

## Ontario History

# The “Statistically Average” Early Haliburton Farm: A Case Study from the Kennaway Settlement

Christopher S. Martinello

Volume 107, numéro 2, fall 2015

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050634ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050634ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Martinello, C. S. (2015). The “Statistically Average” Early Haliburton Farm: A Case Study from the Kennaway Settlement. *Ontario History*, 107, (2), 179–197. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050634ar>

Résumé de l'article

Le comté d'Haliburton fut fondé dans des buts agricoles avant que l'ouest ne soit officiellement ouvert à la colonisation. Haliburton et Kennaway furent les villages originels de ce comté qui est devenu à présent une région de chalets et une zone forestière. Même si Kennaway est à l'heure actuelle une ville fantôme, ses registres de recensement et du prélèvement de taxes peuvent nous montrer qui étaient les premiers pionniers et nous dévoiler ce qu'ils cultivaient et ce qu'ils élevaient. Ces renseignements nous permettent de calculer le rendement annuel des récoltes, le nombre de têtes de bétail, les acres de terre déboisés, ainsi que de déterminer la taille d'une famille et d'une ferme typiques de la région. Grâce à ces informations, il nous est possible de recréer une ferme « statistiquement moyenne » d'Haliburton de l'époque, et d'investiguer la nature des dernières fermes pionnières ontariennes.

# The “Statistically Average” Early Haliburton Farm

A Case Study from the Kennaway Settlement

by Christopher S. Martinello

Haliburton County, Ontario, is much more than a beautifully forested wilderness that comes alive every summer when thousands of cottagers travel to the area to enjoy the region’s sparkling lakes. Unbeknownst to many, the area also has a number of historical secrets and surprises. The county sprawls across hundreds of square kilometers of the geological formation known as the Canadian Shield and, although heavily forested, its shallow soil covers some of the rockiest terrain in North America. Naturally, given the area’s thick forests, ancient rock, and varying topography, it surprises many people to discover that this region was one of the last outposts of a bygone way of life in On-

tario—that of the pioneer farmer. Haliburton’s pioneer farms have been given

## *Abstract*

*Haliburton County, now a major cottage and lumbering area, was founded for the purpose of farming, before the west was officially open for settlement. The original two settlements were Haliburton Village and Kennaway, now a ghost town. Local census and tax assessment registers for Kennaway can tell us who the pioneers were, and exactly what kinds of crops and livestock they tended. This allows us to determine average annual crop yields, livestock numbers, acres of land cleared, and the average family and farm sizes in the region. From this we can construct a “statistically average” early Haliburton farm and discover with precision what some of Ontario’s last pioneer farms were like.*

**Résumé:** *Le comté d’Haliburton fut fondé dans des buts agricoles avant que l’ouest ne soit officiellement ouvert à la colonisation. Haliburton et Kennaway furent les villages originels de ce comté qui est devenu à présent une région de chalets et une zone forestière. Même si Kennaway est à l’heure actuelle une ville fantôme, ses registres de recensement et du prélèvement de taxes peuvent nous montrer qui étaient les premiers pionniers et nous dévoiler ce qu’ils cultivaient et ce qu’ils élevaient. Ces renseignements nous permettent de calculer le rendement annuel des récoltes, le nombre de têtes de bétail, les acres de terre déboisées, ainsi que de déterminer la taille d’une famille et d’une ferme typiques de la région. Grâce à ces informations, il nous est possible de récréer une ferme « statistiquement moyenne » d’Haliburton de l’époque, et d’investiguer la nature des dernières fermes pionnières ontariennes.*

extremely little attention in historical literature, despite the fact that this was one of the last areas of Ontario in which pioneers erected log-cabins and cleared land for agriculture. Utilizing the region's first census records (1871) as well as tax assessment registers that span several decades of the late nineteenth century, this paper will present a snapshot of pioneer life. From this, we can move from general discussions of pioneer farming to remarkably detailed evaluations of agricultural patterns in this fringe environment and answer such questions as what kinds of crops and livestock the settlers raised and exactly how long it took the settlers to chop their farms out of the ancient forest and for those farms to reach their maximum extents. Finally, this information can clearly show us how pioneer farming in this region differed from agriculture in the flatter, more fertile areas of the province south of the Shield. Accordingly, it brings into strong focus a comprehensive picture of the efforts made by some of Ontario's last pioneer settlers.

Many would ask why people attempted to establish pioneer settlements on the rocky Canadian Shield, an area so inhospitable to farming. One reason is that, between 1780 and 1860, Upper Canada experienced a population boom, due in no small part to the influx of the United Empire Loyalists, Americans disenchanted with the direction their country took after the Revolutionary War

ended in 1783. Loyalists rapidly claimed and cleared land in what is now Southern Ontario. Between 1826 and 1838, Ontario's population doubled, and did so yet again by 1861.<sup>1</sup> By Confederation in 1867, the province had about half of all the cleared farmland in Canada. The general belief was that Ontario needed immigration to drive economic prosperity. However, the amount of unclaimed land in Southern Ontario that was suitable for farming was running out, and the vast expanse of the Prairies was still controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company. So the only land available for new immigrants to pioneer was the Haliburton frontier.

A second reason that settlers attempted to farm on the Canadian Shield relates to the area's abundant lumber camps. Since freight costs to ship foodstuffs to these isolated camps were naturally high, proponents of settlement believed that new farms would put food and fodder within easy reach of the camps, and that the settlers would benefit from having a readily available market for their produce. This arrangement was problematic, however. Once the stock of available timber was depleted, the camps moved on, leaving the settlers as isolated as the camps were, and without local demand for their goods.<sup>2</sup>

A third reason that Haliburton was opened up to pioneer farming was that, aside from the population boom, potential settlers from outside Canada wanted

<sup>1</sup> R.L. Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 289, and M. J. Troughton, *Canadian Agriculture* (Budapest, Hungary: Akademiai Kiado, 1982), 31.

<sup>2</sup> J.W. Maxwell, "Notes on Land Use and Landscape Evaluation in a Fringe Area of the Canadian Shield," *Geographical Bulletin*, 8:2 (1966), 144.

