

Cheminements

Conférences

Douglas McCalla

Department of History, Trent University

CONSUMPTION STORIES:
customer purchases of alcohol at an Upper
Canadian country store in 1808-1809 and 1828-1829

m e n t s

CIEQ

1999

Cheminelements

Conférences

Douglas McCalla

Department of History, Trent University

**CONSUMPTION STORIES:
customer purchases of alcohol at an Upper
Canadian country store in 1808-1809 and 1828-1829**

Cet ouvrage est réalisé grâce au soutien financier
du Fonds FCAR.

Données de catalogage avant publication (Canada)
Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Baker, Alan R. H

L'Union fait la force, aidons-nous les uns les autres : towards a historical geography
of fraternal associations in Loir-et-Cher, France, 1815-1914.

(Cheminevements. Conférences)

ISBN 2-921926-07-5

1. Agriculture - France - Loir-et-Cher - Societies, etc. - History - 19th century.
2. Friendly societies - France - Loir-et-Cher - History - 19th century. 3. Peasantry - France -
Loir-et-Cher - History - 19th century. 4. Country life - France - Loir-et-Cher - History.
I. Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises. II. Title. III. Series.

HD1486.F8B34 1998

630'.6'04453

C98-940520-6

Conception graphique

Charaf El Ghernati, *Université Laval*

Légende de la page couverture

McIntosh Mills, Front of Yonge Township, c. 1870, from
Thad. W. H. Leavitt, *History of Leeds and Grenville Ontario,
from 1749 to 1879 with Illustrations and Biographical
Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers*
(Brockville, 1879); illust. between pp. 112 and 113.

© Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises

Tous droits réservés. Imprimé au Canada.

Dépôt légal (Québec et Canada), 1^{er} trimestre 1999

ISBN 2-921926-12-1

CHEMINEMENTS



Cette collection est une réalisation du Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises. Ouverte à toutes les disciplines, elle réunit les textes des invités de marque du Centre. Elle se veut un hommage aux collègues qui, à l'occasion d'une conférence, d'un séminaire ou d'un atelier scientifique, ont contribué à la vie intellectuelle du Centre.



CONSUMPTION STORIES :

customer purchases of alcohol at an Upper Canadian country store in 1808-1809 and 1828-1829¹

Douglas McCalla

Mill at Delta, Beverley Lake, Bastard Township. Taken Summer 1994



Introduction: Consumption Stories

The creation of the modern world of high mass consumption is a central theme in economic, social, and cultural history. A story that can be studied at many levels and from many disciplinary perspectives, it poses challenging methodological and empirical issues.² Within this large story, historians have found many transitions in consumption, more than a few of which they have proclaimed as revolutions. It has been argued, for example, that an eighteenth century “consumer revolution” was crucial both to the industrial revolution and to the American Revolution.³ Although there are conceptual and empirical reasons to doubt this particular “consumer revolution,” patterns of consumption were nevertheless important; and the effort to understand them takes us deeply into the workings of household economies. Indeed, changes in the allocation of time and resources within the household were a fundamental part of the shaping of developed economies.⁴

Among the early major changes in consumption was the diffusion of demand for the principal groceries: sugar, tea, tobacco, and coffee. Imported to Europe from far away, these commodities, along with cotton, were the staples of an expanding Atlantic, and even global, world of exchange, in which much production came from new, increasingly slave-based, economies. Between 1650 and 1750, all of these new groceries became, for British society, commodities of mass consumption; that is, in Carole Shammas’s useful definition, commodities imported in sufficient volume to be consumed on a daily basis by 25 per cent of the adult population.⁵ As the prices of these commodities fell substantially, their wider diffusion was stimulated. Yet prices alone do not seem to

explain rising consumption of goods that at one time had not been consumed at all. Nor did coffee, tea and tobacco provide calories; they represent choice based on taste.⁶ Alcohol, the subject of this paper, was in most of Europe primarily a domestic product, not an import, and it had direct food value. Still, studies of these imported groceries offer ideas and context for understanding alcohol consumption.

In the history of consumption, just knowing what was consumed and by whom poses challenging research questions. Many kinds of documents, including aggregate trade data, probate records, diaries, art and images, account books, and anecdotal evidence, have been used with sophistication, as have artifacts. Each also has limitations. For example, anecdotes may represent the atypical, not the typical; trade data cannot reveal variations within a society in patterns of consumption; and probate records, which have become the prime source for detailed research in the field, can answer only some kinds of questions. Much of the evidence is also biased to the affluent, powerful, and literate. Among all the sources, retail account books have actually been among the least used, in a systematic way.⁷ Yet they give information directly on individuals, from a much wider social spectrum than other sources. They are of particular value in researching commodities that disappear in consumption, such as groceries, which are visible, both in probate records and as artifacts, only through the utensils associated with them.

The increasingly rich literature on substantive issues and research methods in consumption history has had some impact on Canadian history, but less than might be expected. Canadian social and economic history has focused far more on production and exports than on demand and consumption, which are often taken as given. For the colonial era, despite useful studies of some individual stores based on account books, we have

hardly begun to see the larger contours of the history of consumption in Canada.⁸

Village Stores

My research on consumption is framed by a continuing interest in patterns of exchange in rural Upper Canada and by a desire to see what can be learned about ordinary households from the many sets of village store accounts that survive. My current research program addresses consumption through the purchasing patterns of structured samples of customers, at selected stores and in selected years. By linking buyers to the manuscript census (or, in early years, lists of householders and local tax records), it is possible to associate purchases with household structure, land holdings, location, occupation, and other variables.⁹

Although my data have been gathered from as early as 1808 and as late as 1881, analysis has thus far focused mainly on data from 1861, which was made the base year of the study because of the census and the availability of good records then from five village stores in the two counties I have targeted. In 1861, these stores had many similarities in the goods they sold. At all, a small group of principal customers accounted for a relatively large share of sales to the whole sample. Farmers, the principal occupational group in the samples, tended to be under-represented among the largest accounts, many of which were those of artisans and even labourers, who often bought produce that farmers were more likely to produce for themselves. Some artisans also bought inputs for their own production. Such men sold their products and work within the local economy, sometimes to the store which had extended them credit, but often not. Their prominence in the retail accounts suggests, indeed, that exchange in the country may be better understood in terms of multiple, overlapping networks than as a single, hierarchical merchant-centred one.¹⁰

The latter image is the more usual one for such stores in rural society. It is widely accepted in Canadian history that exchange at the local level was fundamentally unequal, dominated by merchants who possessed local monopolies and used their power over credit to manipulate the terms of exchange to ensure the subordination of ordinary producers to them. Even in the preliminary analysis of my 1861 data, however, only a few customers have been found whose accounts suggest they made most or all of their purchases at a single store.¹¹ Nothing suggests they were weaker or more dependent than other customers. Nor is there evidence that prices for goods purchased by customers varied as stories of manipulation imply. This is not to say that class did not matter, or that

merchants were not powerful in local society. But it already seems clear that central elements of the usual story of unequal exchange are just not true.

