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THE ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FOREWORD

One of the major objects of the Ontario Historical Society, embodied in the society's constitution, is to publish "material devoted to the history of the Province." Historical publication of high quality has been a consistent aim of the society since its founding in 1888. This series under the general title of "Research Publications in Ontario History", is therefore a continuation and an extension of one of the society's most important long term activities.

This expanded publication programme has been begun for two reasons: to help fill an increasing demand on the part of students and the general public for a greater range of sources on local and provincial history, and to take advantage of, and provide an outlet for, research material which already exists but which has not been previously available in published form.

The main source (though not necessarily the only source) of these publications will be completed graduate research projects undertaken at Canadian Universities. Many such projects - in the form of theses, research essays etc. - have been done or are being done. Only a small proportion of this work is normally published in extended form. This series seeks to tap this source of research material and to make it more widely accessible, in a modest format, and at moderate cost.

This volume, and succeeding volumes in the series, are presented by the society in the hope that they may serve as a means of encouraging and publicizing continuing expert enquiry into many aspects of the history of the Province of Ontario.

J.K. Johnson
President
Ontario Historical Society

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INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to investigate some of the problems of social organization in Upper Canada in relation to ethnic differences in the population. Its aim is to contribute to knowledge of the social development of Canada. The varied cultural backgrounds of the people of the country have profoundly influenced its social organization ever since the beginnings of settlement by Europeans in the early seventeenth century. The Canadian social system of today cannot be understood without taking them into account. Moreover, a study of the social problems of the past that were affected by ethnic differences may give insight into present-day problems which are influenced by the same factor and point the way to their solution.

The province of Upper Canada was opened up for agricultural settlement during the first half of the nineteenth century. Before the American Revolution it had been a wilderness inhabited only by a few Indians, except in the region around Detroit where French-Canadian farming communities had already been established. By 1851 it was a well-cultivated agricultural region, with an extensive system of canals and a few railroad lines making its more remote districts accessible, and it had a population of 952,000 people.[1] The population, having been recruited from many social groups outside the area, was extremely heterogeneous. William Lyon MacKenzie noted that in an election crowd at Niagara in 1824:

> There were Christians and Heathens, Menonists and Tunkards, Quakers and Universalists, Presbyterians and Baptists, Roman Catholics and American Methodists; there were Frenchmen and Yankees, Irishmen and Mulattoes, Scotchmen and Indians, Englishmen, Canadians, Americans, and Negroes, Dutchmen and Germans, Welshmen and Swedes, Highlanders and Lowlanders, poetical as well as most prosaical phises, horsemen and footmen, fiddlers

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[1] Mary Quayle Innis, The Economic History of Canada (Toronto, 1935).

> and dancers, honourables and reverends, captains and colonels, beaux and belles, waggons and bilburies, coaches and chaises, gigs and carts; in short, Europe, Asia, Africa, and America had there each its representative among the loyal subjects and servants of our good King George, the fourth of the name.[2]

The differences among the people that are most important to this investigation are the ethnic differences. They are in the main related to country of birth, but "groups of common cultural heritage and character"[3] are sometimes composed of people born within various national divisions, and a national unit frequently contains many groups varying widely in culture. The term ethnic shall therefore be used to signify to what specific cultural group an individual considered himself and was considered by the community as belonging, whether the most accurate objective criterion of membership was nationality, race or religion.[4]

Of the ethnic groups in Upper Canada, those that were most significant in the social problems of the province are to be considered. The adoption of new techniques of production, the maintenance of industry and thrift, the modification of standards of living, the establishment of a class system taking into account new occupational groups, the adaptation of the family, the acceptance of moral and legal codes, and the setting up of educational and religious institutions were among the problems. In regard to each certain difficulties emerged as men and women were confronted with new physical and social situations,

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[2]William Lyon MacKenzie, Sketches of Canada and the United States, (London, 1833), p. 89.

[3]Elin L. Anderson, We Americans, a study of cleavage in an American city (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), p. 6.

