instead, Curtis views the establishment of school systems in terms of the destruction of community-based education by urban political leaders seeking to establish a centrally controlled way to ensure political stability within the developing state. Curtis insists on the political ambition of educational systems. Rather than primarily economic or social agencies, public schools evolved in Ontario as a politically motivated response to the perception of elites that schools could be a principal strategy of state formation. This perception became orthodox among the 'governing classes' towards the mid-nineteenth century especially after the rebellions of 1837-8. In this sense, public schooling did not develop as a direct consequence of urbanization, industrialization, or an expanding wage-labour economy. Educational administrators considered political socialization in state-run schools to be just as important in rural as in urban areas. Indeed, given the example of the rebellions, 'proper' education was perhaps even more important in the countryside. In this way, Curtis tries to reconcile a belief in the agency of urban, elite leaders with the reality of a predominantly rural society.

At the same time, Curtis has provided many examples of popular resistance to the school-building efforts of the Ryersonian years. Rather than the almost immediate achievement of socio-cultural hegemony and thus popular acquiescence, parents and local trustees always did their best to maintain control of the schools, often thwarting the ambitions of central authority. Teachers deemed undesirable by community standards were quickly dismissed. Ultimately, such resistance was unable to prevent construction of the educational state, but Curtis emphasizes the continuing efforts of communities to maintain their own integrity in the face of state centralization. This emphasis views the letters from trustees and parents to Ryerson in terms of the local conflicts created by the

<sup>40</sup> The work of Gidney, Lawr, and Millar has been most important in promoting this interpretation. They posed the key question in the title of 'Who Ran the Schools? Local Influence on Educational Policy in Nineteenth-Century Ontario,' *Ontario History* 72, 3 (Sept. 1980): 131-43.

<sup>41</sup> R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, 'From Voluntarism to State Schooling: The Creation of the Public School System in Ontario,' *Canadian Historical Review* 66, 4 (Dec. 1985): 443-73

developing provincial structure which did not and could not adequately respect local circumstances. In this sense, bureaucracy was not the result of popular need but rather the inevitable product of the local loss of authority.

While Curtis stresses examples of popular resistance in order to show that the educational state resulted from coercive high-level agency, the evidence of the book is also testimony to the vitality of rural society. Most of the illustrations of conflict come from the townships, and they do not describe a passive rural society. Rather, this evidence points to an active, dynamic, and, as much as possible, self-assertive countryside. In this way, Curtis's work also encourages an attempt to understand mass schooling from the perspectives of the rural parents and children who did their best to control their own destinies. While urban elites held levers of power not accessible to most rural residents, they were not always able to disregard local priorities which themselves were often in conflict. But what considerations were behind these priorities? What characteristics of rural social formation affected educational attitudes and the experience of children?

To address these questions, family history provides an essential context for the nineteenth century. While a great deal remains to be learned about this history, the continuing importance of family and kin to individual existence is no longer in doubt for nineteenth-century Ontario. The specific analytic advantage of the concept of family reproduction is that it captures the ways in which one generation both biologically creates the next and materially strives to ensure its security and survival.

The essential characteristic of family reproduction is that it is future-oriented. This feature is particularly noteworthy for the study of rural society, since historians have tended to depict rural families as present-minded and reluctant to innovate in anticipation of changed conditions. The data now available on rural fertility, marriage patterns, and inheritance suggest the inappropriateness of this depiction. Rather than being trapped by their own traditional mentalities, the members of rural families appear to have been quite responsive to their changing environment. As early as the mid-nineteenth century in the Ontario townships, they were revising the ways in which they reproduced themselves both demographically and materially. While these revisions are not yet fully understood, a number of important studies have concluded that members of rural families were indeed thinking ahead and planning to meet new challenges throughout the nineteenth century.