Finding that stores did not have monopolies is frustrating for an attempt to use store accounts to get a clear sense of overall consumption patterns of ordinary pioneer farmers. If the accounts are to be useful, in fact, a more nuanced approach to them is required. That is where this paper comes in. Alcohol has been selected for initial analysis because it is the subject of so many stories of pioneer consumption. As there were no sales of alcohol in 1861 by any of the five stores sampled, this is also the first occasion to think about it during the present project.

Consumption Stories about Early Upper Canada

In advice literature, reminiscences, outside observers' descriptions, and other literary sources on Upper Canada, there are many "consumption stories," anecdotes about what people bought, sold, made, and did in pioneer society.¹² In the stories told about life in the settlement era, there are two predominant, and contrasting, images: one of a time of independence and self-sufficiency, of simple abundance and happiness; the other of frontier society as a place of isolation and, often, almost unbearable deprivation.¹³

Of few commodities are there more consumption stories than alcohol.¹⁴ These portray alcohol as both a drug, reflecting the darkness of the frontier, and as part of the life of a colourful, sociable pioneer community. Selected quotations, about British North America and the United States, provide some of the typical stories about alcohol.

"The harsh environment, illiteracy, poor transportation and communication links, the strenuous nature of work, the availability of cheap liquor and the customary use of alcohol for social, recreational, festive and medicinal purposes, all tended to encourage a reliance on booze. Drinking was a regular part of home, work and play."¹⁵

"By almost any standard, Americans drank not only near-universally but in enormous quantities. Their yearly consumption at the time of the Revolution has been estimated at the equivalent of three-and-a-half gallons of pure, two-hundred proof alcohol for each person... After 1790, probably in response to anxieties generated by rapid and unsettling social and economic change, American men began to drink even more. By the late 1820s

their imbibing had risen to an all-time high of almost four gallons per capita."¹⁶

"[I]n British North America nearly every family kept a bottle in the house to 'treat' guests and workmen, and community gatherings witnessed heavy drinking among all levels of society. Liquor was simply considered an absolutely normal accompaniment to whatever men did in groups. Before the late 1820s the only people who worried about heavy drinking were a few New England clergymen... In Upper Canada bush drudgery and high grain yields together produced a society as inebriated as that in Ireland and Britain."¹⁷

"Whisky was often served to the family including the children, at breakfast. For the pioneer confronted with long hours of hard physical labour, alcohol was served as a stimulant; most community efforts such as the building 'bees' were fueled by the ever-present pail of whisky; liquor flowed at wakes and weddings; court cases held in the local inns were often settled with the assistance of the 'ardent spirits'; banquets and dinners were noted for their many toasts. Men of position and even some clergymen were often 'under the influence' towards the end of the day. Drunkenness was not considered a sin unless it significantly interfered with one's duty or occupation..."¹⁸

"[Alcohol] ... was the surest, quickest way for the isolated farmer, the bush worker, and the village claustrophobic to escape his environs. The long hours of manual labour, often alone or in the company of the same small family group, day in and day out, the omnipresent silence when out of doors, the cramped quarters indoors, especially in December, January and February, all dictated that a person sometimes had to hear a fair and inspiring music [sic], conveyed to him by alcohol."¹⁹

In short, alcohol was abundant, cheap, and a normal accompaniment to work and leisure, a part both of daily work routines for many men (and perhaps some women) and of public events such as bees, elections and militia musters. It was consumed at the innumerable pioneer inns and taverns²⁰ and when visitors were received at home. It was often consumed to the point of drunkenness.

A variation on these stories derives from the literature on unequal exchange, in which alcohol was introduced into the lives of hitherto self-reliant people, converting them to new habits and ultimately to dependency.

"For each merchant, rum was an important arm in the struggle with his competitors but, for the merchants as a class, liquor was just as important as a vehicle for making contact with the peasant economy and for expanding their foothold in the precapitalist world of rural French Canada. While Jacobs and the others were flooding the Richelieu in a tide of cheap rum, other Canadian merchants were finding alcohol just as useful in securing a share of the fur trade with the interior Indians, and for similar reasons."²¹

How much was consumed has been variously estimated. A commonly cited estimate is the one given by Larkin, 4 gallons per person per year by the 1820s, although when others use this figure they are not always as clear on the strength of alcohol that is meant. If that rate is for the whole population, as "per person" implies, the consumption of adult males would have been radically larger, given the relative youth of colonial populations and anecdotal evidence that alcohol was more commonly a man's drink. Certainly a higher rate is implied by James Moreira, who suggests that "[in] seaport, garrison, and lumbering towns... a 'moderate' drinker consumed a half pint of rum every day."²² At a rate of about 3 pints per week, annual consumption might amount to close to 20 gallons.

Such stories about alcohol consumption raise many questions. For example, how did any work get done, why did people with limited means waste money on alcohol, and what interest did employers have in plying workers with such substantial quantities of drink? Some of the tales are, in fact, suffused with the moral assumptions of the temperance literature. But is there any other way to learn about pioneers and alcohol? It is premature to say there is, but exploring these issues through retail accounts offers, at least, a different avenue into the question.

