

A Cautious Elite: Toronto's Reluctant Entrance into the Railway Mania of the 1850s

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Article abstract

This paper examines the entrepreneurial strategies of Torontonians. It focuses upon public referenda held in 1850 and 1851 to decide whether to invest municipal funds in railways to Lake Huron and Guelph. Historians who have tried to explain why the citizens rejected the investment in the line to Lake Huron and approved the line to Guelph have limited their analyses to the backers of each project. Toronto's merchants opposed the first subscription but approved the second one. The independently wealthy Tories led the promotion in the spring of 1850 but were in the background in the fall of 1851. The meaning seems inescapable: Torontonians responded positively to the appeal of the merchants who appeared to understand, as the Tories did not, the new options open to a community's development which railways created.

By concentrating only upon individuals, this analysis ignores the persistence of the developmental attitudes of the 1830s and 1840s. The paper is not concerned with how transportation projects were financed, or the numbers of people, wheat, and hogs which passed over them, but with the style and speculation which attended their discussion. It explains the decisions of 1850-1851 by way of a tradition and briefly examines the responses of Chicagoans to the railway frenzy as a sharpening contrast. Faced with many of the same challenges and possibilities as were the people of Chicago, Torontonians responded with far less confidence and unity. Their own beliefs and values, not those of a Hamilton or a Montreal, were hurdles for the citizens of Toronto. Exuberance over railway schemes only gradually displaced prudent attitudes of the 1830s and 1840s.

A Cautious Elite: Toronto's Reluctant Entrance into the Railway Mania of the 1850s

William A. White

Résumé/Abstract

Cet article examine les stratégies d'entreprise des Torontois. Il est entré sur les référendums organisés en 1850 et en 1851 pour décider si la ville investirait des fonds municipaux pour construire des chemins de fer reliant Toronto au lac Huron et à Guelph. Les historiens qui ont essayé d'expliquer pourquoi les Torontois ont refusé le financement de la ligne du lac Huron et approuvé celui de la ligne de Guelph ont limité leur analyse aux promoteurs de chaque projet. Les marchands de la ville se sont opposés à la première souscription, mais ont approuvé la seconde. Les riches Tories ont mené la campagne du printemps 1850, mais sont restés dans l'ombre à l'automne 1851. La conclusion paraît évidente: les Torontois ont répondu à l'appel des marchands qui semblaient comprendre, contrairement aux Tories, les nouvelles possibilités de développement que les chemins de fer offraient à la collectivité.

Concentrée exclusivement sur les personnalités, cette analyse passe sous silence la persistance des attitudes des années 1830 et 1840 face au développement. L'article ne porte pas sur le financement des ouvrages, ni sur le nombre de personnes, de boisseaux de blé ou de porcs qui les empruntaient, mais sur le style de discussion et sur les arguments qu'ils ont suscités. L'auteur y explique les décisions de 1850-1851 en invoquant la tradition et considère brièvement les réactions des gens de Chicago à la fièvre des chemins de fer pour en dégager un contraste révélateur. Mis en présence des mêmes défis et des mêmes possibilités que les habitants de Chicago, les Torontois ont réagi avec beaucoup moins de confiance et d'unité. Pour eux, les obstacles étaient leurs propres convictions et leurs propres valeurs, et non la concurrence de Hamilton ou de Montréal. Face aux chemins de fer, l'enthousiasme n'a supplanté que graduellement la prudence des années 1830 et 1840.

This paper examines the entrepreneurial strategies of Torontonians. It focuses upon public referenda held in 1850 and 1851 to decide whether to invest municipal funds in railways to Lake Huron and Guelph. Historians who have tried to explain why the citizens rejected the investment in the line to Lake Huron and approved the line to Guelph have limited their analyses to the backers of each project. Toronto's merchants opposed the first subscription but approved the second one. The independently wealthy Tories led the promotion in the spring of 1850 but were in the background in the fall of 1851. The meaning seems inescapable: Torontonians responded positively to the appeal of the merchants who appeared to understand, as the Tories did not, the new options open to a community's development which railways created.

By concentrating only upon individuals, this analysis ignores the persistence of the developmental attitudes of the 1830s and 1840s. The paper is not concerned with how transportation projects were financed, or the numbers of people, wheat, and hogs which passed over them, but with the style and speculation which attended their discussion. It explains the decisions of 1850-1851 by way of a tradition and briefly examines the responses of Chicagoans to the railway frenzy as a sharpening contrast. Faced with many of the same challenges and possibilities as were the people of Chicago, Torontonians responded with far less confidence and unity. Their own beliefs and values, not those of a Hamilton or a Montreal, were hurdles for the citizens of Toronto. Exuberance over railway schemes only gradually displaced prudent attitudes of the 1830s and 1840s.

