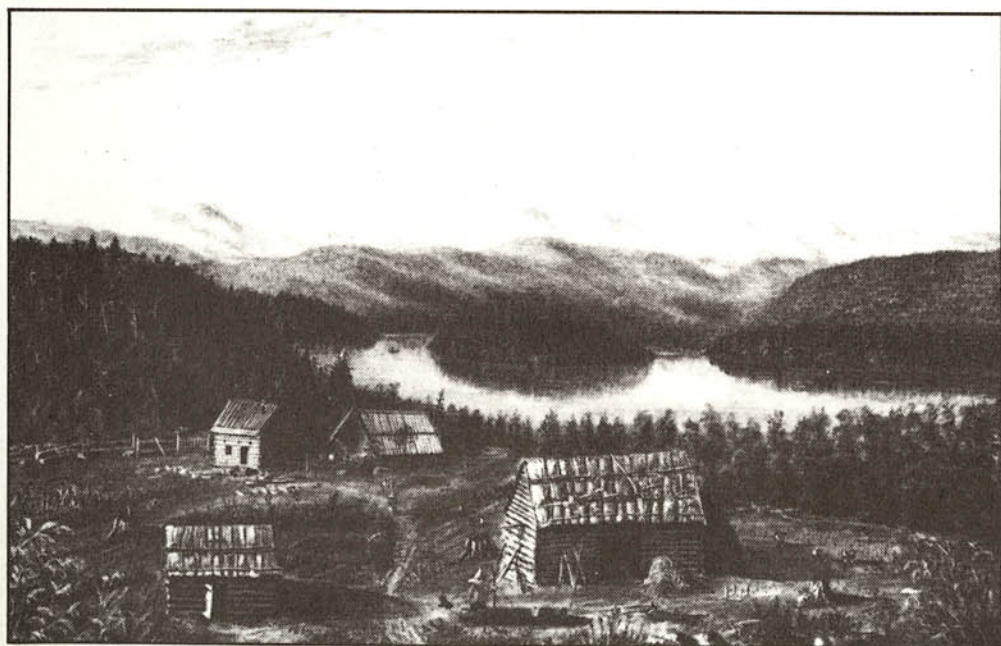


RURAL LIFE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY QUEBEC

Serge Courville
and
Normand Séguin



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RURAL LIFE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY QUEBEC

There is still no overall synthesis of the rural world of nineteenth-century Quebec. While research has progressed considerably in recent years, much remains to be done before a satisfactory general interpretation can be proposed. Numerous but disparate collections of documents require further research on yet unstudied themes and places, or on various periods of the century which have been somewhat neglected. Moreover, since most past research has focused on changing contexts, it is difficult to grasp the development, as a global whole, of a world which appears today more and more complex and diversified, a world marked both by tradition and by currents of modernity from Europe and the United States. The aim of this booklet, then, is not to review in detail past research on this subject, but rather to suggest the key landmarks in the evolution and transformation of Quebec rural society throughout the nineteenth century.

THE PREMISES OF A TRANSFORMATION (1815-1840)

The first four decades of the century marked both the end of one societal context and the beginning of a new one. It was a sort of intermediate age, between the achievements of the late eighteenth century and the transformations of the second half of the nineteenth, a period between two different types of development, in which beside a persistent tradition appeared undeniable signs of progress affecting the social economy of the countryside. One of the changes in the rural world of the time was a dramatic increase in population, which exerted new pressure on the land, but which also fostered new activities that lead to the local restructuring of forms of settlement. Agriculture itself was thus transformed and the peasant economy became more diversified. As a result, the rural scene was changed, and regional differences were accentuated.

Demographic expansion and land shortages

To assess with certainty the demographic evolution of the countryside between 1815 and 1840 is still somewhat hypothetical. However, most scholars agree that growth was rapid. In absolute figures, the population of Lower Canada increased from about 335,000 in 1815 to 600,000 in 1840, three-quarters of which was still rural.

This growth is explained by several factors. The principal one is natural increase, which varies from 24 to 28 per 1,000, according to the decade. The population of Lower Canada, compared to that of other countries, had a higher birth rate (between 50 and 54 per 1,000 from 1815 to 1839), and a lower death (between 22 and 25 per 1,000, except for the cholera epidemic years 1830-34, when it climbed to over 31 per 1,000). This explains the

doubling of the population every twenty-five or twenty-eight years. But there are other factors, in particular immigration, which brought thousands of settlers to Lower Canada. Between 1815 and 1840, almost 300,000 immigrants arrived at the port of Quebec. Most came from the British Isles, especially Ireland, which was suffering from a severe economic crisis. Others came from different European countries and from the United States, but in smaller proportions. Up to 1825, more than a third of these immigrants settled in the St. Lawrence Valley. Subsequently, however, this movement decreased.

This demographic growth resulted in increased population density and in a migratory movement towards the seigneurial back country and towards the "townships" (the surveying of the Eastern Townships was accelerated during this period). As in the eighteenth century, settlement occurred first along the waterways, but very soon headed inland, and new "rangs" of settlement were opened. By the end of the period, the lowland territory was almost entirely occupied and already there were signs of an overflow towards the Laurentian and Appalachian Valleys. The Montreal plain had at this time close to half of the rural population.

All this led to a notable extension of the inhabited territory, as shown by the increase in the number of parishes. While it is certain that new pressures were exerted on the land, it must also be recognized that major changes occurred which reduced their negative effect. The large population growth generated a greater demand for goods and services, which encouraged the appearance of new economic activities, and at the same time sparked the rise of a whole new network of hamlets and villages which were able, for a time, to absorb the expanded labour force from the older settled areas.

Lumbering and rural industry: the village phenomenon

Even if, between 1815 and 1840, agriculture remained the foundation of rural life, there appeared beside it other kinds of activity, which were much more significant and varied than in the previous century. The economy became more diversified and, in a way, more dynamic, stimulated as it was by population growth and by the wider penetration of market factors into the countryside. The notable expansion of agricultural land was accompanied by a market rise in lumbering, coupled with an increased growth of rural industries in what previously were only small centres serving the needs of the surrounding population.