Figure 1: The Hon. Philip Michael Matthew Scott VanKoughnet, Commissioner of Crown Lands from 1858 to 1862. (Library and Archives Canada)

cheap land. Immigrants fleeing the potato famine in Ireland and general poverty across the British Isles, pushed the Ontario government to establish new settlements. Many Britons believed that there were “vast tracts” of unsettled land in Ontario, but remained ignorant of their true quality.<sup>3</sup> Bending to this pressure in the 1840s, the Ontario Legislature set up a Select Committee for the Management of Public Lands, which began to plan how to open up the Haliburton-Muskoka region to new pioneers. The plan coalesced in 1846, under the leadership of the Hon. P. VanKoughnet, the Commissioner of Crown Lands.<sup>4</sup> He authorized a settlement policy for the Haliburton-Muskoka area that introduced land grants along colonization roads yet to be built. This, he thought, would solve at least two problems: the mounting pressure for new land, and the growing need to feed the many lumber camps already operating in the northern forests. He went on to declare the region, “the most advantageous for colonization that the government had *at its disposal*.”<sup>5</sup> This claim, tenuous as it was, was made and then circulated *without* the consent of the select committee that had worked on the issue. While it may have been factu-



ally true at the time, it presupposed that farming could be successfully done in the rocky, sparsely soiled region.

This initiative opened an inherently inhospitable area to agriculture, helping to predetermine its eventual failure. On some level, VanKoughnet may have been aware of the inferior potential of the region as farmland. The Land Act of 1841 allowed for allotments of fewer than fifty acres along future colonization roads to be sold to settlers<sup>6</sup> but, in 1846, the de-

<sup>3</sup> Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario*, 289.

<sup>4</sup> Canada, Library of Parliament collection, “Hon. Philip Michael VanKoughnet,” 1856–1862, Quebec, photograph by William Ellisson, Library and Archives Canada, accession number 1951–322, location number 50097, reproduction copy number C-008366 (copy negative number).

<sup>5</sup> Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario*, 290; emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.



*Figure 2: The Hon. William McDougall, Commissioner of Crown Lands from 1862-1864. (LAC)*

cision was made to distribute it through free grants. This suggests that legislators knew the land had limited agricultural potential but were willing to give it away in order to open up the area, thus promoting it as the “best area available.”

Clearly, there is conflicting evidence about how well the government truly understood the Haliburton-Muskoka region or believed in its potential as farmland. Regardless, in 1854 the government gave the nod to plans to build a grid of colonization roads through it, despite pessimistic reports both private as well as government surveyors of the

area’s agricultural potential. One private surveyor assessed the proposed Quebec-Lake Huron Railroad, and surveyed the land north of where the Opeongo Colonization Road would be. He reported that there was “scarcely any [good soil] in the area he examined.”<sup>7</sup> He, at least, had no reason to present a picture that was prettier than the reality. Finally, even some government surveyors had to admit that in some of the townships “there was not enough soil to hold their [property boundary] stakes, and that in others there was nothing but sand.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, someone of influence was needed to discourage agricultural expansion in the Canadian Shield region. Such an individual came in the guise of yet another Commissioner of Crown Lands.

The Hon. William McDougall, Commissioner of Crown Land from 1862 to 1864 (see figure 2),<sup>9</sup> attempted to turn the tide of farming settlement away from the Haliburton area, but he was perhaps too late. In his first report, he acknowledged that Ontario’s Canadian Shield frontier was unsuitable for settlement. He also began to outline which specific areas should be closed to such expansion, even saying in a speech to the Assembly that there was “no point in bringing in paupers at the government’s expense, and watching over them and even feeding

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Henry J. Morgan collection, “Hon. W. MacDougal,” ca. 1867–1876, Montreal, photograph by William Notman, Library and Archives Canada, accession number 1984–170, location number 5197, finding aid FA-194 MSTRNOT.



them afterwards.”<sup>10</sup> Various legislators began to support McDougall’s policy. In 1864, a select committee of the legislature not only agreed but also argued in favour of new colonization roads being built in areas that were proven to be hospitable to farming. The following year, yet another select committee noticed that politicians’ interest in the Haliburton area had been dropped like a hot stone “in view of the general expectation that a very large area of fertile land... is shortly to be placed under the control and supervision of the Canadian Legislature.”<sup>11</sup> This great gift of land was, of course, the Hudson’s Bay Company lands in the Northwest, which would eventually be officially opened up for settlement, but this would come too late for the initial settlers of Haliburton in the 1850s and 1860s.

Unfortunately, McDougall’s wisdom and caution were not maintained by later policy-makers, thus swinging the pendulum back towards support for pioneering on the Canadian Shield just before 1880. Even though the birth of the Western provinces was on the horizon,

the Ontario government implemented the Free Grants and Homesteads Act of 1868.<sup>12</sup> It allowed for the expansion of the original colonization roads in 1868 and 1869, with shorter branch roads built to access the new settlements in the northern townships. Following these initiatives, the government had the future Haliburton County surveyed, laying out townships in the customary rectangular lot and concession pattern that was used so successfully in Southern Ontario. The founding of Haliburton County was underway, and at its root was pioneer farming.

In the 1860s, a British company known as the Canadian Land and Emigration Company was formed in London, and it decided to try to make a profit by purchasing nine of the new townships and selling lots to potential pioneer settlers for \$1.50 per acre.<sup>13</sup> The company began by establishing two settlements in its townships: Haliburton Village in Dysart Township in the west of the region, and Kennaway in Harcourt Township in the east.<sup>14</sup> A rough coloni-

<sup>10</sup> Florence B. Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), and Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario*, 298.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario*, 298.

<sup>12</sup> J.H. Richards, “Land Use and Settlement Patterns on the Fringe of the Shield in Southern Ontario,” vol. 1 (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1954), 99.

<sup>13</sup> Valerie Smith, *Harcourt’s Sons & Daughters* (Haliburton: Self-published, 2003), 10.