Yonge Mills in 1808, 1828

The data for this study derive from two samples of customers of a store at Yonge Mills a short distance inland from the St. Lawrence River in Yonge Township, and about 14 kilometres west of Brockville, an important town in early Upper Canada.²³ (Coincidentally, Upper Canada's first temperance society was organized in 1828 in Bastard Township, which adjoins Yonge to the north.) The mill here had been built before 1806 by Charles Jones (1781-1840), second son of Ephraim Jones, a prominent local Loyalist, originally from Massachusetts.²⁴ When he entered this business, Charles Jones already had a store in Brockville and

was himself becoming a leading figure in the region; later he represented it in the Legislative Assembly (from 1820 to 1828) and he was then appointed to the Legislative Council. The mill was a major commercial establishment that brought much wheat from elsewhere in Upper Canada; as its daybooks and toll records show, the mill was also patronized by local farmers. In the 1830s, and likely sooner, the mill had links with at least two nearby distilleries, which it supplied with mill by-products (called "whisky stuff"), in one case in return for a share of the whisky produced.²⁵

Yonge, just west of the initial Loyalist settlements in Upper Canada, was opened early and by 1808 its population was approaching 1000, according to that year's census; by 1828, its population was close to 1300. Assessors in 1808 counted almost 100 farms with 20 or more acres of land under culture, and it is evident that forests also provided a substantial element of the area's economy. Most houses were, however, built of round logs, the standard house for the first settlement generation.

Data have been gathered on purchases at the store during two 12-month periods, September 1808 to August 1809, and July 1828 to June 1829. In each period, the store had just over 200 customers, of whom about two-thirds can be definitely linked to the contemporary local tax and/or census rolls (Table 1);²⁶ most of those linked resided in Yonge Township, although a few were located in Elizabethtown, the next township to the east. From the linked group, a structured sample of

	1808-9 Sept. to Aug.	1828-9 July to June
Customers	204	218
Linked customers	140 (69%)	143 (66%)
Sample (total)	73	77
linked	48	50
unlinked	23	25
possibly linked	2	2

(note: possible links = name duplications)

about 50 was drawn for each year, to which another group of about 25 was added from the unlinked; the samples include 6 women (4 unlinked) in 1808, and 5 (2 unlinked) in 1828.

Alcohol Sales

In both of the years studied, five kinds of alcohol (brandy, rum, spirits, whisky, and wine) were sold at the store, about the same total quantity of alcohol was purchased by the sample, and the value of alcohol sales equalled just over 14% of total sales (Table 2). Such continuities do not suggest a rise in consumption, such as some tales of the origins of the temperance movement imply. Alcohol sales were recorded in gallons, quarts, and occasionally pints; purchases of more than one quart might be shown either as several quarts or as fractions of gallons. For some analytic purposes it is helpful to keep these units distinct; data on total volumes, however, are presented in quarts. Prices varied during the year, notably in a large swing up and

	1808-1809			1828-1829		
	buyers	volume (qts)	value (sh)	buyers	volume (qts)	value (sh)
brandy	11	31	78	16	28	63
rum	49	534	1130	25	84	104
spirits	30	152	337	1	4	7
whisky	10	66	141	51	675	445
wine, port	8	11	40	8	9	34
total	54	794	1726	56	800	653
total, all sales			12203			4480
% alcohol			14.1%			14.5%

Note: transactions valued at 7/11 are included in values for 1808-9, although volumes for these sales are not known.
5 shillings (Halifax currency) = \$1.00

Table 3

**Monthly Alcohol Sales, Yonge Mills
(quarts, shillings/qt)
(1808-9, 1828-9)**

month	brandy		rum		spirits		whisky		wine	
	qts	s/qt	qts	s/qt	qts	s/qt	qts	s/qt	qts	s/qt
1808-9										
Sept.	14	2.5	150	1.7	4	2.2			3	4.0
Oct.	17	2.5	36	1.8	26	2.3			1	4.0
Nov.			77	2.0	14	2.4				
Dec.			65	2.1	9	2.6				
Jan.			26	2.4	3	3.2			1	4.0
Feb.			42	2.7	3	2.8			1	4.0
Mar.			42	2.7	9	2.9				
Apr.			60	2.7						
May			12	2.7			40	2.0		
June			1	2.8			25	2.3		
July					13	2.0	1	2.3		
Aug.			24	2.0	71	2.0			5	2.5
Total	31		534		152		66		11	
1828-9										
July			10	1.2			109	0.6	1	3.8
Aug.			28	1.3			94	0.6	2	3.8
Sept.	2	2.4	14	1.3			80	0.6	2	3.8
Oct.	3	2.3	2	1.3			17	0.6	2	3.8
Nov.	1	2.4	5	1.3			46	0.6	1	3.8
Dec.	4	2.3	5	1.3			48	0.6		
Jan.	1	2.4	6	1.3	4	1.7	25	0.6	1	3.8
Feb.	1	2.2	4	1.3			45	0.7		
Mar.	3	2.2	7	1.3			42	0.8		
Apr.	9	2.3					19	0.6		
May	4	2.2	1	1.3			119	0.7		
June			2	1.3			31	0.6		
Total	28		84		4		675		9	

Note: columns may not add because of automatic rounding.

down during 1808-9 (Table 3),²⁷ but contrary to many images of country stores, they did not vary by customer, and often not in relation to quantity purchased either. For much of the winter of 1808-9, there was a small discount (about 1.5 d per quart) in the price of gallon lots of rum, but otherwise the price of a gallon was typically four times the price of a quart of whisky or rum at the same time.

Wine and brandy were the most expensive and least frequently purchased products.²⁸ Unlike many products in this period, their prices did not decline much in the interval between years studied (Table

3). "Spirits" were a higher quality rum, as their higher price suggests.²⁹ In the summer of 1809, when there was no price differential, it seems possible that only one (presumably better) quality of rum was stocked. In 1808-9, rum was the principal form of alcohol sold; sales of whisky, despite its lower price, occurred during a period when rum sales had virtually stopped, as if the store was out of stock of the latter. The concentration of brandy sales in less than two months suggests that it was not available after October 1808. By 1828, such inventory considerations seem unlikely to have been a concern, as all products were sold during

much of the year. By then, whisky, a local product, had largely replaced rum as the main form of alcohol sold. In the 20-year interval, both rum and whisky prices had fallen substantially, rum to 1/3 (25 ¢) per quart and whisky to just 7.5 d (12.5 ¢) per quart.³⁰

Almost 75% of the sample made at least one alcohol purchase in each year, but volumes purchased varied widely among customers. At the low end of the range, nine customers in each year bought just one or two quarts. The other extreme was Levi June, who in 1808-9 purchased 57 quarts of rum, spirits, and brandy, worth in total over 107 shillings. The ten largest customers then accounted for half of all alcohol purchases (Table 6). Twenty years later, the single largest purchaser, James Adams, bought 45 quarts, including all five products sold, worth just over 43 shillings; in this year the ten largest buyers accounted for around 40% of alcohol sales.