Lumbering began in the Ottawa Valley at the beginning of the century, when Great Britain was blockaded by the armies of Napoleon from wood supplies in Europe and had to seek alternate sources. Gradually, lumbering spread to other regions, from the seigneurial back-country to the Laurentian and Appalachian woodlands, taking advantage of the ease of access and

facilities for log drives provided by the waterways. In certain areas, the extension of economic activity was actually based on lumbering, with agriculture coming only later, or becoming a secondary activity. Elsewhere, in already settled areas, lumbering provided considerable supplementary income for both the affluent and the more impoverished among rural settlers. Apart from the actual felling of trees, which was carried on especially in winter, there were the activities of sawing and transporting timber, which could be spread over a much longer period, and which encouraged the appearance of enterprises employing a larger labour force. In certain areas, lumbering combined with agriculture and local industry to define particular ways of life. The region north of Trois-Rivières was the most striking example. The foundries of St. Maurice provided work for many a rural family. It was perhaps in the new concentrations of population that it fostered, and the new activities it generated (repair shops, factories making products used in lumber camps, etc.), that the forest assumed its greatest importance. With sustained progress throughout the period, it stimulated a type of economy based on the combination of agriculture and lumbering, which became an important characteristic of the fringes of the Quebec-inhabited territory. Especially, it created new living conditions in addition to those prevalent in old river-front parishes.

At the same time as lumbering brought changes to pioneer areas, there was a significant rise in rural industry in older settled areas, leading to new concentrations of population. In space, this growth was uneven and was affected in various ways by economic circumstances. In time, however, it was constant, fostered by a closer association between the world of the seigneurs and that of trade, industry, and transportation, and an equally close association of the rural population with craft production, small workshops, and factories. As a direct result, there was an increase in the number of rural hamlets and villages, whose growth reflected the demographic increase, and whose appearance in time coincided with what could be observed in neighbouring areas, especially in New England, where a similar but more extensive phenomenon occurred.

As early as 1815, Joseph Bouchette, Surveyor General of Lower Canada, reported the first signs of this transformation, noting the importance of market facilities in the countryside: trade facilities, first, in the form of shops, stores, granaries, warehouses, and fairs or market places, but also accommodation and service facilities, in the form of inns, wharves, and stagecoach and postal depots. At the same time he noted the important place occupied by flour and grist mills, in addition to sawmills, tanning establishments, and carding mills, the number of which, although still relatively small, was growing. Finally, without being very explicit, he mentioned the rise of workshops and factories, whose growth closely followed that of the number of artisans.

Bouchette also observed the existence of at least fifty villages in the seigneuries, as opposed to only a few in the townships, which had just recently been opened to settlement. Many of these villages were still only hamlets, clustered around the manor or the church, but a few had already attained a respectable size. On the whole, they were market centres, combining stores and warehouses, and would remain so throughout the period. However, beginning in the years 1825-30, a good number of them would also become important production centres, characterized by the presence of mills, workshops, and small factories, and, for some of them, even large factories, forges, foundries, and shipyards, as in the larger towns.

These developments would have notable effects on the distribution of the local population and on its activities. In 1831, between 8 and 12 per cent of the population of parishes, on average, lived in the village, a little more by 1842, in proportions which varied according to region. This was in general a young population, with a wide range of employment covering all sectors of economic life: trade, maintenance, transportation, services, manufacturing, construction, and agriculture as well as day labour, which was important in all villages.

The growth of villages, which began during the French regime and continued throughout the eighteenth century, reached such a height that, while Bouchette counted around fifty centres in 1815, there were soon three times that many, built for the most part on the personal estate of the seigneur or on sites acquired or reserved for that purpose, especially along waterways with a potential for the water power needed for mills. The largest and most dynamic centres were almost all located in the old river-front parishes, with more intensive agriculture and a larger population, and with easier access to markets. Others sprang up in the seigneurial back-country and in the townships, where settlement and the distance from the large cities necessitated the creation of small service centres, destined to become important regional centres later. The village reflected the changes in the economy of Lower Canada, and in Quebec rural society in general, and became one of the sites of social differentiation.

In fact, around the basic structural components of the villages, there evolved a composite population which differed more and more from that of the rural areas per se. The rise of the villages illustrated one of the most fundamental dimensions of the transformation of rural society. Seigneurs, members of the liberal professions, clergy, merchants, local business-operators, artisans, tradespeople, day labourers, and farm families made the villages places where activities of movement and trading of goods, and non-agricultural services and production, were concentrated and where strategies were acted out and alliances made through civil and religious institutions and power networks. The villages became links between the

cities and the rural areas, and thus connected the rural world to the broader economy. They differed in their make-up, size, and role, were spread out at intervals, and formed an axis, of the intersecting lines of the rising economy. But at the same time, the villages revealed the uneven progress of the extension and densification of the population.

The rural family

For a long period of time, research has been carried out on the family. Very little of this has involved the period 1815-40, however. Apart from some work based primarily on census data, or more rarely registry data, everything that is known about the peasant family of this time comes from case studies for the eighteenth century and the second half of the nineteenth. While these are very informative, they can only be suggestive concerning the reality of family life in the first half of the nineteenth century, especially as they are often focused on very specific segments of the population, the original families for example, or on strictly the agricultural population, as opposed to families of artisans or day labourers. As for census data, they do provide snapshots, which are made clearer by a few case studies based on registry data and notarial records. What is lacking, however, are lengthy studies of family history, since very little research has yet been devoted to such analysis.

However, despite the major changes, which led to a diversification of the socio-professional profile of the countryside, the rural family's presence was felt everywhere, influencing the structure of the land and at the same time the distribution of labour and of people. The countryside itself reflected its impact: the house brought the family together, the fields fed the family, and the typical operation remained the family farm that was inhabited and cultivated, to which were sometimes added more lots according to the family's strength, needs, and aspirations.

In view of the high fertility of couples, households were generally rather large: there were between six and ten people per household, sometimes more, according to region and location in the parish, the families of the "côte" often being slightly larger. It is noteworthy also that the family was somewhat smaller in the Montreal area than in Trois-Rivières or in Quebec. Finally, there was a progressive differentiation by size and age according to distance from the river, young couples being generally more numerous on the frontier than in the river-front parishes.