<sup>14</sup> The terms “early Haliburton” and “eastern Haliburton” will be used here to indicate an emphasis on either the time period or the location. Since Haliburton County was generally settled in the 1860s and 1870s, I use “early Haliburton” when I want to be clear that the farms being discussed are from the initial settlement period (to contrast with those from later on, some of which still exist today). “Eastern Haliburton” and “Harcourt” emphasize place. Since “Haliburton” refers to the entire county, and there were at first two settlements (Haliburton Village in Dysart Township in the west of the county and Kennaway in Harcourt Township in the east), sometimes I alternate between these place names. Haliburton County, as well as the village itself, are named after Chief Justice Thomas Chandler Haliburton, the first chair of the Canadian Land and Emigration Company. Kennaway Village is named after John H. Kennaway, who was the second to hold the position of company chair.

zation road called the Kennaway Road, built in 1872, initially connected these two original pioneer hamlets.<sup>15</sup> In later years, settlers founded new villages nearby, and some still exist, such as Tory Hill, Wilberforce, and Harcourt, while others were eventually abandoned and have since disappeared, such as Cheddar, Deer Lake, and Essonville. By the 1940s, one of the original two settlements, Kennaway, had also collapsed. When the Kennaway schoolhouse (originally opened in 1870) closed in 1950 or 1952, it was servicing children from only two families.<sup>16</sup>

Why did Kennaway and many other settlements collapse? In short, after years of extremely difficult labour trying to coax crops out of the easily exhausted soils of the Canadian Shield, the settlers were forced either to give up their farming and turn to different pursuits more suited to the area (such as logging), or to move away if they wanted to continue to farm successfully. After 1870, Canada officially opened up Manitoba for pioneering and, as Nila Reynolds states, "...hardly a family escaped the fever which seized whole settlements... There is hardly a Haliburton County family established since the nineteenth century which has not contributed at least one member to the wining of the west."<sup>17</sup> The inauguration of the fertile prairie provinces signaled the beginning of the end of pioneer

farming in Haliburton.

## Nineteenth-Century Wheat Farming in Ontario

Although Haliburton County, including the Kennaway settlement, was home to some of Ontario's last settlers, their farming efforts have much to tell us about how they modified typical Southern Ontario agricultural practices to fit the unique environment of the Canadian Shield. In order to discern what a study of an early Haliburton farm can tell us about farming patterns in the region, it is important to understand the larger context of agriculture throughout Ontario, and to grasp the overall pattern of pioneer farming in the later part of the nineteenth century. Several important sources document how pioneer farms south of the Canadian Shield tended to progress from original woodlots to productive fields, and the particular types of crops that their settlers grew in the first years of a farm's existence. Edwin Guillet, for example, notes that in early settlements, even as close to Haliburton as Peterborough, pioneers usually grew potatoes and wheat together.<sup>18</sup> These two cultigens seem to have dominated dinner tables for decades before the northern townships were settled, as evidenced in 1833 by surveyor Nichol Baird, whose

<sup>15</sup> Leopolda and Lobkowicz Dobrzensky, *Fragments of a Dream: Pioneering in Dysart Township and Haliburton Village* (Haliburton: Municipality of Dysart, 1985), 206.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher S. Martinello, *Kennaway: The History and Archaeology of a Haliburton Ghost Town* (London: Self-published, 2010), 573, and Smith, *Harcourt's Sons & Daughters*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Nila Reynolds, *In Quest of Yesterday* (Minden: The Provisional County of Haliburton, 1973), 127.

<sup>18</sup> Edwin C. Guillet, *Pioneer Settlements* (Toronto: The Ontario Publishing Company, Co., Ltd., 1947), 45.

party called for dinner at a farmhouse near Rice Lake. A large pot of potatoes was boiled and emptied on the table, and some salt placed nearby. Joseph Pickering... found that the typical meal he could get at a farmhouse was bread or cake, and butter and potatoes..."<sup>19</sup>

Even when settlement did reach the borders of Haliburton, settlers clearly expected that wheat would be the staple crop. The trend was that as soon as a settler ploughed the land, a grist mill followed: "In 1861 Giles Stone became the first white settler within the present confines of Burleigh Township, and two years later John Goulbourne erected a grist-mill on Eel's Creek..."<sup>20</sup>

If wheat and potatoes were the pioneer farmers' staple crops south of the Canadian Shield, clearly wheat was meant to take precedence over the root crops upon which they seemed to have relied most heavily during their first year on the land. Jones describes the early evolution of crop types for the typical Ontario pioneer farmer:

When he had the trees removed from a few acres, the backwoodsman planted his first crop... he cut holes in the turf for his potatoes... Then, in the autumn, to obtain a little cash for tea and other necessities, he would sow some wheat broadcast on the unstirred ground..."<sup>21</sup>

James Beaven, who published an account of his travels to Upper Canada, described a settler in the second year of working the land: He ensured that "a crop of grain or Indian corn cover[ed] the ground,"<sup>22</sup> or "*he might sow wheat where the potatoes and Indian corn had been the first...*"<sup>23</sup> Preferably he chopped and logged enough each year to be able to harrow wheat into four or five acres of new land, and left the older clearings in hay or pasture..."<sup>23</sup> Beaven then described the typical farm that had advanced to yet another phase: "The crops of *grain and corn* extend on all sides."<sup>24</sup> Since most settlers had strong intentions of becoming predominantly wheat farmers, it should come as no surprise that in Upper Canada, wheat was nearly universally grown within the first six decades of initial settlement, and alone accounted for more than 30 per cent of the land under crop in the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>25</sup>

A brief examination of farming trends from a sample of counties throughout the province will further refine our understanding of the predominance of wheat farming in new settlements south of the Canadian Shield, and how the example of Haliburton and the Shield settlements did not conform to this pattern. Victoria County, for example, lies south

<sup>19</sup> Edwin C. Guillet, *Pioneer Life* (Toronto: The Ontario Publishing Company, Co., Ltd., 1938), 62.

<sup>20</sup> Guillet, *Pioneer Settlements*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, *History of Agriculture*, 72–73.

<sup>22</sup> Jones quoting James Beaven, *Recreations of a Long Vacation, or a Visit to Indian Missions in Upper Canada* (Toronto: H. and W. Rowsell, 1846), 65–67.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 73; emphasis mine.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–67.