From data on purchases, it is impossible to know where alcohol was consumed, or by whom (e.g. whether at home or elsewhere, at work or at leisure, alone or with friends). Nor is it possible to know about alcohol purchased at other stores and at taverns. No customer is recorded as buying alcohol in every month of either year, and many purchased other goods in months they bought no alcohol. When not buying here, did they buy elsewhere? Or did they have "dry" periods when they did not drink? Could customers have

afforded to buy all year at the rate they did in peak periods? It is not possible to answer such questions definitively, but close reading of the information on sales can suggest something about patterns of alcohol consumption. From the standard stories, two kinds of retail purchases might be expected.

The first, for bees and collective community activities, should appear as large volume purchases.³¹ In 1808-9, 8 different customers made at least one purchase of 2 or more gallons, Jabish Andrews making the largest one, 6 gallons of whisky on 19 May (Table 4). These transactions were more frequent twenty years later, when a

Table 4

**Alcohol Purchases of 2 or More Gallons
Yonge Mills, 1808-9, 1828-9**

1808-9				1828-9			
Ryan, D.	05-Sept.	rum	2.00 gal	Russe, F.	04-July	whk	2.00 gal
Cronk, P.	08-Sept.	rum	2.00 gal	Webster, W.	08-July	whk	4.00 gal
Seaman, C.	12-Sept.	rum	4.25 gal	Warren, B.	11-July	whk	2.00 gal
June, L.	21-Sept.	rum	2.00 gal	Bradley, S.	19-July	whk	2.50 gal
Cronk, P.	22-Oct.	sp	3.00 gal	Thomson, A.	21-July	whk	2.00 gal
Trickey, G.	03-Nov.	sp	2.00 gal	Guild, H.	29-July	whk	2.00 gal
Seaman, C.	02-Dec.	rum	3.00 gal	Guild, H.	06-Aug.	whk	2.00 gal
Powers, N.	31-Dec.	rum	2.00 gal	Redman, J.	09-Aug.	whk	3.00 gal
Tollman, S.	06-Feb.	rum	2.00 gal	Busea, A.	13-Aug.	whk	2.00 gal
Cronk, P.	17-Apr.	rum	2.50 gal	Trickey, P.	18-Sept.	whk	4.00 gal
Andrews, J.	19-May	whk	6.00 gal	Trickey, P.	18-Sept.	rum	2.75 gal
June, L.	18-Aug.	sp	3.00 gal	Tenant, W.	19-Sept.	whk	2.00 gal
				Bradley, S.	22-Sept.	whk	3.00 gal
				Nail, J.	04-Nov.	whk	4.00 gal
				Mallory, E.	04-Dec.	whk	2.00 gal
				Guild, H.	17-Dec.	whk	2.00 gal
				Griffin, G.	27-Feb.	whk	3.00 gal
				Dewoolf, D.	27-Apr.	whk	2.00 gal
				Purvis, G.	28-Apr.	whk	2.00 gal
				Adams, J.	04-May	whk	2.00 gal
				Adams, J.	04-May	whk	2.00 gal
				Adams, J.	06-May	whk	2.00 gal
				June, J.	09-May	whk	3.50 gal
				Adams, J.	11-May	whk	2.00 gal
				Lathen, L.	12-May	whk	3.00 gal
				Armstrong, C.	29-May	whk	3.00 gal

larger portion of all sales was in gallons; 18 buyers in 1828-9 made at least one purchase of 2 or more gallons, the largest transactions involving Peter Trickey, with 4 gallons of whisky and 2.75 gallons of rum on 18 September 1828, and James Adams, who bought 8 gallons of whisky during one week in May 1829. Such transactions occurred all year, but in 1828-9 with particular frequency in summer months (July-September and May), when outdoor work was likely to be at its peak.³² These data are consistent with a pattern of bees or other large scale social and work events.

The second type of purchase, for daily domestic and work-related consumption, might also appear as occasional large purchases but would be most obvious in frequent buying of smaller amounts. Clearly some men drank frequently and substantially, as can be seen in the transactions of the 10 largest buyers in each year (Table 5). In total,

however, none of these customers bought (from this store at least) anything like the 70 or more quarts implied by a daily rate of a half-pint per day. But 19 of the 20 reached an approximate equivalent, 6 or more quarts in a month, two of them in four different months, five in three months, and nine in two.³³ In 1808-9, for example, Jabish Andrews bought 11 quarts of rum in the 25 days beginning 1 November; the other Andrews (probably his brother) bought 6 quarts of whisky in 12 days in June; Joseph Christmas bought 13 quarts of spirits and rum in 18 days in August; Jeremiah Coughran bought 11 quarts in 22 days between 21 September and 12 October and another 10 quarts in the month after 24 October. Equivalent periods are evident in the accounts of Samuel Tollman, Daniel Patterson, and Henry Plum. In 1828-9, there were similar cases, such as the 7 quarts of whisky bought by A. Thomson in 9 days early in July, followed by another

13 quarts in 11 days in late July and early August. Francis Russe bought 2 gallons of whisky on 4 July, a gallon of rum on 5 July, a quart of whisky just 4 days later, and from time to time thereafter several quarts of whisky in periods of a few days. All of Antoine Busea's 28 quarts of rum and whisky were purchased in less than 4 weeks in July and August. These and other cases certainly tend to confirm the stories of sustained alcohol consumption by at least some people in pioneer society.