Studies have also now shown that an earlier tendency to view rural

families as little capitalist enterprises always seeking to maximize immediate production is misleading at best. Rather, a high priority appears to have been the maintenance of family and kinship bonds that formed the basis of communal and ethnic attachment. This priority certainly involved sentiment but it was also directly related to the material insecurity of everyday life. The best long-term economic guarantee was an extensive network of relatives, some of whom would always, it was hoped, be in a position to support needy individuals. Such support might take the form of facilitating migration, helping establish farms, or perhaps identifying a job opportunity. This familial ideology engendered ethnic patterns of settlement as well as the maintenance of ties across time and space.

Despite the major social, economic, and cultural changes of the nineteenth century, researchers have not found that familial ideology simply broke down. While the new institutions (including schooling) can be considered as attacks on family solidarity in that they promoted a state-defined identity, scholars have shown that families often used such institutions only for their own reasons and within a family context. The ways in which various family members viewed such activities, and the importance they held for them as individuals, clearly reflected the patriarchal underpinnings of the nineteenth century as well as their specific historical context. In this sense, the continued importance of families does not imply homogeneous experience and should not be associated with stasis more than change. In fact, rapid transformation appears to have engendered complex and competing forces. As a result, family members were both pushed together and pulled apart as they constantly reevaluated the most promising ways in which to achieve security and stability.

Perhaps the most surprising evidence of recent research is that fertility was being controlled from as early as the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The recent analyses undertaken by Marvin McInnis and others indicate that efforts to limit family size were particularly evident in Ontario's older settled regions but were also apparent in the more recently opened townships. Fertility in cities came to be lower than in the countryside after mid-century, but the pattern of change was exceedingly complicated. Indeed, no single explanation has been able to account for the extent to which the various regions of Ontario experienced general fertility reduction. While family size

<sup>42</sup> Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren summarize the demographic evidence as the point of departure for their study of contraception and abortion in *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1986).

was consistently declining throughout Ontario, the actual rate of reduction varied among different groups in different regions of the province. Beyond a moderate relationship between fertility and the timing of settlement, scholars have yet to determine the convergence of forces that inspired either demographic adjustment or innovation as early as 1850.<sup>43</sup>

One tantalizing suggestion, however, is that the attitudes and relative importance of men and women in deciding to control family size were quite different.<sup>44</sup> Two possibilities are relevant to this suggestion: that women may have been more interested than men in limiting family size; and that women and men may have had their own reasons for doing so. Almost no evidence has yet been presented with which we can examine these possibilities for the mid-nineteenth century, but it is intriguing that family limitation began in an era when the written evidence suggests that it was disapproved by both formal and informal ideologies and structures. Since such evidence has an inherent bias in favour of the importance of patriarchal authority, the practice of family limitation implies that the internal workings of actual families was far more complex than described in the documents of the time.<sup>45</sup>

The important conclusion for understanding the changing position of children is that rural as well as urban families were recalculating the rhythms of their reproduction throughout the era of public school construction. Although children in larger families were more likely to go to school during the mid-nineteenth century the reverse pattern took

43 Marvin McInnis's extensive research has been undertaken for the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. 2, forthcoming. The results for central Canada are analysed in 'Fertility Patterns in Late Nineteenth-Century Quebec and Ontario,' presented at the colloquium Studies in North American Fertility, University of Ottawa, March 1989.

44 Wally Secombe has quipped that 'one would never guess [from reading the publications of historical demographers] that childbearing was a sex-specific and gender differentiated process.' See 'Marxism and Demography,' *New Left Review* 137 (1983): 22-47. In contrast, McLaren and McLaren differentiate as much as possible between men and women in *The Bedroom and the State*.

45 One of the few discussions in Canada of the relationship between women's history and historical demography is Jennifer Stoddart, 'L'histoire des femmes et la démographie,' *Cahiers québécois de démographie* 13 (1984): 79-85. Marie Lavigne has particularly emphasized the need to assess aggregate demographic evidence from the women's point of view in her 'Réflexions féministes autour de la fertilité des Québécois,' in Nadia Fahmy-Eid and Micheline Dumont, eds., *Maîtresses de maison, maîtresses d'école* (Montréal: Boreal Express 1983); her work for early nineteenth-century Quebec is summarized in the Clio Collective, *Québec Women: A History* (Toronto: Women's Press 1987), 192-3.