<sup>25</sup> Troughton, *Canadian Agriculture*, 109.



of Haliburton-Muskoka, but it does not straddle the Shield itself, and there, bushels of wheat topped the list of farm products grown in the 1870s, followed by oats, peas, barley, corn, and rye.<sup>26</sup> In the same period in Huron County, hugging the east shore of the lake for which it is named, oats and turnips only surpassed wheat production.<sup>27</sup> In Wellington region, north and east of Waterloo, “the emigrants cut down the trees, cleared the land and planted their potatoes, and sowed their wheat between the blackened stumps.”<sup>28</sup> In Grey County on Georgian Bay, formally established in 1852, wheat by far dominated the agricultural production with 121,379 bushels, as reported by the 1851 census, almost doubling the number of bushels of the second most-produced crop, which was oats at 70,875 bushels. Peas, barley, and corn followed.<sup>29</sup> Bordering Grey County to the east, Simcoe County’s wheat production similarly topped the list, with both spring and fall wheat outputs combining to reach 974,141 bushels. Oats, potatoes, and turnips rounded out Simcoe’s top crops by the 1870s.<sup>30</sup> Representing Southwestern Ontario, Kent County’s

crop returns painted a similar picture, with wheat as its most abundant crop by the 1850s, though it fell to third place by the 1870s behind oats and corn.<sup>31</sup>

The overall primacy of wheat as a staple crop in Ontario townships south of the Canadian Shield, therefore, has long been established. To compare this picture with the patterns on the Shield during the late 1800s requires an investigation into what an average farm in an area like Haliburton was producing around the same time. To this effect, a study of an average Haliburton farm will successfully provide us with an unprecedented view into the realities of how farming on the Canadian Shield was dramatically divergent from that of pioneer farming south of that rocky landmass.

### Early Farming in Haliburton

By the early twentieth century, pioneer farming was largely given up in Haliburton, but the topic of Haliburton pioneer farms has been given relatively little attention in historical literature. Perhaps this is because people assume that the general story of pioneer farming is well known, or that so little information ex-

<sup>26</sup> Edward C. Phelps, ed., *Belden’s Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Victoria, Ontario 1881* (Ancaster, ON: Alexander Publishing, 2000), 6.

<sup>27</sup> H. Belden & Co., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Huron, Ontario* (Toronto: H. Belden & Co., 1879), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Ross Cumming, *Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington, Ontario* (Toronto: Historical Atlas Publishing Co., 1906).

<sup>29</sup> H. Belden & Co., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Grey and Bruce, Ont.* (Toronto: H. Belden & Co., 1880).

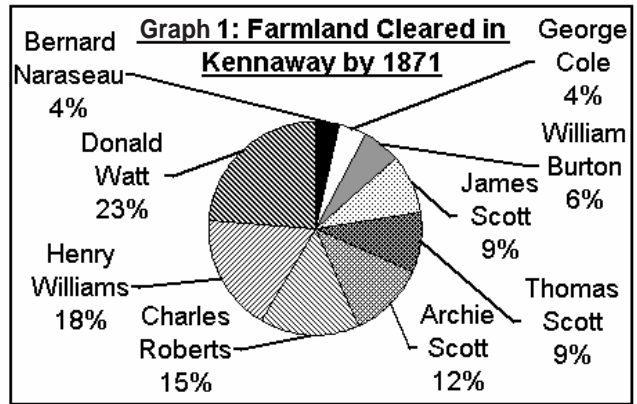
<sup>30</sup> H. Belden & Co., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Simcoe, Ont.* (Toronto: H. Belden & Co., 1881), 7.

<sup>31</sup> H. Belden & Co., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Essex and Kent* (Toronto: H. Belden & Co., 1881), 51.

ists about the Haliburton farms that we cannot easily discern what they were really like, let alone how they may have compared to pioneer farms in other areas of Ontario. In fact, we can discover a great deal about Haliburton's original farms by compiling data from sources that include census records and the county's tax assessment registers. Such a study can help us answer the following questions about farming in the region:

- (1) Exactly how large (in acres) was the average early Haliburton farm?
- (2) How large was the average early Haliburton pioneer family?
- (3) Is there a correlation between the two, and if so, what is it?
- (4) What specific kinds of crops and livestock did the average early Haliburton farmer tend, and exactly how much of each?
- (5) How many acres of old growth Canadian Shield forest could the average pioneer family clear per year?

To answer these and other questions, we will examine historical data about *all* of the pioneers from the Kennaway settlement in Harcourt Township in Haliburton, which will serve, for us, as a sample of a typical early Haliburton pioneer village. From this sample, we can construct an accurate depiction of what we can reliably refer to as the "statistically average" early Haliburton farm.

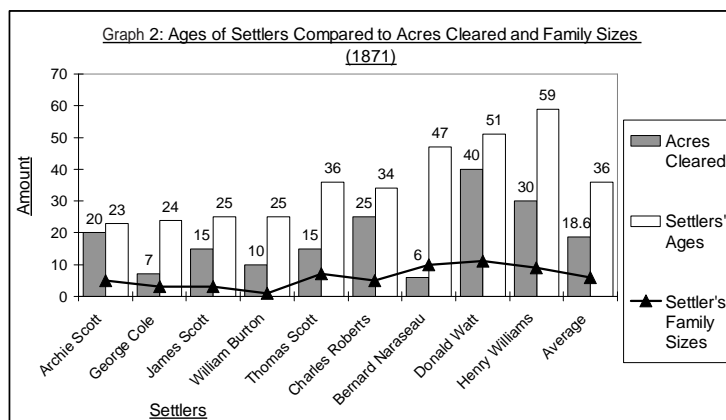


To begin, we must turn to the Canadian census records for Harcourt for 1871 which records the initial nine pioneer families that populated the Kennaway village. Considering that Kennaway was founded by the mid-1860s (but definitely by 1868 when the settlement was officially named),<sup>32</sup> the 1871 data depicts a Haliburton settlement about half a decade into its life. The census reports the number of acres of land that the families had cleared by 1871. Graph 1 shows that the smallest farms, those of settlers Naraseau and Cole, occupied 6 and 7 acres, respectively, while the largest, those of Williams and Watt, sprawled to 30 and 40 acres.<sup>33</sup> A simple tally of all nine farms gives an average size of 18.7 acres, after almost half a decade of pioneering.