While the age of the settlement, the number of households, and the degree of intensity of agricultural development could explain differences recorded in space, these were essentially due to the mode of social reproduction prevalent in the Quebec countryside. The farm was the means by which the family subsisted, and thus there was an attempt to preserve its integrity as much as possible, by practices which excluded children at marriage by

obliging each generation to settle farther and farther away in the territory, on farms which were often acquired for this purpose by the parents. This explains the disparities between parishes, the chronic debt of families, and also the role played by family solidarity in the process of the acquisition and control of land. Since land was less plentiful than before, strategies were developed similar to those recorded for the French regime: based on alliances and on networks of alliances with parents and neighbours, these strategies remained the dominant form of social relationships.

The dynamics of the transmission of property did not exclude the accumulation of land for other reasons, more directly linked to forces introduced by the market economy: for example, the acquisition of parcels of land in order to increase production, to have a forest reserve or an investment, or in order to increase one's wealth and thus one's social status and personal prestige. Land in fact, at the time, commanded good prices, due to its scarcity, and if the merchant or the religious communities could see in it a potential source of profit, there is no reason to believe that the same cannot be said of the rural inhabitants. However, given the present state of our knowledge of the structure and evolution of such family property, we are still unsure of the actual extent of these practices, which depended on the economic and spatial strategies of the farmer. Whatever may be the causes, and provided that the land thus acquired remained in the hands of the family, it would sooner or later go to the children, since the right to make out a will was restricted in Lower Canada, if not by the Code at least by practice. This peculiarity of an egalitarian division of property among heirs was a legacy of the ancient civil laws of France. Much of the behaviour of Quebec society can be explained by this practice, which was transmitted as an established cultural trait in all strata of society. With rural families, however, the value of the inheritance remained dependent on economic circumstances, domestic crises, and especially the liquid assets of the family.

Far from being uniform, the wealth of country families varied immensely according to the age of the household and the family life cycle. The younger the household, the more modest its means. This was true especially where there were young children, who increased consumption needs and, in many cases, indebtedness. Conversely, the older the household, the greater its labour force and the more its assets and property increased, until the day came when the children settled elsewhere, after which a significant decrease in resources occurred. When this stage was completed, the family's wealth increased again, until the final abandonment of work on the farm, often resulting in transfer of the home farm by deed of gift to the oldest son who, in return for the assets he received, took care of the parents and the remaining children whose resettlement he would have to look after at a later date. The wealthiest acquired at this time a privileged status in the local community and led the life of gentlemen farmers; many even became money-lenders.

The rest had to be satisfied with a more modest standard of living according to what was allotted to them by their children.

While it was important, the family life cycle was only one of the factors influencing the levels of wealth and hence socio-economic differentiation among rural people. The political situation, the rise and fall of prices, climatic accidents, epidemics, the arrival of a more demanding seigneur, domestic crises, the level of indebtedness, and even marriage alliances themselves, were all potential causes of disruption in the accumulation of property. While well-to-do habitants could withstand temporary difficulties rather well, the rest, of humbler means, often saw many of their achievements destroyed. At best, they took a few years to get back on their feet; at worst, they remained dependent on the money-lender, until they were able to migrate into the townships or to abandon agriculture, in search of employment in the village or in town, thus joining those who had been excluded from agricultural activity at the time of marriage, or who had abandoned it voluntarily, attracted by wages and an easier life. Such employment did exist, even if a significant improvement of one's fate could not always be expected. For the habitant, the years 1834-37 were the most difficult, being marked by epidemics, climatic accidents, and wheat blight. The result was serious societal tension which some scholars attribute to the constant deterioration of agricultural conditions, but which others explain in reference to the new competition between rising urban industry and rural enterprise. Whatever the case, after the rebellions, the countryside, relieved of its excess population, soon found a new equilibrium, as shown by the evolution of habitant property and production.

The household economy

In general, the rural family had at its disposal a minimum of sixty to ninety *arpents* of land in the seigneuries, and a hundred, sometimes two hundred, acres in the townships (an *arpent* is equivalent to about five-sixths of an acre). However, certain operations were larger, with as many as two and even three hundred *arpents*, or as many acres or more, of which one-quarter or one-third, or even more, were under cultivation. These operations consisted of several lots, which may or may not have been adjacent to the main lot, and which had various uses.

The traditional means of land acquisition in the seigneuries remained the request for a land grant from the seigneur, the deed of gift (parents, while still alive, giving their farm to their children), or inheritance. At this time, however, many farms were also bought or rented because land was becoming scarce, and also because increasing speculation limited its availability. In the townships, where seigneurial tenure did not apply, land was sold, according to Maurice Séguin, at prices varying between 0.4 and 4.0 *piastres* an acre between 1825 and 1837, with the average being around 0.7

piastres. This was a substantial increase over eighteenth-century prices, when an entire two-hundred-acre farm cost around 7.0 *piastres*.

The work on the farm was carried out by the family, including the children. In the case of larger operations, there were hired men, assisted by seasonal workers if required by production volume and permitted by revenue. The bulk of activity consisted of grain farming and stock raising, the proportion varying according to the region. But it could also include small craft industries, producing fabrics and woollens, of which part of the production was sold on the local market or to merchants. In addition, depending on opportunities, age, and geography, extra revenue was obtained from fruit and berry picking, fishing, working in the forest, or from various activities related to transportation, services, or manufacturing.

The farm tended to have two functions: trade and subsistence, and this explains the general orientation of the system of production. At this time, as throughout the nineteenth century, the system was one of mixed farming dominated by grain, with stock raising present in proportions varying according to the region. Early in the period, wheat still made up more than three-quarters of the crop, regardless of the territory. This is not only explained by the quality of the soil or the needs and eating habits of the population, but also by the fact that wheat constituted an important source of revenue allowing the family to meet its financial obligations (tithes, seigneurial taxes, perpetual rents, etc.) to pay for services (those of a doctor, notary, artisan, or surveyor), and to acquire consumer goods and products needed for its everyday life or to consolidate or increase its standard of living (alcohol, tea, spices, furniture, and farm implements). Later, wheat would make room for more diversified crops, and the face of the farm would be changed completely.