hold in later decades. Over time, smaller families (associated with the concept of 'quality' children) contributed significantly to the extension of mass schooling into the teenage years. Understandably, this process was not recognized by Ryerson or other educational leaders.<sup>46</sup>

But were increasing school attendance and family limitation interrelated and, if so, in which ways? Rather than seeking a single answer to this question, recent research suggests the importance of studying the articulations of the two processes in specific times and places. Very little can yet be said about certain regions of Ontario, but at least some preliminary indications do suggest a high correlation between literacy and fertility. In the easternmost corner of the province, for example, quite high rates of illiteracy (predominantly among francophone settlers) were associated with continued high fertility rates. This pattern appears to have been widespread not only in Ontario but also in Quebec. The mechanisms at work remain a question: Did increasing literacy inspire birth control or did smaller family sizes permit greater educational attainment? More specifically, did the ability to read and write change the attitude of men and/or women towards childbearing? Or did changing material conditions encourage family limitation which, as a byproduct, facilitated school attendance? In both analyses, however, educational behaviour and fertility decisions can be considered central components in the changing process of family reproduction.<sup>47</sup>

A further aspect of the demographic changes evident during the second half of the nineteenth century included two trends related to marriage: an increasing age at marriage for most men and women, and a growing minority of adults who never married. These patterns include significant variation among certain groups in specific settings, but the general trends were evident in both cities and rural areas.<sup>48</sup> Since the first phases of industrialization are usually associated with a decreasing age of marriage, the data on age at marriage further

46 For a presentation of the kind of conceptualization that seems worth pursuing see David Levine, 'Recombinant Family Formation Strategies,' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 2 (1989): 100-6.

47 It may also be, of course, that some third as yet unidentified process was responsible for both literacy and fertility trends. Or they may have been dynamically interrelated, both acting at various moments as independent and dependent variables. An important contribution to conceptualization of the many possible connections between fertility and education is Mark J. Stern's *Society and Family Strategy: Erie County, New York 1850-1920* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1987).

48 Ellen M.T. Gee has undertaken the most extensive work including 'Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Canada,' *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 3

indicates the problems of interpreting nineteenth-century Ontario within the framework of the Industrial Revolution in cities. It is also noteworthy that, in addition to contributing to the fertility decline, the majority who postponed marriage and the increasing minority who never married produced a larger cohort of older single adults. While most of these adults would eventually marry, the delay of their formation of families is significant evidence of changing individual considerations within families.

The process of courtship and the right to marry appear to have continued to be controlled socially in nineteenth-century Ontario, with parents doing their best to supervise both the selection of mates and the timing of engagement. The material consequences of not respecting the familial ideology (as articulated by parental wishes) were often sufficient to encourage young adults to plan their lives as continuing members of families rather than as individuals. Nonetheless, this control was certainly not total since the structures of Ontario society afforded the opportunity to migrate elsewhere. And premarital conception could be used as a power strategy by young adults, perhaps in an effort to force approval by parents of a 'disapproved' relationship.<sup>49</sup> Such a strategy clearly had different risks for men and women, as did the decision not to marry.<sup>50</sup>

But how can the various pieces of evidence on economic, educational, and demographic history be brought together to produce better understandings of the changing experience of children in nineteenth-century Ontario? In focusing on family reproduction, the essential dimension may have involved the process of inheritance. Unfortunately, researchers have paid very little attention to inheritance practices in Ontario. In fact, educational historians have generally ignored the topic.<sup>51</sup> One of the few studies of inheritance is David Gagan's analysis of probate records representing 1500 estates

in Peel County between 1840 and 1900.<sup>52</sup> In Gagan's analysis, these records indicate very little change over time in the inheritance practices of this largely agricultural region. Throughout the period, several inheritance strategies were used, but the most common approach reconciled two competing ambitions: to provide quite equally for all children, and to keep the land of the family as one property. Rural families preferred not to subdivide their holdings but rather transmitted the land to one heir while seeking to establish other children in neighbouring areas or compensating them in other ways. Most children did not inherit their family's land directly but rather inherited a share of the value of the estate. Gagan argues that this system did not serve anyone particularly well since the value of the inheritance was characteristically being divided three or four ways. Even the heir who received land was often encumbered by the need to ensure that brothers and sisters could also claim their share of the estate. Nonetheless, inheritance was a key mechanism of family reproduction, and planning for the households of the next generation preoccupied parents who saw all their children as deserving support.