Census data also allow us to answer what correlations, if any, existed between the ages of settlers (heads of household), family size, and acreage cleared. We can also compare Haliburton to other agricul-

<sup>32</sup> Dobrzensky, *Fragments of a Dream*, 130.

<sup>33</sup> Martinello, *Kennaway*, 82.



tural areas of the province. The natural assumption that the older the settlers were,

the more children (and therefore farmhands) they would likely have, and consequently the more acres they would be able to clear and have under crop, is born out by an analysis of the nine “founding families” of Harcourt Township in 1871 (see Graph 2). The average Haliburton settler in 1871 was 36-years old and had a family size of six to help clear and tend a farm of 18.7 acres.<sup>34</sup>

When told that the Haliburton region was originally

rolls. In 1871, settlers in Haliburton reported that the least common



Figure 3: The average Haliburton settlers erected boulder fences along the perimeters of their fields. They solved two problems at once by clearing their intended fields of rocks and establishing the boundaries of their farms. Image source: Author.

cultigen grown in the area by far was barley, with only 24 bushels grown in Kennaway. Hay followed, at 54.5 (16-lb. bundles), then peas (58 bushels), spring wheat (147 bushels), turnips (230), oats (1,370), and finally potatoes, at a whopping 1,527 bushels.<sup>35</sup>

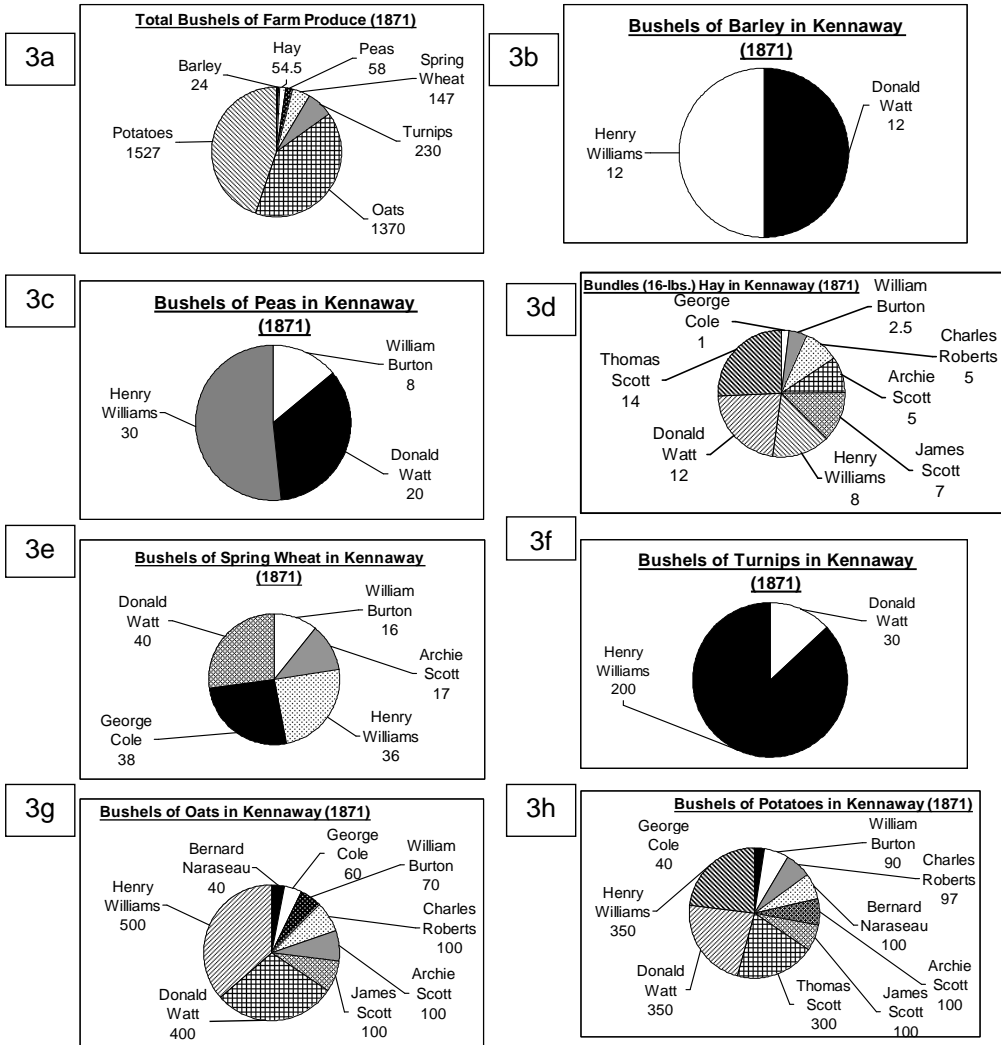
Graph 3a makes it evident that Haliburton’s settlers were overwhelmingly oat and potato farmers, with much smaller

sections of their farms dedicated to veg-

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 84. The single, notable exception to this rule is the settler Bernard Naraseau, the only original Kennaway settler who was a member of the Algonquin nation and was known to practice a diverse variety of traditional subsistence strategies rather than relying primarily on pioneer farming. *Ibid.*, 68, and Dobrzensky, *Fragment of a Dream*, 151.

<sup>35</sup> 1871 Canada Census, s.v. “William Burton, George Cole, Bernard Naraseau, Charles Roberts,

Graph 3



etables and wheat.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, Watt and Williams operated the farms with the most diverse crops, as theirs were the largest in the region by a considerable margin. The data collected about

the produce grown on the farms help us to move from general discussions of Haliburton farms to more detailed analyses of the farms' actual outputs in the region of the Canadian Shield.

Archibald Scott, James Scott, Thomas Scott, Donald Watt, Henry Williams," Dysart, Dudley, Harcourt, Guilford, Harburn & Bruton, Peterborough North, Ontario, accessed through *Ancestry.com*

<sup>36</sup> Martinello, *Kennaway*, 86.