On the other hand, and although we must assume that they also made purchases elsewhere, it is at least possible that not even these men drank at the same rate all year. For example, some of them were frequently in the store in periods when they bought little or no alcohol. In 1808-9, Coughran bought three quarts of rum between December and February, but there were transactions on his account on 15 other days in those three months. Russe bought 3 quarts of whisky between November 1828 and February 1829, but there were 18 days in those months when he made other purchases. Busea's account recorded other kinds of purchases in eight of the ten months after the alcohol purchases stopped.

To understand such purchasing patterns, it is useful to pursue information on the buyers themselves, through their overall purchasing and in census and assessment lists (Table 6). Of the 20 principal buyers (10 in each year), 14 can be definitely linked to the census, although some information is lacking for a few. We know that 6 of the largest customers in 1808-9 held land and that only one had as much as 10 acres under cultivation. In 1828-9, 3 were landholders, including one with 10 acres cultivated and another, Peter Trickey, with over 90 acres, one of the largest farms in the township. With the exception of Trickey, tax assessments were modest, ranging in the two years from £5 to £64. The information on household structure does not suggest that principal buyers headed complex households with a number of adult male members.

At the other extreme in the store's alcohol market were customers who bought no alcohol at all (Table 7). In both years those in this group who are known to have held land averaged around 30 acres under culture; such holdings made for substantially higher average tax assessments. Neither average misrepresents the distribution of the group. In fact the evaluations of 6 of the 9 non-purchasers who were assessed in 1808 were higher than any of the 7 principal buyers of alcohol. With the exception of Peter Trickey, the same pattern held in 1828-9. Of the 11 women with their own accounts in the two sample periods, only 2 bought any alcohol.³⁴

Table 5
Alcohol Purchased by 10 Principal Buyers, Yonge Mills
(ranking is by volume, quantity is 1 unless noted; q = quart, g = gallon, p = pint)
panel B, 1828-9

Adams, J.	Brown, J.	Burnham, B.	Busea, A.	Guild, H.	Mallory, E.	Russe, F.	Thomson, A.	Trickey, P.	Warren, B.
30-Aug. wi	q 12-July whk	0.5 ga 02-Aug. whk	ga 21-July rum	0.5 ga 29-July whk	2.0 ga 07-July whk	q 01-July whk	q 03-July whk	q 18-Sept. whk	4.0 ga 11-July whk
26-Nov. rum	q 24-July whk	0.5 ga 04-Aug. whk	0.5 ga 25-July whk	q 06-Aug. whk	2.0 ga 08-July whk	q 04-July whk	2.0 ga 03-July whk	q 18-Sept. rum	2.8 ga 14-Aug. whk
26-Nov. whk	ga 25-Aug. whk	q 14-Aug. whk	0.5 ga 30-July whk	q 20-Aug. rum	0.5 ga 05-Aug. whk	q 05-July rum	ga 05-July whk	q 17-Dec. whk	ga 15-Sept. whk
31-Dec. br	0.5 ga 20-Sept. whk	ga 13-Sept. whk	ga 04-Aug. whk	ga 19-Sept. rum	q 05-Aug. whk	q 09-July whk	q 07-July whk	q 04-Oct. wi	q
09-Jan. sp	ga 17-Oct. whk	0.5 ga 19-Sept. whk	ga 04-Aug. rum	0.5 ga 25-Oct. whk	ga 11-Aug. whk	0.5 ga 15-July whk	q 09-July whk	q TOTAL	31 q 04-Nov. whk
04-May whk	2.0 ga 08-Nov. whk	0.5 ga 26-Dec. br	q 09-Aug. whk	ga 17-Dec. whk	2.0 ga 20-Aug. rum	q 16-July whk	q 09-July whk	q	05-Dec. whk
04-May whk	2.0 ga 11-Nov. brandy	q 20-Jan. wi	q 13-Aug. whk	2.0 ga 23-Aug. rum	0.5 ga 18-July whk	q 11-July whk	q	q	19-Dec. whk
06-May whk	2.0 ga 18-Nov. whk	0.5 ga 18-May whk	0.5 ga 13-Aug. rum	0.5 ga TOTAL	31 q 25-Aug. rum	0.5 ga 23-July whk	q 17-July whk	q	13-Feb. whk
11-May whk	2.0 ga 28-Jan. whk	0.5 ga 24-May br	q 16-Aug. rum	ga 30-Aug. whk	0.5 ga 30-July whk	q 19-July whk	q	q	18-Feb. whk
13-May whk	q 04-Feb. whk	q 27-May whk	0.5 ga 07-Feb. rum	q 30-May whk	q 30-May whk	q 21-July whk	2.0 ga 21-July whk	q	24-Feb. whk
TOTAL	45q 21-Mar. whk	0.5 ga 02-June whk	q	28 q 04-Sept. whk	q 04-Aug. whk	q 23-July whk	q	q	27-Mar. whk
	25-Mar. whk	q 12-June whk	q	13-Oct. br	q 11-Aug. whk	q 28-July whk	q	q	13-May whk
	13-May whk	q 13-June whk	ga	20-Oct. whk	q 12-Aug. whk	q 29-July whk	q	q	TOTAL
	06-June whk	q	q	21-Oct. whk	q 16-Aug. rum	q 30-July whk	q	q	37 q
	27-June whk	0.5 ga TOTAL	30q	04-Dec. whk	2.0 ga 22-Aug. whk	q 30-July whk	q	q	
	TOTAL	27q		17-Jan. whk	q 25-Aug. whk	q 01-Aug. whk	q	q	
				11-Mar. whk	q 06-Sept. whk	q 01-Aug. whk	q	q	
				23-Mar. whk	q 11-Sept. whk	q 04-Aug. whk	ga	ga	
				25-May whk	q 22-Sept. whk	q 05-Aug. whk	q	q	
				TOTAL	18-Oct. whk	q 06-Aug. whk	q	q	
					31q 22-Oct. whk	q 07-Aug. whk	q	q	
					07-Nov. whk	q 11-Aug. whk	q	q	
					13-Dec. whk	q	q	q	
					20-Dec. whk	q TOTAL	33 q		
					10-Mar. whk	q	q		
					12-Mar. whk	q	q		
					TOTAL	37 q			

A further difference between the leading buyers and those who bought no alcohol is in the size of their accounts. Only 4 of the 19 non-purchasers in 1808-9 had an account as large as the value of just the alcohol purchased by the 10th ranked buyer, Caleb Seaman Jr.; and the total of all 19 accounts (714/-) was less than the total account of Peter Cronk alone. In 1828-9, there was some overlap in the range of accounts for the two groups, but accounts for 11 of the 20 who bought no alcohol were still less than the 20 shillings spent on alcohol by the 10th ranked buyer, James Brown; and the accounts of 6 of the 10 leading buyers of alcohol exceeded even the largest of the accounts of the "non-purchasers".