Many of these crops were traditional: barley, oats, and peas, which were grown with wheat and like it underwent a two-year, or three-year, crop rotation; and corn, rye, and buckwheat, which were poor-soil grains grown at the end of the cycle. Along with these, there were potatoes, recently introduced, but which soon made up a large share of the crop. In certain cases, also, tobacco, flax, and hemp were grown. These were for home use as well as cash crops. Finally, there was hay and various leguminous plants, the quantities of which are not well known since they were not included in census data. Near the house there would be the garden, where fruit and vegetables were grown, and, at the back of the farm, the family woodlot, which could be expected to yield maple sugar, unless this was replaced by domestic honey. Livestock remained variable, but almost always included a few head of cattle, oxen especially, which are used for tilling the soil, horses, sheep, pigs, and poultry.

In this system of production, dominated by large crops, fallowing was important, especially in the seigneuries, where livestock were more limited, except for areas near the towns where it seemed to increase. The use of manure was thus restricted to the garden and to fields used for growing flax, tobacco, and potatoes, and, if supply permitted, to pastureland and land lying fallow. In the townships, where stock raising is more extensive, the situation was different and the fields benefitted from better manuring. All the committees studying agriculture between 1815 and 1840 have noted this difference and have attributed it to the better practices of the English-speaking farmers. In fact such a conclusion, which is based too much on the ideologies of the period and too little on available data, should not be treated as absolute. While it is true that English-speaking small farmers show superior production figures compared to their French-speaking counterparts, these differences decrease among large farmers, where similar or very close production figures are noted. The difference is thus found at the level of small farmers, who were more numerous among the French-speaking population. But any conclusion ascribed to faulty techniques would be hasty. Levels of wealth, the nature of demand, its structure, and distance from markets, made for different systems of production which had nothing to do with ethnic factors. Moreover, while it is true that early in the period, agricultural yields in the seigneuries were linked more with the availability and quality of new land than with methods of cultivation, with time and the increasing scarcity of good land, practices improved, thus permitting relative increases in production according to the needs and evolution of the market.

Adaptations to the market

One of the methods used by some historians to judge rural economic health has been an analysis based almost exclusively on transatlantic trade, the nature and volume of exports thus becoming the criterion for the evaluation of the evolution and quality of production. There were other types of markets, however, to which the producer had access. Apart from the transatlantic imperial market, which involved very diverse trade (fur, wheat, flour, and timber), there were also the American and Upper Canadian markets, involving timber, agricultural produce, fabrics, and goods from the mother country, and, at the regional level, the urban market, which, through the growing ascendancy of the merchants, generated an increased demand for foodstuffs, timber, and handicrafts and manufactured goods, leading in turn to much river traffic, as shown by the growing number of navigators recorded on censuses for certain river-front parishes. Finally, at the local level, there was the village market with its market places and seasonal fairs, and a multitude of small diffuse markets linked to the rise of lumbering and rural industries.

These markets did not all have the same extent or the same organization. Nor did they all have the same interest for the producer, some offering more short-term guarantees than others, or, on the contrary, more risks. Hence, trade took several forms, leading to a greater diversification of agricultural production. This did not mean that there was general progress in agriculture or that it was perfectly integrated into the market economy: problems existed, which limited its performance (climatic accidents, increases in land prices, higher levies by the seigneurs and clergy, etc.). But despite the checks imposed on its full growth, agriculture did develop, in a variety of patterns attesting to very diverse situations: certain producers responded to external demand, others to internal demand, according to needs, the economic situation, and the opportunities of the moment. Beside those who succeeded in carving out for themselves an enviable place and in acquiring large farms, there were those who succeeded only in consolidating the traditional way of life, and, between these two groups, there were all those who, while not comparable to the former, nevertheless achieved levels of wealth which would have been the envy of many a European peasant.

This process accentuated regional differences, certain areas appearing more dynamic than others, more stabilized, or more specialized in production. Wheat farming, for instance, formerly spread throughout the territory, now tended to be concentrated on rich farmlands or on new farms on certain fringes of the inhabited territory. In the same way, the growing of certain crops or the raising of certain livestock, formerly rather indiscriminately distributed across all regions, now tended to be prevalent around localities where the market was strongest and where rural industries were centred. Thus, the rural scene was to be transformed, and with it, the general characteristics of rural areas.

The rural scene in the first half of the century

The Quebec rural world in the first half of the nineteenth century was at once two territories (the seigneuries and the townships), two regions (Quebec and Montreal, the latter extending to Trois-Rivières), and a succession of areas which changed as they stretched out from the banks of St. Lawrence to the interior. In all this area, wide open to settlement, the river occupied the dominant position and defined the axis along which the population was constituted historically and along which trade was carried out. Although population densities in the Montreal area contrasted with those of other regions, general patterns took shape concerning the way land was successively inhabited and developed.

Areas along the river, occupied longer and more fully, and dominated by intensive agriculture, were succeeded by more recent and more open spaces of extensive agriculture, which on the frontier became an agriculture of colonization living off various interactions with the forest, the river, or the

sea. Architecture itself reflected these distinct territorialities, showing a differentiation in the style of dwellings, construction materials, and the overall appearance of public buildings, always more opulent and more imposing in the older river-front parishes. Even the pattern of roads revealed these differences, being more dense near the river, less so towards the interior and in newly cleared areas.

Finally, even though the “côte” (or “rang” similar to rural concession lines) was still the main site of population, the axis along which the rural inhabitants were primarily dotted, the village was increasingly present everywhere, and thus making for the local restructuring of the traditional forms of settlement. Each village had its own vocation, but alongside those which acted as veritable relays, in the countryside, of the urban economy and values, accumulating a whole range of enterprises and institutions which recalled or mirrored those of the town, there were also those villages which had much more modest profiles and roles, and which shed light on the rhythms found in the countryside. Some of these rhythms were slow, defined by timid, localized advances, which were even punctuated by regression during difficult times; others were more rapid, characterized by more solid advances which explain, if not the prosperity, at least the better resistance of certain sectors to economic trends.