In this analysis, the changing demographic features of nineteenth-century Ontario related directly to inheritance practices since the timing of marriage and family size both depended upon material circumstances. In order to marry, couples had to be able to form their own households. Ideally, households were based on land ownership, but even for couples who became tenants, some basis of material security was the highest priority. Wage labour could certainly be important in family formation but, unless one of the small number of non-seasonal relatively secure positions could be attained, the inherent insecurity of working for an employer in the nineteenth century encouraged continued reliance on parents for the wherewithal to establish households. Moreover, family solidarity was enhanced by an understanding (sometimes made explicit) that the unpaid labour youth performed for the family had to be compensated by a share of

(1982): 311-25. Also see the older but still valuable study of Lorne Tepperman in 'Ethnic Variations in Marriage and Fertility: Canada in 1871', *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 9 (1974): 324-43.

49 One of the few studies of illegitimacy is W. Peter Ward's 'Unwed Motherhood in Nineteenth-Century English Canada', *Historical Papers* (1981): 84-96.

50 Peter Ward, *Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1990).

51 While various scholars have pursued the links between family history and educational history, the specific question of inheritance has been quite neglected as a possible aspect of these links; for example, see the valuable discussions in Nadia Fahmy-Eid and Micheline Dumont, 'Les rapports femmes/famille/éducation au Québec: bilan de la recherche,' in their *Maitresses de maison*; and Maris

A. Vinovskis, 'Family and Schooling in Colonial and Nineteenth-Century America,' in Hareven and Plakans, eds., *Family History at the Crossroads*. It is also noteworthy that the question of inheritance in a predominantly rural social formation has received considerable attention in Quebec; for example, see 'Famille, mariage, patrimoine et reproduction sociale,' part 3 of Joseph Goy and Jean-Pierre Wallot, eds., *Évolution et étatement du monde rural* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal 1986). Gidney and Millar do mention inheritance in their recent book, *Inventing Secondary Education*; see 25-6 and 135-6.

52 David Gagan, 'The Indivisibility of Land: A Microanalysis of the System of Inheritance in Nineteenth-Century Ontario,' *Journal of Economic History* 36 (1976): 126-47.

the patrimony. Intergenerational transmission of property thus occurred in the context of ongoing family relationships in which individual decisions affected all family members.<sup>53</sup>

The apparent stability of the characteristic system of inheritance in rural Ontario is surprising given the changing circumstances of the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Gagan and other scholars, the system encouraged out-migration by families as the maturing of settlement made the establishment of sons on nearby farms more difficult. Families even on successful farms would sell to move to less developed regions where the households of the next generation could be in reasonable proximity to the parental farm. At the same time, however, many families did persist, and, indeed, they often became the community leaders in rural society. Such families may have been disproportionately important in local educational history since their commitment to the community appears to have led to positions as school trustees, for example. While recent socio-historical research has emphasized massive geographic mobility as a central feature of rural Ontario, the role of those families who stayed may have been crucial to the character of school experience.

While this preliminary research on probate records in nineteenth-century Ontario is exceedingly valuable, later work has revealed the limitations of studying inheritance in this way. The major problem is methodological in that probate records do not reveal all the aspects of transmission that occurred before death. This limitation is substantial since inheritance appears to have been a process stretched over many years as aging parents began giving property to their children. In this sense, will capture only the final stage of the transmission between generations. For this reason, scholars have begun undertaking longitudinal analyses of certain families by way of a complex array of sources ranging from genealogical documents to land records.<sup>54</sup>