This comparison of extremes suggests a correlation between alcohol purchases and the overall size of an account. If all the larger accounts (taken here as 50/- or more per year in total purchases) are considered together, that pattern holds relatively well in 1808-9 (Figure 1). Only 5 of these accounts, the largest less than 200/-, bought no alcohol, and there is at least a broad tendency for larger accounts to have larger alcohol purchases too.³⁵ Such a pattern is at most imperfectly visible in 1828-9 (Figure 2). At the lower prices prevailing then, a number of accounts under 50/- bought enough alcohol that they need to be represented in a summary graph (the threshold for Figure 2 is 10 quarts of alcohol). Every 1828-9 account over 100/- included some alcohol, but quantities and account sizes are less obviously correlated than 20 years earlier. To the information summarized in these figures, it should be added that many customers' accounts, especially among moderate purchasers of alcohol, have extended periods when no alcohol was among the items debited to accounts.

The apparently negative association between large purchases of alcohol on the one hand and established farming and assessed wealth on the other implies that alcohol was somehow related more to non-farm than to farm work. Such a conclusion would also be consistent with my evidence for 1861 that it was particularly among labourers and artisans that the largest retail accounts were found. An alternative, that farmers made their own alcohol, cannot be ruled out; it is not easy, however, to see economic advantages to such domestic production, when the price of whisky was as low as in the 1820s.³⁶

Table 6									
Principal Alcohol Buyers: Some Details									
(1808-9, 1828-9)									
	link	household men size 16+	land cultiv. acres	total total acres	total assess't value (£)	alcohol vol qts	val (s)	total account (s)	alc/total (%)
1808-9									
Andrews, J.	y	4	2	40	24	43	86	604	14
Andrews, ?	?					31	77	308	25
Christmas, J.	n					31	70	251	28
Coughran, J.	n					40	88	540	16
Cronk, P.	y	5	10	100	64	55	122	874	14
June, L.	y	2	7	100	54	57	108	247	44
Patterson, D.	y	na	-	50	5	37	78	337	23
Plum, H.	y	5	5	100	35	36	79	303	26
Seaman, C. jr.	y	6	7	100	42	35	64	506	13
Tollman, S.	y	5	-	-	18	35	88	687	13
totals						400	860	4657	18
% of totals for store						50%	50%	38%	
1828-9									
Adams, J.	y	5	1		na	45	43	139	31
Brown, J.	y	2	1		6	27	20	55	36
Burnham, B.	y	5	1	10	35	61	30	93	28
Busea, A.	n					28	24	208	12
Guild, H.	y	5	1		-	17	31	74	28
Mallory, E.	y	na	6	40	21	31	25	170	15
Russe, F.	n					37	27	183	15
Thomson, A.	y	3	2		na	33	21	71	30
Trickey, P.	y	8	2	92	200	191	31	60	43
Warren, B.	p*					37	27	106	25
totals						330	260	1159	22
% of totals for store						41%	40%	26%	
* p = duplicated name in census									
na = not available (used selectively)									
- = none									

Table 7		
Customers Buying No Alcohol: Some Details		
Yonge Mills		
(1808-9, 1828-9)		
	1808-9	1828-9
number	19	20
number linked	9	11
number of women	5	4
total debits all accounts	714sh	597sh
largest single debit	158sh	87sh
average assessment	£90	£109
(for those assessed)		
average cultivated acres	29	32
(for those with land)		
20 sh = £1 = \$4.00		

Figure 1

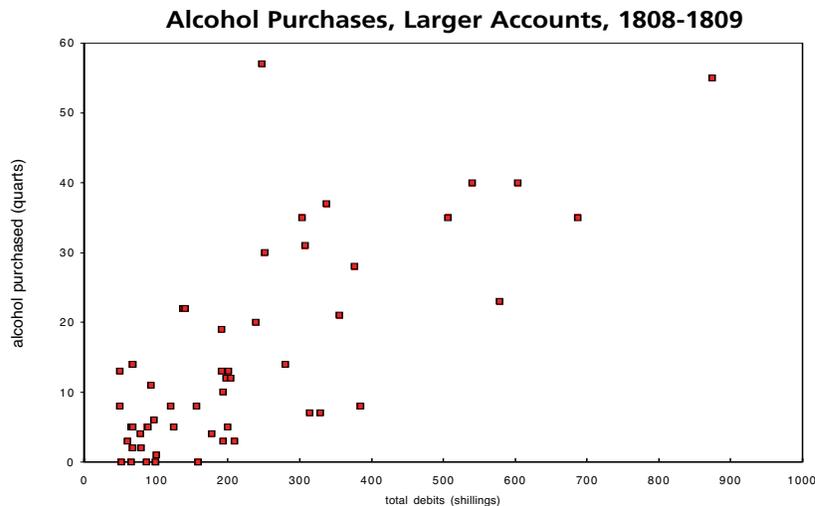
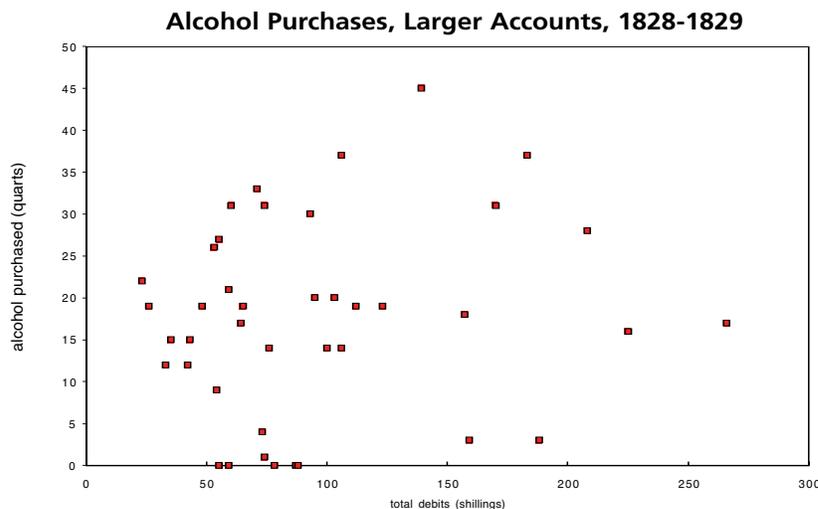