The rural world in the Quebec of the 1840s was thus a mosaic of very diverse areas, bound by an overall pattern of organization, but subject to regional differences. Contrary to the Montreal area, for example, which revealed a significant increase in the number of workshops and factories fostering new links between agriculture, the market, craft industries, and manufacturing, eastern Quebec demonstrated a different rural existence, in which agriculture lived off various interactions with the forest, the river, and the sea. The result was different rhythms of growth, which later would be accentuated by different rhythms of urbanization and industrialization.

THE BROADENING OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND THE EXTENSION OF THE MARKET ECONOMY: FROM THE 1840s TO THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

The evolution of the Quebec rural world accelerated in the second half of the nineteenth century, in terms both of demographic growth and the integration of production into the market. Whether it was agriculture, rural industry, or the village society, and from whatever angle it is examined, the rural social economy was transformed and became more complex under the pressure of numerous factors.

A new institutional framework

After the upheaval of 1837-38, there began with the 1840s a period of significant institutional change. The era of Union government was

dominated by a spirit of reform. Modernization occurred at the same time as the way was being prepared for the abolition of the seigneurial system. As early as 1829, a law was passed to facilitate the elimination of secret mortgages, a practice much condemned by the English-speaking business community. Over the following decade, a few community registry offices were established in response to such anglophone demands. Then, in 1841, an edict instituted a universal system for the publication of property titles and the establishment of a registry office in each judicial district of Lower Canada. The aim of this new system was to encourage the recognition of title deeds and to eliminate obstacles to mortgage lending. This represented a considerable disruption to the practices of the time. The management of public land underwent a similar process. While it was limited for a long time to areas of English-speaking colonization, the system of public land grants by townships was generalized and consolidated beginning in 1841, at a time when French Canadians had to overflow the seigneurial areas in their quest for new land. Consequently, they settled in large numbers in the townships from the middle of the century. Finally, the municipal system, conferring specific responsibilities on representative local administrations, was also gradually set up beginning in the 1840s; in 1855, the municipal status of certain large villages was reconfirmed, and any parish or township with a population of at least three hundred acquired the status of a distinct municipality. In the French-speaking areas, it was generally the religious parish which, once established legally, became the territorial basis for the municipality. This municipalization of the parish structure can certainly be considered one of the distinctive traits in the development of rural areas in Quebec. When the seigneurial system was finally abolished in 1854, new institutional foundations, elaborating on a long transition, had already taken shape and were consolidated in a series of adaptations over the following years. In 1867, the new federal government under Confederation did not abolish these achievements of its Union predecessor. From then on, however, given the division of power, it was up to the provincial government to promote through its own policies the development of the public domain and to stimulate agriculture and colonization.

Demographic pressures and colonization

Between 1850 and 1911, the population of Quebec increased by more than one million, thanks to a natural increase which remained high despite the relative decline in the birth rate (from almost 43 per 1,000 around 1867 to about 38 per 1,000 on the eve of the First World War; the death rate also dropped, however, from around 23 per 1,000 in the middle of the century, to about 17.5 per 1,000 around 1914). This increase in the Quebec population was, however, uneven: 14.5 per cent between 1851 and 1871, but only 11.1 per cent in the next two decades, then 14.8 per cent between 1891 and 1911. While Quebec received few permanent immigrants in the last decades of the

century, it suffered a veritable hemorrhage: from 1840 to 1930, more than 900,000 Quebeckers, the great majority of them French-speaking, left the province. This emigration reached its height during the last thirty years of the century, when 410,000 people left, including 150,000 between 1880 and 1890, the worst decade of this long exodus.

Quebec in the second half of the nineteenth century was literally overflowing, so strong were the demographic pressures: its agriculture was being transformed; new lands were more and more remote from the central areas of the province; and urban growth was still uneven and could not absorb the excess population of the countryside. It was the city, however, that was now the attraction. Whole families left the countryside, hoping to take advantage of new jobs in industry. The majority headed for American cities, in one leap, or through various networks of emigration. This exodus reflected not only the renunciation of a whole way of life but, for many, the rejection of certain values.

It was only at the end of the century that these internal demographic pressures were alleviated, thanks to an increasing and generalized industrialization. For 1901, the estimated number of French Canadians who had settled outside the province was over a million. Meanwhile, from 1871 to 1901, the urban population of Quebec (centres with a population over 1,000) increased from 20 to 36 per cent of the whole. The actual extent of migratory movement within Quebec is still unclear. Although this was less spectacular than emigration out of the province, it nonetheless also helped to transform the rural scene: movements from the older parishes to the frontier; and from rural areas to villages, the developing towns, and the great urban centres of the time, Quebec and especially Montreal; and from the new peripheries to the central areas. These exchanges of population, whose constant currents were shaped by economic circumstances, determined in large part the growth or decline of spatial entities and influenced their composition.

In the strict sense of the conquest of new land for agriculture, the spread of the population over the territory became after 1840 a more and more significant phenomenon, in all directions. The advance of settlement opened new territory on the edge of the Laurentian Shield (from the Montreal back-country to that of Quebec) and beyond, to the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area. At the same time the settlers moved in waves into the Eastern Townships and up the Ottawa Valley and continued their advance into the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé. By the end of the century, only the remote Abitibi remained out of range of the colonization movement, despite some timid breakthroughs in Témiscamingue. How many people participated in these migrations? This can still be only approximately estimated: several tens of thousands, certainly. It is known that the powerful

demographic dynamism characteristic of the French-speaking rural population in the nineteenth century ensured a strong base of internal growth for these new settlements. This was an important and, indeed, determining factor in the expansion of the frontier, from the time of its earliest settlement. Finally, it is clear that this movement did not depend exclusively on agriculture, but also on the forest and on all the non-agricultural activities carried on in the rural areas and especially in the villages. Regardless of their size and population, the villages were at once service and production centres, whose attraction and role, in these new areas, are still not well known.