## A Statistically Average Farm

The records reveal how powerful a factor farm size was in affecting the settlers' ability to diversify their produce. For example, the two large farms in Kennaway, those of Williams (30 acres) and Watt (40 acres), were the only ones in the settlement to produce barley (12 bushels each) and turnips (30 bushels for Watt and 200 for Williams) and, along with the small 10-acre farm of Burton, were the only ones to grow peas (8 bushels for Burton, 20 for Watt, and 30 for Williams).<sup>37</sup> None of the other farmers in eastern Haliburton reported producing any such vegetables. Dorothy Duncan notes that elsewhere in Ontario, "vegetables basic to everyday cooking would have included cabbage, carrots, peas, onions, and turnips..."<sup>38</sup> The near absence of such crops in eastern Haliburton, identifies one of the small ways that farming there differed from the rest of Southern Ontario. Perhaps they had an aversion to vegetables; there was a common belief in the 1800s that vegetables were actually bad for your health until they were vigorously boiled.<sup>39</sup> In all likelihood, however, farmers would not even grow these foodstuffs unless their farms were over 30 acres in size, large

for the Haliburton area.

For crops common to the majority of the settlers of in eastern Haliburton, yields increased in direct proportion to the size of farms, the size of families and the age of the farmer. Hay was grown for livestock by eight of the nine founding families of Kennaway in 1871. Only Bernard Naraseau, who relied partly on traditional Algonquin methods, reported no livestock that year and consequently produced no hay. Cole and Burton, both small farmers, produced 1.0 and 2.5 16-pound bundles of hay, respectively. The mid-sized farms of Roberts and the two Scott families reported between 5 and 8 such bundles, while the large farms like the Watt's farm could produce 12 (see Graph 3d).<sup>40</sup> This gives us an annual average of 6.1 bundles (97.6 pounds) of hay per settler on the Canadian Shield.

One might assume that wheat would be the staple crop in Haliburton as it was in the more heavily farmed areas of Southern Ontario; however, only five of the nine original families in Kennaway grew it in 1871. Yields were low, ranging from 16 to 40 bushels (see Graph 3e).<sup>41</sup> Haliburton's cooler climate and shorter growing season do much to explain the de-emphasis on wheat, and settlers grew only spring wheat rather than the later-

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–93, and 1871 Census. Few Haliburton farmers decided to grow these crops. The meager 1871 production of all of the original nine families of the region yield averages of only 2.7 bushels of barley, 25.6 bushels of turnips, and 6.4 bushels of peas.

<sup>38</sup> Dorothy Duncan, *Canadians at Table: A Culinary History of Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006), 61.

<sup>39</sup> Christina Bates, *Out of Old Ontario Kitchens: A Collection of Traditional Recipes of Ontario and the Stories of the People Who Cooked Them* (Toronto: Pagurian Press Limited, 1978), 99.

<sup>40</sup> 1871 Census, and Martinello, *Kennaway*, 90.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.



*Figure 4: The average Haliburton settlers constructed log cabins out of the pine trees on their lots. They could cut the logs into rectangular profiles (as is the case here) or leave them round. Many of Kenaway's decaying log cabins, aside from the boulder fences, are the only physical remains of the abandoned settlement. Image source: Author.*

ripening fall wheat. Still, the aroma of freshly baked bread rose above the tree-tops, as the Haliburton pioneer farmer averaged 16.3 bushels of spring wheat in 1871.

It seems that the shallow, piney soils of the Canadian Shield led nineteenth-century settlers to be predominantly oat and potato farmers. Together, the tubers and grain crops totaled 84 per cent of the 1871 yield in the eastern Haliburton settlement and, again unsurprisingly, the amounts that farmers produced mirrored their comparative farm sizes.<sup>42</sup> Eight of the nine original Kennaway settlers grew oats, and every settler without exception produced potatoes. In 1871, the smaller 7-to-10-acre Haliburton farms like those of Cole and Burton produced 60 and 70 bushels of oats, mid-sized-15-to-20 acre farms produced about 100 bushels, and the large, 30-to-40-acre farms generated 400 and 500 bushels of the breakfast gruel (see Graph 3g). The potato yields were similarly abundant, with 40 bushels being the minimum reported amount, and 90 to 100 bushels representing the norm for mid-sized farms. The large farms produced 350 bushels of spuds each, more than enough to fill the storage cellars of the settlers' log cabins for the winter (see



Graph 3h).

Why the near total dependence on oats and especially potatoes? These cultigens were some of the few that grew well in the sparse, rocky soils of Haliburton, and there is evidence of a close relationship between nineteenth-century Ontario settlers and spuds in historical literature. Bates tells us “just as pork was often the settler’s only choice of meat, the potato was the one dependable vegetable and pork’s constant companion.”<sup>43</sup> Even Catherine Parr Traill, who settled in the 1830s just south of Haliburton, wrote that “the potato is a... blessing here; new settlers would otherwise be greatly dis-

<sup>42</sup> 1871 Census, and Martinello, *Kennaway*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> Bates, *Out of Old Ontario Kitchens*, 100, Martinello, *Kennaway*, 96.

Table 4: 1871 Amounts of Livestock in Kennaway						
	Horses (6)	Oxen (12)	Pigs (14)	Milk Cows (17)	Cattle (17)	Sheep (27)
Bernard Naraseau						
George Cole		2	1			
William Burton		2		2	2	2
James Scott	2		1	3	2	10
Thomas Scott	2		1	3	2	
Archie Scott		2	1	2	1	3
Charles Roberts		2		1		
Henry Williams	2	2	3	3	4	9
Donald Watt		2	7	3	6	3

tressed, and the poor man and his family who are without resources, without the potato must starve.”<sup>44</sup> Boiled, mashed, or baked, the potato became, for Haliburton’s settlers, the staple that fuelled the expansion of furrows and fields. The average settler produced 152.2 bushels of oats and 169.7 of potatoes per annum.

Our construction of a statistically average late-nineteenth-century Haliburton farm would not be complete without an examination of the livestock upon which the settlers depended. The census of 1871 records that cows (17 in the settlement), beef cattle (17), and sheep (27) were the most abundant, followed by smaller populations of pigs (14), draft oxen (12), and horses (6). The data [Table 4] indicate that in eastern Haliburton the horse was the rarest animal, being owned by only three families, each with two horses. Their primary role was likely as high quality draft animals, pulling wagons, carts, cutters, and plows. With an average of only 0.67 per family, the typical settler was unlikely to own

a horse. According to the census, oxen were the draft animals of choice in Haliburton, and were owned by two-thirds of the settler families, twice as many as horse-owning families. As with horses, settlers tended to own oxen in pairs: six families owned and tended exactly two each,<sup>45</sup> while, on average, settlers owned 1.3 oxen per family. A team of these sturdy draft animals could effectively pull the plows that parted the piney soils of the Canadian Shield.