[4]Cf. W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, The Social Life of a Modern Community, Yankee City Series, Vol. I. (New Haven, 1941), p. 210; Carl A. Dawson, Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities in western Canada, (Toronto, 1936); Caroline F. Ware, "Ethnic Communities", Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. V. (New York, 1935), pp. 607-13.

to which they had to work out adjustments. They did not start from complete naiveté but acted in ways determined by previously acquired attitudes and values, which had developed within the different ethnic groups under pressure of historical circumstance. The old attitudes and values persisted as long as they offered a tolerable mode of adjustment, because most men and women lack the motivation or the ability to develop new definitions of the situations in which they find themselves. When, however, they ceased to have practical or emotional utility they were replaced by others more harmonious with the new environment. If one ethnic group had been more successful in its adaptation to frontier life than others, its ways would probably be taken over, unless cultural diffusion was retarded by attitudes of antipathy, and the borrowing would involve readjustment of many elements of the life organization of the individuals and the social organization of the groups.[5]

The full extent of the changes necessary when one element of a life style or a cultural system was altered was almost certainly not foreseen. The members of a society are never aware of all the interconnections of the parts of their culture. Hence one part of a complex was sometimes modified readily, while related changes were stoutly resisted. Such circumstances rendered both individual and group adjustment slow and painful.

Usually immigrant groups enter an already existing culture and social structure. But the people who came to Upper Canada did not do so. Since it was influenced only to a very slight degree by the social system of the native Indians, Upper Canada was a new area of social life. When a Canadian culture emerged, it proceeded from the response of the various ethnic groups to the underlying conditions of the frontier.

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[5]Cf. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (Boston, 1920), especially Vols. I and IV; also Robert E. Park and Herbert A. Miller, Old World Traits Transplanted (New York, 1921).

The conditions were by no means identical for all of the early settlers. Those entering in time to make the first attempts at pioneer farming faced a different situation from those who came in when the exploitation of the agricultural resources of the province was at its height, and the latter faced a different situation from those who immigrated when the expansionist phase was succeeded by a more stable agrarian economy. But certain general solutions to common problems did develop, and certain distinctively Canadian cultural traits did emerge. By the middle of the nineteenth century a Canadian ethnic group, with a Canadian point of view, was emerging. This study deals, then, with the formative period of Upper Canadian society, an understanding of which is essential to an understanding of the subsequent social history of Canada.

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL PROGRESS AND SOCIAL WELFARE

Material benefit was one of the leading incentives for immigration to Upper Canada. It is important, therefore, to examine the energy and initiative displayed by different ethnic groups in economic activity, their standards of living, and their contributions to the frontier's problems of social welfare.

The first settlers to come to Upper Canada, French Canadians, Loyalists, soldiers who had taken part in the Revolutionary Wars, and, in numbers greater than all the others together, American frontier farmers, took up land on the north shore of Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, and the St. Lawrence. Their holdings, stretching from Detroit to Montreal, were fertile and provided with convenient waterways, but cut off from the outside world by distance and by difficulties of transportation. The colonists lacked ready markets for their surplus products and the incentive neighbours would have afforded. Hence they tended to be satisfied with making a living, and to lack ambition to improve their condition beyond that point. Patrick Shirreff said of the early settlers of the Niagara Peninsula:

> The old settlers are evidently the least enterprising class. Having come to the country uncultivated themselves, and ever since living without intercourse with the world, they seem content with the necessaries of life, which are easily obtained. Their descendants imbibe the same sentiments and habits, and before the first settled portions of Upper Canada can be further improved, the present farmers must either sell to others of more enterprise, or another generation arise with new opinions.[1]

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[1] Patrick Shirreff, A Tour through North America; together with a Comprehensive View of the Canadas and United States (Edinburgh, 1835), p. 95.

Shirreff mentioned the French Canadians as deficient in enterprise,[2] and his view was confirmed by other writers. The French Canadians had been settled near Detroit since the middle of the eighteenth century, and though they were praised for their stump-free fields and their fruitful orchards, neat, white houses and tidy fences, they were decried for going on "exactly as their ancestors did a century ago, raising on their rich, fertile lands just sufficient for a subsistence".[3] There was a need, observers felt, for enterprising people to come among them and set an example for emulation.