What is clear, however, is that if rural Quebec is divided into two by drawing a horizontal line cutting through the St. Lawrence axis at Lac St. Pierre, the movement toward new land was much more pronounced to the north than to the south. The total number of farmers increases by 82 per cent in the northern half, and by only 42 per cent in south. In the middle of the century, the latter half had around 62 per cent of all farmers, but by 1900 this proportion had fallen to 56 per cent. This is explained particularly by the pattern in the Montreal area, which reveals an increase of only a few thousand farmers. All other areas show increases of between 65 and 167 per cent, with the Saguenay the leader, followed by the Eastern Townships and the Ottawa Valley. Interestingly enough, this occurred at a time when urban expansion increased significantly the demographic importance of the Montreal area.

The rural scene and agrarian structures

After 1850, the state intervened to promote the diffusion of agricultural knowledge through various means (schools, societies and circles, farm newspapers, etc.) But the actual impact of these efforts on the farmer is still difficult to evaluate, compared to that of commercial strategies whose role in the adaptation process is much more evident. Mechanization spread, and methods of cultivation improved, thus increasing productivity. In general, the advance of the commercialization of agriculture led to a certain reorganization of the agrarian area of the province. In the face of strong outside competition, wheat growing was further marginalized, while other market productions increased in importance. Commercialization also changed the composition and size of livestock herds, and encouraged improvements in quality and yield.

During the second half of the century, the land area devoted to agriculture doubled, while the improved area expanded even more rapidly, increasing 2.36 times. By 1900, the production of hay, potatoes, buckwheat, and barley was three to five times greater than at the middle of the century. Wheat production, however, was at half its former level. During this time, the number of farmers increased by around 50,000, an increase of 50 or 60 per cent depending on interpretations of census data. When small lots under ten

acres are omitted from the calculations, the size of the average farm was 80 to 90 acres at the middle of the century, and 105 to 115 acres by the end; on the same basis, the average improved acreage increased from 35 to 45 acres to 55 to 60. These changes are explained above all by the decline in small farms under fifty acres whose proportion fell from 25 to 15 per cent, and by the corresponding rise in large farms over one-hundred acres, which increased from 50 to 60 per cent of the total. Very large farms (over two hundred acres) increased from 10 to 12 per cent of the total, a modest but important trend. These data show clearly the extent of changes in Quebec agriculture over the fifty-year period. But these changes varied greatly in intensity and nature according to the decade and the region.

In fact, 1850-1870 and 1890-1910 were relatively active periods, while 1870-1890 was clearly a slower, transitional period. The most rapid increase in the number of farmers occurred in the period before 1880, when three-quarters of the new farms of this half-century were established. The 1850s was the most active decade, with over fifteen thousand new farms. This evolution in the number of farmers is in itself a clear indication of the slowdown in the movement of colonization after the 1870s.

As a whole, the adaptations in Quebec agriculture between 1850 and 1870 were remarkably vigorous. Access to the American market was in large part responsible for this new climate: the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 with the United States and the American Civil War had a very stimulating effect on agricultural activities. Wheat production fell by a third, while all other large crops—hay, oats, barley, potatoes, and buckwheat—increased. Hay and oats in particular acquired an increasingly predominant share of the cultivated acreage and became the dominant commercial crops of the half-century. The Quebec agrarian scene was thus changed remarkably.

With the end of the Civil War and the reciprocity period in 1865-66 the American market dwindled, and Quebec agriculture had to find another external outlet. This would be Great Britain, whose demand for butter and cheese stimulated a specialization in dairy production, which was also encouraged by the increasing demand in the Quebec market itself, due to urban and village expansion. This was a difficult conversion, given the keen competition from other stronger agricultural areas in the international market-place, especially those of Ontario, the United States, and New Zealand.

Between 1870 and 1890, hay production continued to increase, and indeed almost doubled. Farmers now devoted more acreage to hay than to all other crops combined. Oats were in second place. The importance of hay was related to the evolution of demand by internal and external markets and to the increase in dairy herds and in the number of horses, indications of the growing specialization of Quebec agriculture and increasing farm

mechanization. A predictable consequence of this mechanization was the establishment of small farm implement factories in various regions.

The period 1890-1910 was, like 1850-1870, one of rapid growth. The production of hay continued to advance, and that of oats almost doubled. In the 1890s, dairy herds increased rapidly, by over 200,000 head, but declined slightly over the next decade, an obvious sign of difficulty in this still recent specialization. However, hog-raising increased so rapidly that it became the second largest livestock activity; in twenty years the number of hogs doubled and eventually exceeded even the number of dairy cattle. Over these last two decades, the growing importance of poultry was also evident, with the numbers almost doubling. This rapid increase in hogs and poultry revealed the growing and determining impact of the internal market on Quebec agriculture.

Despite a still fragile situation, stock-raising, in particular dairy cattle and hogs, was by the beginning of the twentieth century the new main-spring of expansion for Quebec agriculture. But one must avoid an overly optimistic view of these accomplishments. Given the serious distortions in available statistics, it is difficult to reconstitute the livestock population on an average farm in the second half of the century. But one can hazard an estimate, as a general indication: around 1850, four or five dairy cows, three or four hogs, and seven or eight sheep; while half a century later, six or seven dairy cows, four or five hogs, but only four or five sheep. This data for Quebec as a whole does not show, as already pointed out, the great variety of situations and the very uneven progress according to region. They especially do not take into account the numerous cases of large-scale farmers, in 1850 as in 1900, with an impressive volume of specialized production. Specialization was not a new phenomenon; it was very old, and first took shape at the level of individuals or groups of individuals before becoming more widespread. However, it appeared more clearly in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially so for large crop and livestock production, and for fruit growing and market gardening near the edge of urban centres.

Undeniably, Quebec agriculture made significant gains in productivity over this period. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, various problems continued to limit its development and efficiency. The size of livestock herds was in general still too small to ensure the adequate manuring of the land, which thus remained insufficiently enriched. Certain techniques became more widespread, such as the claying of sandy soils, or liming, but the farmers' limited revenue was an obstacle to the regular and extensive use of new enrichment methods. (The use of commercial fertilizer would become a generalized practice only in the 1920s.) Several areas suffered from poor drainage, others from erosion. Moreover, while crop rotation improved, the cycle was not always adequate for the crops involved. It is

often judged to have been too long. Finally, with regard to the quality and yield of livestock, it was only well into the twentieth century that the most significant advances were made, after a long period of effort and numerous failures.