In June of 1850 Torontonians voted in a referendum to allow the city to subscribe £100,000 of stock in a company that proposed to build a railway to Lake Huron. The citizens turned the subscription down by a three to one margin. In November 1851, however, they seemingly reversed their stand and approved by an even larger margin an investment of £100,000 in the Toronto and Guelph Railroad Company. Historians who have tried to explain these two votes have limited their explanations to an analysis of the backers of each project. They have noted that Toronto's merchants, individually and through the Board of Trade, opposed the first subscription but approved the second one. The independently wealthy Tories, on the other hand, led the promotion in the spring of 1850 but were in the background in the fall of 1851. The meaning seems inescapable: Torontonians responded positively to the appeal of the merchants who appeared to understand, as the Tories did not, the new options open to a community's development that railways created.¹

By concentrating only upon individuals, this analysis ignores the persistence of the developmental attitudes of the 1830s and 1840s. Those who argued against investing in the road to Lake Huron and in favour of the line to Guelph repeated the convictions that engineer Thomas Roy had written in 1837. Most Torontonians in 1850 accepted Roy's argument that a line through an unsettled territory could not succeed. They could accept a municipal investment in a line to Guelph because it connected two established communities and passed through a well-populated and fertile area.

This paper is not so concerned with how transportation projects were financed or the number of people, wheat, and hogs that passed over them, but with the style of speculation that attended their discussion. It will explain the decisions of 1850-1851 by way of a tradition and will briefly examine the responses of Chicagoans to the railroad frenzy as a sharpening contrast. Faced with many of the same challenges and possibilities

as were the people of Chicago, Torontonians responded with far less confidence and unity. Their own beliefs and values, not those of a Hamilton or a Montreal, were hurdles for the citizens of Toronto. Exuberance over railway schemes only gradually displaced their prudent attitude of the 1830s and 1840s. Possessing little confidence in their ability to finance lines or in the capacity of railways to create wealth, Torontonians had to overcome earlier prejudices. An ambivalence over the value of railways resulted as they saw other communities trusting such projects to accomplish miracles. An earlier cautiousness had become so ingrained that Torontonians could not do likewise.

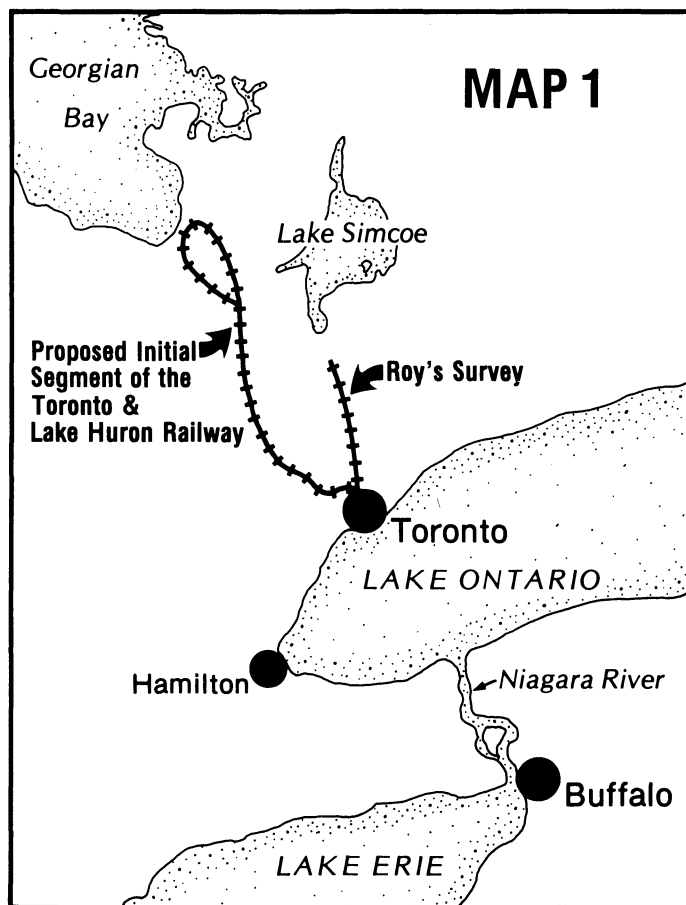
I

Though attempts to organize a railway company did not take place until 1837, Torontonians had considered a line as early as 1832. In July of that year, the *Courier of Upper Canada* noted local gossip about a railway survey from Toronto to Lake Simcoe. It called for the gossip to become a reality in order to test the feasibility of such a line.² For two years its proposal languished, but a meeting of people who lived near Lake Simcoe sparked the interest of Torontonians who quickly followed with one of their own. A Canadian engineer named Thomas Roy surveyed the route in 1834, but the company was not incorporated until April 20, 1836. The act of incorporation required the company to sell £50,000 of stock before it could begin operations and revealed that Torontonians had broadened their original conception: the line would bypass Simcoe and run directly to Lake Huron to the northwest.³