> On front of every tenement which calls him master, with truth and verity might be written "In statu quo". There seems to be no "going a-head" with him. "Progressing" is not a term in his vocabulary, and "Right slick away" would startle him from his equanimity, or at least sound as High Dutch to his unaccustomed ears. We saw several jolly topers dozing away in the forenoon, sitting on a low dyke with their arms warped together in front. The upper half of their inert bodies was enveloped in a dreamy halo, diffused from dirt-glazed tobacco-pipes that dangled head downwards from their mouths, which, to emit the rolling fumes, ever and anon opened and shut like the last yawn of a dying bull-frog. At times too when the fire-engines were for a few seconds removed, their lips fell into an attitude that one might suppose would have been productive of a merry whistle. This, however, would have required too much exertion, the sound was the mere shadow of a shade, or, when it chanced to gather strength enough to reach the listening ear, alas! it could claim no kin to the genuine ploughboy music of the lips, but, being interpreted, would have signified,
>
> "A life from care and business free,
> Is, of all lives, the life for me."
>
> And every grade of animal existence that vegetated around these lumpish lords of creation, was pitched on the same careless contented keynote; for the very dogs, cats, pigs, and poultry seemed to emulate the sedate cast of their owners, and passed away the time in listlessness and repose.[4]

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[2]Shirreff, A Tour through North America, p. 209; Joseph Pickering, Inquiries of an Emigrant (London, 1831), p. 87; James B. Brown, Views of Canada and the Colonists, embracing the experience of an eight years' residence (Edinburgh, 1851), p. 314; Adam Fergusson, Practical Notes Made During a Tour in Canada and a Portion of the United States, in MDCCCXXXI, (Edinburgh, 1833), p. 151.

[3]Anna Jameson, Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada, new edition (Toronto, 1923), p. 217.

[4]David Wilkie, Sketches of a Summer Trip to New York and the Canadas (Edinburgh, 1837), pp. 97-8.

The Loyalists and the military settlers, largely of Highland Scotch origin, were not so backward as the French Canadians, but they too lacked enterprise.

> A considerable portion of the inhabitants on Lake Erie, in the townships of Malden, Colchester, and the banks of the Thames, are descendants of the Loyalists who left the States at the time of their becoming independent, and who obtained grants of land in Canada from the British Government. Like other colonists in this vast continent who have been shut out in a great measure from intercourse with the world, they have been content to live without an apparent desire to improve their condition. Their extent of clear forest is limited, and few additions have recently been made. The dwelling houses and farm-offices are of the shabbiest kind, and only two brick houses were seen in a distance of twenty-seven miles, passing from Amherstburgh round Lake Erie. A brick house is also a rare sight on the Thames, wood being almost the only building material.
>
> In this part of Canada, farming is as low as in the newly settled districts.[5]

Some of the Loyalists did not even face the drudgery of farming, or soon abandoned it, preferring to live in the country towns along the lake front. The townsmen maintained a much higher standard of living than those on the farms, but as office-holders under government showed no more enterprise.

There were certain people, however, who did make remarkable progress in Upper Canada. Entering the province at almost the same time as the Loyalists were several sectarian groups, the Quakers, of Anglo-Saxon background, and the Mennonites, Moravians, and Tunkers, of German background, all coming largely from previous settlements in the north-eastern part of the United States. The sectarians were by no means innovators: they were said to be primitive, conservative, old-fashioned, unchangeable, and plodding, and to retain their ethnic peculiarities "by rejecting all innovation and instructions as vehemently as the Chinese".[6] But writers were impressed by their domestic comforts, their excellent

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[5] Shirreff, A Tour through North America, p. 212; cf. John R. Godley, Letters from America (London, 1844), vol. I, pp. 124, 130-1.

[6] John Howison, Sketches of Upper Canada, domestic, local, and characteristic (London, 1821, p. 115; also, Fergusson, Practical Notes Made During a Tour in Canada and a Portion of the United States, in MDCCCXXXI, pp. 127-8; John M'Gregor, British America (Edinburgh, 1833), Vol. II, p. 449; William Dunlop, Recollections of the American War (n.d., n.p.) pp. 20-1.