One might assume that pigs, being hardier, easier to feed and quicker to mature than other animals would be most abundant in Haliburton. However, the data prove otherwise. Animals that produced a continuous supply of resources such as dairy and wool were preferred. The food value of pigs was manifested only when they were butchered. Four of the six families that reported having pigs owned a single swine, one family had three, and the other had seven. But pigs did have some presence in Haliburton, offering pork, bacon, and ham at an aver-

<sup>44</sup> Catherine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada 1832–1835* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, New Canadian Library, 1966), 54.

<sup>45</sup> 1871 Census.

age rate of 1.5 animals per settler.

As for milk cows, seven out of the nine families in eastern Haliburton owned them in 1871, each raising between one and three animals. Cows were obviously prized for their ability to produce products such as milk, butter, and cheese on a long-term basis, without having to butcher them; they were the animal of choice in such a challenging farming environment. This led to settlers having an average of 1.89 milk cows per family in 1871. There were just as many beef cattle in the settlement that year but distributed over six, rather than seven, of the families.<sup>46</sup> Their distribution was also more erratic, with smaller farms having one or two, and larger farms like those of Williams and Watt boasting four and six cattle, respectively. Clearly, established farmers in Haliburton could weigh down their dinner tables with roasts and steaks on special occasions.

The final animal reported in the 1871 census was sheep, and of all the reported animals, they were most prolific (27 in total). Sheep were something of a specialty animal in the area. Only five of the original nine settler families of Kennaway tended sheep and their “flock” sizes fluctuated from 2 and 3 on some farms, to 9 and 10 on the others. Clearly, Haliburton settlers were rather selective about their sheep, likely based on whether a family would produce its own wool or buy/trade for it instead. The ability of sheep-tending families to use the animals for mutton as well as wool highlighted

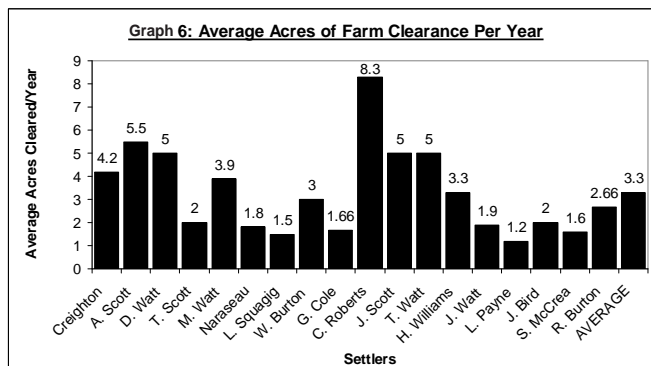
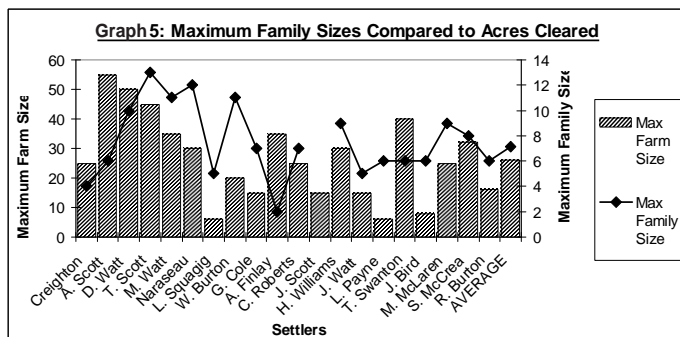
the attraction of sheep in an area like Haliburton, where nineteenth-century settlers had to be largely self-sufficient. In 1871, then, the settlers tended an average of three sheep each.

## Agricultural Growth Through Time

With the preceding information, we can effectively turn otherwise dry statistics into an unusually accurate picture of life in early Haliburton and of nineteenth-century farming on the Canadian Shield, but census data cannot offer insight into factors that necessarily change over time, such as the average amount of forest-filled acres that settlers could clear *per year*, or the extent of land that Haliburton’s farms *eventually* reached. Fortunately, we can connect the data from our snapshot year of 1871 to these factors by examining the tax assessment rolls kept by the Municipality of Dysart *et al*, which includes the Kennaway settlement in Harcourt. Each year, Haliburton County officials recorded the number of people in each family, the number of acres the family had cleared that year and the current size of their farms (in acres). This information, available in full for the years from 1871 to 1903, helps us discover what the region’s average pioneer farm looked like, by illustrating three factors:

- (1) the average *maximum* family size throughout the pioneer period.
- (2) the average *maximum* farm size over the course of the area’s de-

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, and Martinello, *Kennaway*, 103.



velopment.

- (3) the average number of acres that a Haliburton pioneer cleared *per year* (which allows us to discover how many years it would take a pioneer to reach the average maximum farm size).

From tax assessments, it is easy to calculate the maximum size for each family—after all the children were born and before they started to move away. This can be done for the entire nineteenth-century period of pioneer farming. Similarly, we can easily record the number of acres these families had

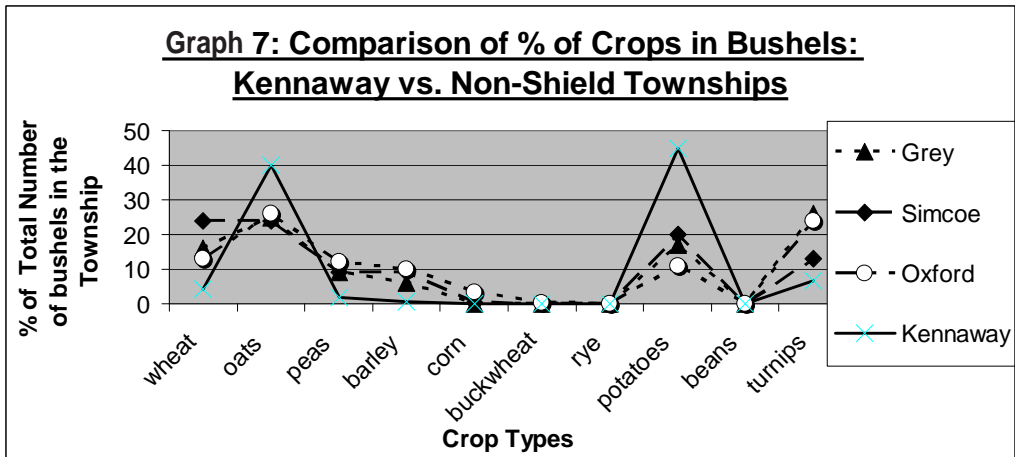
cleared at their maximum extents through the same period. Tabulating these variables reveals an interesting correlation (see Graph 5).<sup>47</sup>