In this sense, the recent work of Bruce Elliott on Irish Protestants is very informative.<sup>55</sup> He shows that, even during the first half of the nineteenth century, families recognized the need to provide for sons and daughters who would not inherit land. Very few daughters ever

received real property, being given their share in the form of a dowry. Sons who were not given land (usually the youngest son inherited the family farm) were either given a cash settlement or prepared for a trade and sometimes a profession in the case of affluent families. Elliott suggests that poor farmers could only hope to help such sons enter trades such as blacksmithing, carpentry, and shoemaking. The better choices were positions as country merchants or innkeepers, who were often well situated to benefit from the increasing prosperity of rural Ontario. In any case, average family size meant that most families throughout the nineteenth century had to expect that at least some of their children would not achieve the ideal of independent farming. Over time, this expectation took an increased importance as the frontier stage passed, and as the decision to persist made establishing children on nearby farms more difficult.

Taken together with Gagan's evidence, these findings demonstrate that the process of inheritance goes far beyond Jack Goody's classic definition of it as a system "by which property is transmitted between the living and the dead."<sup>56</sup> Rather, inheritance often included the transmission of tangible and intangible elements over many years. This transmission was associated with both stability and instability, concentration and dispersion both in terms of property and family members. The ambition of inheritance was multi-faceted but was essentially designed to encourage family attachment and solidarity within patriarchal processes.

This general characterization of inheritance lays the foundation for a possible reinterpretation of the position of children within the changing patterns of educational, economic, and demographic behaviour. By viewing these patterns as related to the changing dynamics in the interior of families, the inherent interrelationships of school, work, and family structure within the lives of specific individuals becomes the necessary focus of attention. In this sense, the crucial question that emerges for children concerns the ways in which going to school became an increasingly important part of the process of family reproduction. Rather than implying a quite sudden transformation of producers into pupils, this question seeks to understand the changing relative importance of schooling within a complex web of familial priorities.

Specifically, it can be hypothesized that, during the course of the nineteenth century, parents increasingly came to consider sending

53 For comparative perspectives see Gérard Bouchard and Jeannette Larouche, 'Paramètres sociaux de la reproduction familiale au Saguenay (1842-1911)', *Sociologie et sociétés* 19 (1987): 133-44, and David Gaunt, 'Rural Household Organization and Inheritance in Northern Europe,' in Hareven and Plakans, eds., *Family History at the Crossroads*.

54 Beatrice Craig offers a comparative perspective (and a helpful bibliography) in 'Pour une approche comparative de l'étude des sociétés rurales nord-américaines,' *Histoire sociale/Social History* 23, 46 (1990): 249-70.

55 Elliott, *Irish Migrants*, chap. 8.

56 Jack Goody, ed., *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976).

their children to school as a means of giving to them a part of their inheritance. From the parents' perspective, school attendance came to play a role similar to that of property. In stylized terms, it might be said that the formal education of children increasingly replaced the transmission of property (especially land) as the central strategy by which families attempted to reproduce their material circumstances.

This hypothesis attempts to account for two fundamental aspects of nineteenth-century educational history: the emergence of a general belief in the value of formal schooling, and the continuing inequality and diversity of school attendance. Just as the values and material circumstances of families differed widely, the role of formal education within their reproduction also differed widely. Such distinctions engendered conflict and contradiction as well as adjustment and accommodation. For reasons beyond their control, many families were not able to integrate education into their reproductive 'strategies' in the ways they wished. Similarly, the ways in which certain families wished to use schooling within their own priorities was not seen as acceptable by those in authority. Not surprisingly, therefore, nineteenth-century educational policy and practice were always controversial. This characteristically testifies to its increasing importance in the lives of families in diverse situations.

What did parents hope to achieve by sending their children to school? In terms of the ambition of family reproduction, two motivations seem most important. First, parents sought to enhance the possibility of their children attaining material survival and security. In this view, education was not generally expected to permit significant upward social mobility. Rather, it was primarily intended to prevent downward social mobility for the children of well-established families and to permit the attainment of basic security for the children of materially disadvantaged families. In other words, parents increasingly saw formal schooling as a way for their children to achieve 'economic competency.' Defined as a 'degree of comfortable independence,' this expression seems to capture the economic aspect of parents' decision to send their children to school. In his analysis of the early nineteenth-century United States, Daniel Vickers argues that 'in time, the very term "competency" would come to denote a degree of skill or capacity (sufficient to survive in an industrializing world) and lose its traditional meaning, which had hinged on property ownership.'<sup>57</sup> Although Vickers does not relate this process to educational history, his analysis

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Vickers, 'Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 47, 1 (Jan. 1990): 28

appears very consistent with the available evidence on schooling in nineteenth-century Ontario.