Figure 2



Conclusion

Because the accounts of purchases at one store are unlikely to reveal all of anyone's actual alcohol consumption, conclusions from them have to be tentative.³⁷ In both years, a substantial majority of customers bought alcohol, but they did so in varying quantities. And no one bought the total amount needed to sustain the "moderate" rate of consumption of a half-pint per day over an entire year. The accounts of men such as Busea and Russe in the summer of 1828 look very much like what we would expect from the standard stories of pioneer drinking habits. But not even they purchased alcohol at this rate from this store for more than a brief period. Despite the switch to whisky as the main form of alcohol sold, there was an element of choice in alcohol consumption, evident for example in sales of higher priced spirits in 1808-9 and rum in 1828-9.³⁸

Are the variations among customers significant? I think so. Most importantly, they provide a measure against which to set the anecdotal accounts of pioneer drinking; they invite asking standard economic history questions, how much, by whom, when, at what price? They suggest adding choice, moderate drinking and perhaps even abstinence to our repertoire of consumer stories concerning pioneer alcohol. Here, as also in stores studied in 1861, many of the principal customers were not farmers; whether farmers drank less, or acquired alcohol differently, cannot be known from these data.

At a larger level, we would do well to think of many anecdotes about alcohol in pioneer society essentially as moral stories, not precise descriptions of the everyday life of most Upper Canadians. This is not to deny the tragedies and violence associated with alcohol (or student interest in such tales), just to say that we need to reflect closely on the stories, preferably using evidence from actual lives lived. It is a commentary on our preferred methods of historical research that we so often repeat essentially equivalent stories, when we might instead seek ways to confirm or revise them through other kinds of research. There are many account books in various archives, from a variety of settings; even if they cannot be definitive either, they can give us new and perhaps better consumption stories. From this brief example, is it possible to argue that our whole vision of pioneer alcohol consumption needs revisiting, free of the deep bias that comes from using temperance literature as its principal source?

Notes

- The research for this paper was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks are due to Annette Fox, who gathered the Yonge Mills data, and Laura Zink for their excellent research assistance, and to Robert Sweeny, Rosemary Ommer, and Robert Hong for wise and generous advice on account book research. In this version of the paper, I have sought to respond to some of the many stimulating questions raised when it was presented at the CIEQ Séminaire.
- Consumption and the World of Goods*, John Brewer and Roy Porter eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) is an excellent entry into the issues this story poses.
- See T.H. Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present*, 119 (May 1988), 73-104; and Neil McKendrick, "The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England," in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England* (London: Europa Publications, 1982), 9-33. For a "clothing" revolution, a forerunner of the French Revolution, see Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 503.
- For a recent statement, see Jan De Vries, "The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution," *Journal of Economic History*, 54 (1994), 249-70.
- Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 78
- Some might add addiction here, but even addictions represent an element of choice — both in the initial decision to use a product and in the inability to overcome the addiction.
- See Lorena S. Walsh, "Consumer Behavior, Diet, and the Standard of Living in Late Colonial and Early Antebellum America, 1770-1840," in *American Economic Growth and Standards of Living before the Civil War*, Robert E. Gallman and John Joseph Wallis, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 246-52.
- Some examples of accounts based research include: Claude Desrosiers, "La clientèle d'un marchand général en milieu rural à la fin du XVIII^e siècle: analyse des comportements de consommation" in *Sociétés villageoises et rapports villes-campagnes au Québec et dans la France de l'ouest XVIII^e - XX^e siècles*, sous la direction de François Lebrun et Normand Séguin (Trois-Rivières: Centre de recherche en études québécoises, 1987), 151-8; Elizabeth Mancke, "At the Counter of the General Store: Women and the Economy in Eighteenth-Century Horton, Nova Scotia," in Margaret Conrad, ed., *Intimate Relations: Family and Community in Planter Nova Scotia 1759-1800* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1995), 167-81; Robert C.H. Sweeny with David Bradley and Robert Hong, "Movement, Options and Costs: Indexes as Historical Evidence, a Newfoundland Example," *Acadiensis*, 22 #1 (autumn/automne 1992), 111-21; and Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, 'Give Us Good Measure': *An Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).
- See my "The Needs of Farm Households: Farm Families' Purchases from Two Upper Canadian Stores in 1861," in *Espace et culture/Space and Culture*, Serge Courville et Normand Séguin dirs. (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995), 355-68.
- See my "Retailing in the Countryside: Upper Canadian General Stores in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Business and Economic History*, 26: 2 (Winter 1997), 393-403.
- For another confirmation of this point, see Claude Gélinas, "La traite des fourrures en Haute-Mauricie avant 1831. Concurrence, stratégies commerciales et petits profits," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 51 (1997-8), 404-5, 412-13.
- Such sources and stories are well-represented in *Consuming Passions: Eating and Drinking Traditions in Ontario*, Meribeth Clow et al, eds. (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1990).
- Both can often be found in a single source. See, e.g., Canniff Haight, *Country Life in Canada Fifty Years Ago* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, 1885), 102-3, 225.
- The classic account for Upper Canada is M.A. Garland and J.J. Talman, "Pioneer Drinking Habits and the Rise of the Temperance Agitation in Upper Canada Prior to 1840," in *Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Ontario: Essays Presented to James J. Talman*, F.H. Armstrong, H.A. Stevenson, and J.D. Wilson, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 171-93 [article first published in 1931].
- C. Mark Davis, "Rum and the Law: The Maritime Experience," in *Tempered by Rum: Rum in the History of the Maritime Provinces*, James H. Morrison and James Moreira, eds. (Porters Lake, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1988), 44
- Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 286
- Glenn J. Lockwood, "Temperance in Upper Canada as Ethnic Subterfuge," in *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays*, Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 46.
- Richard D. Merritt, "Early Inns and Taverns: Accommodation, Fellowship, and Good Cheer" in *The Capital Years: Niagara-on-the-Lake, 1792-1796*, Richard Merritt, Nancy Butler, and Michael Power, eds. (Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn, 1991), 206
- Donald Harman Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), 218. Note that the Township of Leeds and Lansdowne, the area focused on by this book, is just to the west of Yonge Township.
- See Margaret McBurney and Mary Byers, *Tavern in the Town: Early Inns and Taverns of Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).
- Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 158-9
- James Moreira, "Rum in the Atlantic Provinces," in *Tempered by Rum*, 22
- AO, Yonge Mills Records, Daybook #3, 1808-9, MU3165; and daybooks for 1828 and 1828-9, MU3171-2.
- Elva Richards McGaughey, "Ephraim Jones," *DCB*, 5 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 456-8; Thomas F. McIlwraith, "Charles Jones," *DCB*, 7 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 452-4; Robert L. Fraser, "Jonas Jones," *Ibid.*, 456-61; J.K. Johnson, *Becoming Prominent: Regional Leadership in Upper Canada, 1791-1841* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 200-1. See also Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 95-6, 99.
- AO, Yonge Mills Records, series J-1, Charles Jones letterbook, 1834-8, MU3187, Jones to Samuel Warner, 2 Jan. 1837; and to William Bacon, 2 Jan. 1837
- Records used here are Census Lists and Assessment Rolls for Elizabethtown and Yonge Townships in 1808, 1809, 1810, 1828, and 1829, in AO, Ms 262, reels 7, 10, 11, and 14.
- This price movement was matched in other prices in the period. See *Planting the Province*, Appendix, Table C.1.
- Whether two kinds of wine were sold is unclear. I have combined entries for port with those for wine; the price was the same for both.
- James Moreira, "Rum in the Atlantic Provinces," 20
- They were not the only commodities whose prices fell so sharply; the price at which the store sold a number of textiles, especially cotton, fell by the same percentage or more. So did the price of nails.
- None of the buyers appear to have been tavern or inn-keepers.
- 6 of 12 were in this period in 1808-9, 20 of 26 in 1828-9; in neither year were there any such transactions in June — or in January, one of the dark months stressed in Akenson's gloomy depiction of the pioneer winter (although it was individual, not collective, gloom that he stressed). On seasonality, see also Table 3.
- Evidently anyone buying 2 gallons or more at a time met this standard; thus to the names listed in Table 5 can be added 3 others in 1808-9 and 11 in 1828-9 from Table 4. In addition, 8 others in 1808-9 and 12 in 1828-9 made purchases of 6 or more quarts in one or two months. That is, 21 of 54 buyers in 1808-9 and 32 of 56 in 1828-9 bought at least 6 quarts in at least one month; only 7 did so in as many as 3 months and none in more than 4.