The Montreal area remained, throughout the period, the real heart of the Quebec agrarian activity, and the part which was most sensitive to market trends. Here, agriculture appeared more intensive, better organized, and more highly mechanized. Where it is observed, the decrease in the number of farmers is accompanied by an increase in the average farm size, a result of the constant regrouping of farms in fully occupied territories, where the opportunities of the rising generations were necessarily limited and where the more solid farms had to nibble at the weaker ones in order to expand. In these older areas, the average age of farmers tended as a result, as was the case earlier, to be older than on the frontier, to where aspiring young settlers would flow.

The Montreal area was a relatively diversified region; the South Shore contrasted in many ways with the North Shore: the former suffered a decrease in the number of farmers, while in the latter there was an increase, due to the addition of new frontiers. Around 1850, with about 45 per cent of all farms in Quebec, the Montreal region had half the area under cultivation, and accounted for 50 per cent of the Quebec production of oats and buckwheat and for 65 per cent of its wheat. Potatoes were not yet very important, with only 35 per cent of the total crop, which was more characteristic of the Quebec area, the Côte-du-Sud, and the Lower St. Lawrence. As far as livestock was concerned, the area had almost 60 per cent of all horses, an indication of more advanced rural development and of greater affluence than elsewhere, and half of all hogs and dairy cattle. The raising of other horned cattle remained limited, scarcely 40 per cent of the Quebec total. This can be explained by the gradual abandonment of the ox as a draught animal. At this time, the raising of slaughter animals was already a speciality of the Eastern Townships and permitted the development for a time of a veritable base of agrarian capitalism in that area. By around 1900, the farmers in the Montreal area represented only 30 per cent of the Quebec total, but they possessed close to 40 per cent of the land under cultivation. Their share of Quebec wheat production had dropped drastically to around 25 per cent. This crop, which they were quickly abandoning, was now more characteristic of the Ottawa Valley and certain remote areas of Eastern Quebec. However, the Montreal area accounted for almost half the buckwheat and pea production, 45 per cent of oats, and 36 per cent of potatoes. The importance of buckwheat, a poor-soil grain grown in a rich soil, attested to more sophisticated and evolved systems of crop rotation. Moreover, this area still had a large proportion of horses (40 per cent) and of hogs (36 per cent). As for dairy herds, their importance was less

than at the middle of the century, the provincial share for the area depending more or less on the number of farmers actually engaged in this activity throughout Quebec. In fact, the dairy industry was becoming, like cattle raising, characteristic of the Eastern Townships, and had made remarkable progress elsewhere.

With all the qualifications required by such a judgement, it can be asserted that, around 1900, the southern part of rural Quebec, including the Ottawa Valley, was more adjusted to the market and performed better than the northern part which had absorbed the bulk of new farms over the previous half-century. This gap between the south and the north, these regional characteristics and disparities, are nonetheless timid indicators of the striking contrasts observable between the increasingly intensive agriculture, principally oriented to the market, practised on the better soil of the St. Lawrence lowlands, and the extensive agriculture, still largely oriented to home consumption, practised in the parishes on the edge of the frontier. What disparities also from one parish to another, from one *rang* and one farm to another! As a result of the uneven potential of the land and adaptation to the market, the rural scene demonstrated an even broader range of circumstances by the end of the century, which in turn suggests a greater hierarchical distribution of farmers according to the value of their possessions.

This progress of agriculture was linked to the rise of rural industries: in the back-country and on the frontier, first of all, where such industries were limited to the exploitation of natural resources, but also in the more fertile areas (along the St. Lawrence River axis, on the Montreal plain, and in the Eastern Townships), where they flourished in numerous forms: smelting works and foundries, textile industries, tanneries, the manufacturing of harness, shoes, tilling implements, tools, doors and windows, matches, carriages, candles, and numerous other goods. Whether a manifestation of urban capital or a direct expression of the entrepreneurial spirit of the rural population itself, the rural industries, although fragile, rather shaky, and often short-lived, nevertheless profitted from the unceasing renewal of such initiatives. Thus, in this way, quite aside from agriculture, the links of the rural world to the broader economy were strengthened.

The rural industries, along with service functions, influenced in various ways the fate of the village centres: demographic evolution, social characteristics, and their role and importance in a specific economic structure. In fact, not only did village networks spread but they also became hierarchical: there was little in common between a centre of services and rural industries of over two thousand people and an embryonic collection of a few dozen houses. In the second half of the century, village society represented an important and growing share of the rural population. The

extension of rail and road links reinforced all the more its functions of non-agricultural production, of trade, and of service; in an increasingly structured rural space, the generating and mediating role of the village in relations between town and country was accentuated.

On the whole, however, this growth had its limits. With the exception of those with urban dynamics, few villages succeeded in avoiding a population ceiling. Some even lost population. There were several factors explaining this, including competition between village centres, which was increased by advances in communications, and the even more important competition from urban centres. The rise of urban industries led to the difficult process of conversion or replacement of rural industries, especially in the later decades. It was however, ultimately through the further increase in the number of villages, from place to place in the countryside, that the village phenomenon was solidified.

The rural population and the transformation of the rural economy

In the second half of the century, the life of the rural family was maintained through close solidarity and survival strategies for the benefit of its members. It was on this basis that family farms were preserved and enlarged through the generations, and that others were formed on the fringe of and far from the older settlements. It is certain that rural families were still far from the situation of modern agricultural producers who are perfectly integrated into the market economy, whose conduct is dictated by profit and ever improved productivity. This would appear in Quebec really only in the transitional 1950s. It would be wrong to consider the rural family of the nineteenth century as entirely subject to such external constraints. In conditions which were its own, the family demonstrated the apparent paradox of a social cell which, for the necessity of its reproduction, accepted the marginal nature of the areas of colonization, but which also, for reasons of stability and survival, increased its participation in the market economy. To what extent did the family change or maintain certain behaviour patterns current during the first decades of the nineteenth century: helping the younger generations become established inside and outside agriculture; attitudes toward celibacy and marriage; number of offspring; the role of men, women, and children in the farming operation; secondary income earned by members of the family on and off the farm; the use of wage-earning workers from outside the family; openness to the consumption of non-domestic products; attitudes toward credit; receptivity to new knowledge and techniques? Too much is still unknown to permit an acceptable answer to this fundamental question, but at least certain observations help to shed light on the general trends of some such behavioural adaptations.