*In general*, the bars recording the maximum extent of acres cleared per family tend to be shorter in the areas of the graph where the line recording the maximum number of people in the families similarly dips. This corroborates the trend suggested by the 1871 census data, that the larger the pioneer family was, the more acres of old growth forest they could clear and have under crop. Throughout the settlement period, farms in the eastern Haliburton region had an average of 7.15 people per family who cleared an average maximum farm size of 26.1 acres. But how many acres, on average, could each settler clear? And how fast were Haliburton's homesteads hollowed out from the forest?

To help explain these figures, let us briefly examine one settler. Tax rolls and the land registry records for Harcourt Township, show that pioneer M. Watt arrived in Kennaway in 1875.<sup>48</sup> But his land clearance totals are first recorded in 1884 and continue until he left the region in 1892. Over this time he cleared a total

<sup>47</sup> Between 1871 and 1903, many more families came to farm in the Kennaway area in addition to the original nine.

<sup>48</sup> 1871–1903 Tax Assessment Registers, s.v. “Harcourt Township,” Municipality of Dysart et al., Haliburton County, Ontario.



of 35 acres for an average of 3.9 acres per year.<sup>49</sup> Averaging the forest clearance of the seventeen settlers in the region from 1871 until 1903 and tabulating them in a bar graph gives us the figures seen in Graph 6. The slowest Haliburton farmers cleared just over an acre per year, while the most ambitious managed to clear an average of 8.3 acres. Area settlers cleared an average of 3.3 acres per year, and therefore could achieve the average maximum farm size of 26.1 acres in 7.9 years, an impressive amount considering the density of the forest on the Canadian Shield.

So what can all of this tell us about the “statistically average Haliburton farm”? After about half a decade into a settlement’s life, the typical settler was about thirty-six years old and had six people in his family. They would farm an average area of 18.7 acres, and would harvest from those acres an average of 6.1 (16-pound) bundles of hay, 2.7 bushels of barley, 6.4 of peas, 16.3 of wheat, 25.6 of

turnips, 152.2 of oats, and 169.7 of potatoes. Their farms would also be populated with an average of 1.3 oxen, 1.5 pigs, 1.89 milk cows, 1.89 cattle, 3 sheep, and, if they were particularly lucky or well off, a horse or two (an average of 0.67). Until the end of the pioneering period at the advent of the twentieth century, their average family size would grow from 6 to 7.15 people and their average farm size would balloon to 26.1 acres, which they would clear at a rate of about 3.3 acres per year and finally achieve in an average of 7.9 years. When the “average” Haliburton summer cottager asks incredulously, “What could they possibly farm up here?” the answer has become as clear as the pristine waters of the region’s many lakes.

These statistics on agricultural production from eastern Haliburton can tell us more when we compare them to a selection of townships south of the Canadian Shield. In this way, we can further refine our understanding of the specific

<sup>49</sup> Martinello, *Kennaway*, 287.



differences between the two regions.

Graph 7 compares for 1871 crop outputs in southern counties with those in Kennaway.<sup>50</sup> In Grey, Simcoe, and Oxford Counties wheat, oats, potatoes, and turnips were the most-produced crops, and all three shared a similar pattern of overall crop production. In the Kennaway settlement, on the other hand, oats and potatoes predominated and the yield of all other crops was smaller; 13.3% less in wheat and 14.3% in turnips. On the other hand, Kennaway boasted 15% higher oat production and an impressive 29% higher rate for potatoes than the other three counties. Haliburton pioneer farmers clearly gravitated to a binary system of crop production.

## Conclusion

This examination of the oldest pioneer settlements in early Haliburton details not only specific agricultural activity but also how it differed from the rest of the province. The problems inherent in farming on the Canadian Shield were made manifest early in the settlement of the region, but Ontario's rapid population expansion in the decades leading up to the 1860s, the economic needs of lumber camps, and the demand for new farm lands persuaded legislators that the area should be settled. Early on, settlers in Haliburton found that they could not simply import the time-honoured traditions from the older areas of the province. Census records and tax registers

reveal a significant deviation from the usual farming standard. Farms south of the Shield often became large cash-crop enterprises, emphasizing the growing of wheat, with a good measure of corn and other vegetables. Farms of early Haliburton, however, remained small, single-family, and near subsistence, producing, overwhelmingly, potatoes and oats with a good measure of hay added to the mix. Southern farms were homes to all types of livestock, while those of Haliburton primarily raised animals that had multiple uses, such as cows for meat and milk, sheep for mutton and wool, and oxen for meat and pulling ploughs. Single-use animals such as pigs (meat) and horses (draft animals) were rare.

Finally, we now know how large Haliburton farms were, how quickly families grew, and how long they took to reach their maximum sizes. Similar studies of other Haliburton settlements, both abandoned and existing, will corroborate and/or refine the vision of early farming presented here. Additionally, analogous research of farming in different regions of Ontario can provide us with a greater understanding of the comparative pace and pattern of agricultural development across the province. Settlers eventually gave up farming in Haliburton (except for some small-scale farms still around today), but understanding the specifics of past human labour can ultimately inform our choices about how that labour is best spent. Especially important today are our

---

<sup>50</sup> H. Belden & Co., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Simcoe, Ont.* (Toronto: H. Belden & Co., 1881), 7. Each crop is shown as a percentage of the total output for all crops.

decisions about how to use Ontario's finite land resources, a decision made more apparent each year as the speed of devel-

opment increases and paves over the agricultural lands that were carved out by early pioneer settlers.

---