Toronto's merchants actively backed the railway. James Newbigging, a partner of one of the largest mercantile houses in Toronto, served as secretary and treasurer for the project even before the company had received its charter. The evidence available suggests that the merchants whose operations centred in Toronto rather than those who served in branches of Montreal firms led attempts to secure the line. Newbigging, together with George Monroe, Clark Gamble, and George Ridout served as directors of the company, and all headed Toronto firms. Managers of Montreal firms do not appear either as original stockholders or as early directors of the line.⁴ Financial support transcended political loyalties. The Reform Farmers' Bank and the Bank of Upper Canada contributed £100 and £150 respectively in advance subscriptions. The original stockholders included Reformers William O'Grady and James Lesslie and Tories William Henry Boulton and George Strachan.⁵ Although the occupation of "merchant" outnumbered all others among the original stockholders, the list included doctors, lawyers, government clerks, and independently wealthy Tories.⁶

Even this diversified support, however, could not keep the company operating. After raising the required £50,000 early in 1837, the directors calculated that they needed another £80,000 to complete the construction of the line. They opened subscription books in towns throughout Canada and in several states on the Great Lakes. But a depression in that year made full collection of even the original subscription impossible. The directors raised only an additional £2,000 and abandoned the project in 1838.⁷

The Toronto and Lake Huron Railroad Company failed to construct even one mile of track. But the hopes the road had



Two Proposals for the Toronto and Lake Huron Railway Route - 1838

kindled and the arguments over its proposed location provided an insight into the cautious approach Toronto's merchants and wealthy landowners took toward developmental projects. Their scarcity of capital and dependence upon British investments meant that Torontonians in the 1830s and 1840s tended to believe that success came in stages rather than as a consuming whole. In these years most Torontonians did not think a railway running through an unsettled portion of northwestern Upper Canada could make a profit. They believed the Canadian economy had to reach a certain level of maturity before such lines became feasible. Even the directors of the railway admitted it would not bring sudden prosperity to the sparsely populated sections along its route. Instead, they hoped to make a profit by connecting the line, via steamers across Lake Huron, with Michigan and carrying American produce bound for New York.⁸ An examination of what the line meant to its directors and detractors shows that each approached transportation schemes in their own peculiarly prudent manner.

Editors turned to a railway in 1841 as the saviour of Toronto, and as an abstraction it held certain acknowledged qualities. Most Torontonians probably agreed with the generalization made by James Buchanan which appeared in the *Patriot*. The railway, Buchanan contended, had altered the old rules of development by blowing "away all those frigid maxims, which heretofore were safe guides, and where adhered to ... keep a community in a state of death-like inactivity."⁹ Such a statement,

when left in this vague form, must have seemed both attractive and appropriate. Did not American examples, of which Torontonians were constantly reminded, offer all the proof any person might desire? In the abstract they did, but the acceptance of such generalizations could quickly come under closer scrutiny if a fellow citizen was asking for an investment of fifty pounds to help build a railway to Lake Huron. The type of scrutiny most prevalent in Toronto involved location; Torontonians did not believe that all routes promised equal success.

While the arguments over the route by no means caused the line's suspension in 1838, they reflected a prudence about large projects which undoubtedly hindered its financing. During the 1830s not all Torontonians agreed that a line to Lake Huron, designed to carry the trade of the western states in America, was the best one. Undoubtedly Thomas Roy, who was dismissed as the engineer of the company, was attempting to vindicate his choice of a shorter line to Lake Simcoe, yet his arguments against running the road directly to Lake Huron were the same as those brought up by Torontonians in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1837 Roy wrote to Toronto's provincial representative, William Draper, and argued against the new route. The House's approval of £100,000 of provincial credit disturbed Roy because he believed that a railway to Lake Huron would "produce the most fatal effects upon its [provincial] prosperity." He reasoned that "the country along the line of the railway cannot afford traffic enough to maintain one engine passing twice a week...." Roy felt that if Toronto neglected her natural hinterland to the north in favour of the elusive trade of the western states, another port on Lake Ontario would build a railway to the north and become "a destructive rival."¹⁰ Roy did not believe that a railway could create wealth where none existed, and this tenet continued to dominate developmental thought when a group of Toronto citizens tried to revive the railway project in 1844.