The second motivation which can be hypothesized to have increasingly encouraged parents to send their children to school may have especially concerned mothers. The premise of this dimension of family reproduction is that the changing position of mothers within families would particularly lead them to encourage schooling for their children. While a man could reasonably expect to be taken care of until death by his wife, a woman would probably end up depending on her children. In this sense, family solidarity and generational cohesion may have been somewhat more important to women than to men. The preponderance of widows over widowers characterized the entire nineteenth century but its meaning altered considerably over time. A key trend was the increasing likelihood that family formation would require migrating elsewhere, and perhaps leaving parents behind. In this case, the demographic reality meant that if all children in a certain family left home, the mother might well end up alone; fathers would be more likely to have their wives living with them. The increasing possibility of women being left on their own is consistent with a concern in wills for the protection of widows. It is this possibility which may have encouraged mothers to promote schooling for their children; such schooling may have been seen as making it less necessary for children to migrate elsewhere, especially if neighbouring land could not be secured to establish their own households.

The hypothesis that schooling was seen (at least in certain circumstances) as contributing to generational solidarity runs counter to the familiar argument that formal education represented an attack on family integrity. While this may have occurred as the school system evolved, the evidence is ambiguous for the years of great school-building during the mid-nineteenth century. When viewed from the perspective of family members, schools can be said to have reinforced as well as challenged the values of familial attachment. Not only was the 'metaphor of the family' a key part of the ideology of school promoters,<sup>58</sup> but the actual structure and content of schools were hardly antithetical to family priorities. While the 'feminization' of teaching is usually explained in terms of stingy trustees and male

<sup>58</sup> Alison Prentice, 'Education and the Metaphor of the Family: The Upper Canadian Example,' in Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly, eds., *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York University Press 1975)

sexism,<sup>59</sup> this trend may also represent the preference of mothers. Women may have been far more ready to entrust their children to other women than to aging half-pay officers.

It may also be relevant that the curriculum of nineteenth-century schools promoted family values in keeping with Christian religious traditions.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, mothers may have had an increasing interest in the education of their children as changing material conditions increasingly exposed the long-term vulnerability of their position within families. The appearance of proletarianization could only have fueled this trend as it became easier for husbands to default on the traditional responsibilities of supporting their families. New legislation in the later nineteenth-century made an attempt to encourage the maintenance of wives neglected by husbands, but such legislation hardly addressed the real issue.

The rationale for viewing mid-century developments within the context of long-term change involving goals such as economic competency and family solidarity is supported by certain evidence from wills, which included references to the education of children from the beginning of the 1800s. The wills of New France and Lower Canada before this time do not appear to have included such references.<sup>61</sup> But in Upper Canada, Elliott shows that at least for the Tipperary immigrant families, detailed instructions about education can be found in certain wills throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. While land and the transmission of property were the central elements of the inheritance instructions, at least some children began receiving 'cash and an education' as their share of the patrimony.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Marjorie Cohen cites in her own recent study the example of a farmer who in 1804 planned in his will for the education of his children even if his wife should remarry: 'if my

widow should marry I hereby obligate my said son George to bring up and maintain the rest of my children that are not able to do for themselves and use the best endeavour to see them instructed in reading and writing.'<sup>63</sup>

Such examples represent very fragmentary evidence. However, they do suggest a place for education within the inheritance process of at least certain Upper Canadians by the early 1800s. This place was not large but it did apply to both boys and girls. The major concern of wills at this time certainly related to property, and, in contrast to education, sons and daughters were not treated the same way. In Cohen's study, for example, she found that only one-quarter of the wills from the early nineteenth century left a portion of land to daughters.<sup>64</sup> In this sense, the specifications for education appear relatively egalitarian; the educational provisions do not seem to have discriminated against daughters in the way that the transmission of land clearly reflected patriarchal imperatives.