The consumption of non-domestic products and of implements increased; monetary exchanges assumed more importance and fostered the extension

of credit and the increase of mortgage debt; and the price of developed land — affected by the cost of mechanization and credit — increased, particularly in the fully occupied areas of the province which were more subject to the pressures of land regrouping and consolidation. Moreover, the sale of farms tended to replace the deed of gift in the process of property transmission. It thus became necessary to work and produce more in order to maintain or raise one's standard of living, pay off debts, or acquire land. Among those who are incapable of this, many were forced to abandon agriculture, or at least their farm. Some made such a permanent break; others persisted and started again in another context. Everywhere, the demand for farms fostered an active land market, with its money-lenders, and its speculators, of various geographical origins, from the villages or cities, from the region or from outside.

This broader context had a direct influence on the income of the rural family, to which, very early in their lives and until they left home, all members contributed through work on the farm and non-agricultural activities. In settlements near rural or town industries, there were obviously more numerous and varied opportunities to participate in the market than in frontier areas of colonization, whether through selling domestic products, through paid labour carried out at home, or remunerated activity off the farm. In the regions of recent colonization, work in the forest attracted a temporary migration of several months during the off-season. This especially involved young men who had not yet left home and young fathers who would be replaced later by their sons once they had reached a certain physical maturity. The prolonged absence of heads of the family had effects on their wives, whose responsibilities were thus increased considerably. They carried these out relying on help from relatives and neighbours.

The transformations in agriculture naturally also had a direct effect on work on the farm. In certain situations, farmers mechanized to escape what was considered the high cost of paid help; in other situations, because they were short-handed, as was the case especially in the older areas where many people left, and, finally, it was done simply for reasons of efficiency. With the progress of mechanization, the peasant family reduced its need for paid help and relied as much as possible on the collective effort of its members and exchanges of services between relatives and neighbours. While the heavy work in principle fell on the men, certain new machinery which became common required numerous helping hands, especially at harvest time. This was the occasion for a general mobilization of all members of the family able to help, regardless of sex or age. The wife was responsible for most tasks relating to the vegetable garden, which she carried out with the help of the children, who were trained very young to do light work. She also attended to the poultry and helped to look after the animals, saw to the preservation of

the milk stored in the farm dairy, and did most of the work involved in making butter and cheese. The growth in the size of herds increased therefore the work of the wife on the farm while mechanization mobilized her as spare help. One can understand why many young wives were repelled by the prospect of spending their whole life on a farm, when the town offered so many new opportunities.

Ideologies and the rural world: conservatism and modernity

Throughout the second half of the century, two currents of thought, contrary in appearance, ran through Quebec society and both offered interpretations of the rural world. First, there was the conservative agrarian vision with its traditionalist message of preservation (land, family, faith, and language), to which vision much importance has been attached in Canadian historiography. The main propagator of this view was the Catholic clergy, which had a considerable leadership role in society. At a time of wide-scale desertion of the rural areas for American cities, the clergy expressed a fervent mobilizing discourse in favour of internal colonization as a solution to this exodus and praised the virtues of rural life as opposed to the harmful influences of the cities and of Protestantism. Moreover, the clergy itself initiated colonization ventures and attempted to organize the local population to these ends. At the same time, however, a modernist current was also present, which was more discreet and diffuse, and created by the impact of economic transformations. Such modernism advocated the need for change, and was expressed by representatives of various circles (agronomists, journalists, politicians, civil servants, and certain members of the clergy active in education) anxious to see the rural world of Quebec become more receptive to advances in agriculture, and adapt to new modern ideas. Those who advocated modernization did not challenge the moral discourse of the clergy of its commitment to the promotion of the rural world, which they saw as beneficial to society. And the clergy did not reject progress, which underpinned all the great projects (railway construction, industrial enterprises) likely to alleviate the poverty of the rural population and provide it with some wealth. It can thus be understood why a certain agrarian vision and modernist perspective were blended in both discourse and action. The same was true of the Quebec government which, on the one hand, claimed to encourage colonization as a national undertaking and, on the other hand, tried to accelerate the modernization of agriculture for economic reasons.

Conservatism and modernism had bases of support in rural society, principally within the institution of the parish and among the local elites (merchants, notaries, and small business owners, whose group cohesion was strengthened by intermarriage). As was the case earlier, the village was the prevalent site of the reception and diffusion of values. On the one hand, the

parish was strengthened by the establishment of social organizations (schools controlled by priests and nuns, lodges, temperance and other societies, public manifestations of faith) which conferred on the clergy the means for greater social control within the community. On the other hand, the local elites, involved in activities of production and active in various commercial networks, strengthened their constant, if not dominant, presence in the municipal and educational organizations created by the provincial government in the reform movement of the middle of the century. The elites became in large part the architects of improvements in the man-made environment (streets, sidewalks, lighting, water systems, public health facilities), and called for capitalist initiatives to spur general economic development. This behaviour took root in the new attitudes of rural people, as demonstrated by their great sensitivity to the messages of modernity from the city, which were spread by the railway and improved communications. More than before, perhaps, the small village society thus tended to form the centre of the rural world.

CONCLUSION

The arrival of the twentieth century brought other major transformations which affected society as a whole: widespread industrialization, the advance of urbanization throughout the region, and the increased pressure of market forces calling for the greater adaptation of agricultural practices and production. The rural world would then enter a context of more rapid change. The end of a world was coming. The rural way of life, and hence its culture, would gradually be destructured by the combined effect of the transformations in agriculture due to technology and the invasion of city influence and production. The village society would also increasingly become a satellite of the city and hence its role as a centre of the rural world would decline. But one should not look too far ahead: around 1900, everything was still in place, and it would be many years before the direction and true significance of the evolution of a rural world embedded in an industrial and urban universe would be clearly perceived.

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