34. Abigail Comstock bought 6 quarts during the 1808-9 year, and Hannah Whitney bought a single quart of whisky in January 1829.
35. It should be added that only one person with an account under 50/ bought as much as 5 quarts of alcohol in the year; of the 21 such smaller accounts, 14 bought no alcohol.
36. A further alternative, that they traded grain directly with a distillery in return for whisky, needs to be further investigated. In the case of Yonge Mills, it was mainly by-products and inferior grain that went to the nearby distilleries.
37. The likelihood of their buying all year at peak rates of purchase indicated on accounts at this store may also be addressed via close reading of their accounts for other standard commodities and via speculation on prevalent wage rates and other indicators of incomes. For example, if the principal buyers of alcohol tended to have larger total accounts, how realistic is it to imagine that they had equivalent accounts at other stores or had large tavern accounts?
38. Only 6 of 31 1828-9 customers who bought 12 or more quarts of alcohol bought only whisky; these include Warren and Thomson (Table 5-B); 8 bought brandy, rum, and whisky.

Publications du Centre

Cheminements

Mathieu, Jacques, Alain Laberge et Louis Michel, (dir.). *Espaces-temps familiaux au Canada aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*. Avec la participation de Jacinthe Ruel, Isabelle Rodrigue, Claire Gourdeau, Tommy Guénard. Sainte-Foy, CIEQ, 1995, 90 p.

Courville, S. et B. Osborne (dir.), *Histoire mythique et paysage symbolique, Mythical History and Symbolic Landscape, Actes des colloques de Québec et de Kingston*, Sainte-Foy, CIEQ, 1997, 113 p.

Cheminements-Conférences

Baker, Alan R.H., « *L'Union fait la force, aidons-nous les uns les autres* »: *Towards a Historical Geography of Fraternal Associations in Loir-et-Cher (France) 1815-1914*, Sainte-Foy, CIEQ, 1998, 7 p.

McCalla, Douglas, *Consumption Stories: Customer Purchases of Alcohol at an Upper Canadian Country Store in 1808-9 and 1828-9*, Sainte-Foy, CIEQ, 1999, 11 p.

Laboratoire de géographie historique/CIEQ
Faculté des lettres
Université Laval
Sainte-Foy, Québec
Canada G1K 7P4
Tél.: (418) 656-7704
Fax.: (418) 656-3960

Centre d'études québécoises/CIEQ
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
Trois-Rivières, Québec
Canada G9A 5H7
Tél.: (819) 376-5098
Fax.: (819) 376-5179

Courrier: cieq@cieq.ulaval.ca



Douglas McCalla est historien, spécialiste d'histoire économique. Professeur à la Trent University (Peterborough, Ontario), il a signé plusieurs articles et ouvrages sur le XIX^e siècle canadien et ontarien. En avril 1998, il était invité à participer au Séminaire International du Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises, qui associe également l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Placé sous le thème « Perspectives », ce Séminaire a bénéficié de la collaboration des Archives nationales du Québec. Nous sommes heureux de reproduire ici l'exposé du professeur McCalla dans ce numéro de *Cheminements-Conférences*.