Evidence from later decades does indeed suggest that the place of education within inheritance significantly increased. Cohen emphasizes the example of a farmer who, in 1853, carefully provided for the education of his children whether or not his wife remarried:

In case my wife should remarry then in that case my executors herein after named and whom I also appropriate as trustees for my children shall then take the sole management of the said farms and stock and rent or let the same or shares as they see fit and apply the said income to the benefit of my children whom they shall take the management of and see them educated and placed in such situation as said income will admit of and to give my widow a cow and four sheep with a bed and bedding and for her to have no more to say of my affairs. But if she remain my widow and so continues after the children are all educated and of age she shall still have during her natural life the one half of the income of the said farm on which we at present reside.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, Elliott argues that concern for the education of daughters particularly increased as the earlier expectation that they would marry farmers became more uncertain. At least in the case of those with

59 One of the many valuable studies is Maria Danylewycz, Beth Light, and Alison Prentice, 'The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching: A Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec Case Study,' *Histoire sociale/Social History* 31 (1983): 81-109.

60 The Christian character of public schooling has been reaffirmed by William Westfall in *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1989).

61 Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1985), 71-81, 221-4.

62 Elliott, *Irish Migrants*, chap. 8. A recent attempt to locate the changing importance of education with early nineteenth-century rural society in the United States is William C. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England 1780-1885* (Nashville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press 1989).

63 AO, WC, GS1-1251, George Grites, 1804, cited in Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988), 51.

64 Cohen, *Women's Work*, 56. Cohen is not completely clear on whether the proportion was 'almost one-third' or 'over one-fifth'.

65 AO, WC, GS1-1253, William Cassidy, 1853, cited in Cohen, *Women's Work*, 50-1.

ancestors from Tipperary, Elliott concludes that, by 1870, it became 'fairly common to insist [in wills] that daughters receive an education.'<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, only some of the relationships between education and family reproduction can be studied through any particular type of document. While wills appear to hold considerable promise, it must be remembered that they do not capture the full process of transmission and, given the usual circumstances of their writing, can only be expected to offer fragmentary evidence on education. It is also very problematic for educational research that wills were predominantly written by men. Although some evidence exists for widows, a great deal remains to be known about the ways in which women viewed education as a part of family reproduction.

In this sense, the past two decades of scholarly activity have demonstrated the need to draw upon as many concepts, sources, research strategies as possible in order to interpret the complex origins of mass schooling. To emphasize the potential of bringing together the fields of education, economic history, and demography is not to suggest that other subfields can be left aside. However, this approach does indicate that the evolution of historical debate now shows the need for more social history, not less. To insist upon the importance of viewing the history of schooling from the perspective of families experiencing rural transformation is not to imply that urban research was misguided. Instead, the preceding discussion attempts to suggest how previous work can be built upon to achieve a better understanding of why schooling came to play a major role in the lives of children.

Hypotheses about the changing ways in which education came to be situated within the processes of family reproduction in nineteenth-century Ontario indicate the importance of gradual and profound transformations more than the impact of sudden crises. The reconfiguration of growing up did not simply result from short-term 'tactics' as families confronted immediate pressures but also from evolving long-term strategies as families came to grips with the meaning of new social and economic structures.<sup>67</sup> It appears that individuals and families did not necessarily have to come face-to-face with substantial difficulty before they adjusted or innovated their

behaviour. Rather, the evidence suggests that quite subtle changes were early perceived. While significant difficulties were met by many despite their own best efforts and often for reasons far beyond their control, members of families were, indeed, striving to control their own destinies. One result was a greater interest in sending children to school.

<sup>66</sup> Elliott, *Irish Migrants*, 202

<sup>67</sup> The distinction between 'tactics' and 'strategies' is emphasized in Daniel Scott Smith, 'Family Strategy: More than a Metaphor?' *Historical Methods* 10 (1987): 118-20.