With the Rebellion of 1837 and depression behind him, William Allan headed another attempt to build a line to Lake Huron. This time, however, the city's press did not show their old confidence in the project. Suggesting discretion, the editors echoed many of the views of Thomas Roy. Hugh Scobie, editor of the high-Tory *British Colonist*, noted with disappointment the growing railway mania in Canada and denied that Toronto needed a line to Lake Huron. "In our view," Scobie wrote, "a good plank road would, for the present, answer every purpose; it would be accomplished at far less expense than a railroad; and when circumstance afterwards requires it, by the increase of travel and transport, a railroad might be laid along the route in place of the planks."¹¹ Permanent prosperity, Scobie contended, was not based upon ephemeral projects. "Give us good roads," he asserted, "and then we shall witness the prosperity of the Province, not by artificial means, but by the means of our own vast resources...."¹²

The Tory *Patriot* and the Reform *Examiner* agreed with Scobie. Canada was not yet rich enough to support railways. Only after plank roads had increased the country's commerce and population could it afford them. If Torontonians were foolish enough to try to build a railway, advised the *Examiner*, they should construct it through a settled country where it could immediately "command such an abundance of internal and extraneous traffic, as to insure its success."¹³ Since the country west of Toronto was more thickly settled than that to the north-

west, a western route seemed more likely to profit. Absalom Shade wrote to the secretary of the new Toronto and Lake Huron Railroad Company trying to convince the directors that the road should begin westward and pass through his town of Galt. Though the plea was undoubtedly self-serving, Shade would not have presented arguments that had no general ideological validity. He wrote to Secretary O'Brien that "to make a Railroad through the wilderness part of this Country with the expectation that it would pay anything to the Stockholders ... short of 12 to 14 years would be worse than madness."¹⁴

Behind Shade's appeal and the editors' prudence lay two facts which Torontonians considered inescapable. They believed that Upper Canada could afford only one railway line and that outside investment must help build it. They were not altogether mistaken. Already short of capital, Canada's slow progress in completing her canal system hindered proposed rail lines. In the 1840s, when Americans were switching to a multitude of railway programmes, Canadian resources were still being used to finish the canals of the St. Lawrence River system.¹⁵ Aware of such a shortage, Torontonians feared that competing lines from rival towns would cripple each other and make future railways unlikely. They should not provide the British with several alternatives; they had to put forward the route most likely to turn a profit.¹⁶ The Toronto and Lake Huron Company told their agent in London not to denigrate the claims of other lines unjustly but always to correct any false impressions these rivals might spread. He was to use the standard appeal to mercantilism by reminding Londoners that a line from Hamilton to Windsor would not serve the colonial interests nearly as well as one from Toronto to Lake Huron.¹⁷ Such a message reveals that even in the 1840s, Toronto's wealthy Tories, who directed the company, may still have regarded the images of loyalty and colonial welfare as more telling appeals than potential profits.

Even such limited schemes, however, came to nothing. As in the late 1830s, Torontonians again failed to begin construction of a line to Lake Huron. Having given up hope of acquiring sufficient private capital, William Allan wrote to the Governor of the province in April of 1847 and asked either for a provincial loan or for the government to take over the project. Providing that the stockholders were reimbursed and that they might buy the railway at a later date for the government's cost of building it, Allan concluded that "your Memorialists would rejoice to see it undertaken by the government...."¹⁸ His appeal brought neither the loan nor provincial construction.

II

William Allan had despaired of completing a northern railway, but Frederick Capreol had not. Capreol, a British businessman, had come to Canada in 1825 representing the North West Fur Company. He had opened a commercial salesroom in Toronto in 1833 and in the late 1840s he became Toronto's most active railway promoter. On January 2, 1850 Capreol sent a letter to the mayor of Toronto enclosing his proposal of a lottery or a municipal subscription to raise money to build the northern line. He asked the city council for its support and predicted that the railway could raise cities in the Canadian wilderness "where the hum of busy life may in time take the place of the stillness of the forest...."¹⁹

Capreol's suggestion of raising fund through a lottery had

been publicly debated with the Reform editors in opposition. The *Examiner* declined to publish advertisements for the lottery since the editor felt it offered public encouragement for men to gamble away their savings. He wanted no part in a get-rich-quick scheme which would turn husband against wife and break up many Toronto families. The *Examiner* warned the city council not to buy lottery tickets because it would be "a departure from the obvious functions of the municipal office."²⁰ George Brown's *Globe* also opposed the lottery. While Brown admitted that the railway would help Toronto, he did not believe that the town should use such blatantly immoral means in acquiring it. "Lotteries," he wrote, "produced innumerable evils, turning attention from the pursuit of industry to the delusions of gambling with all its pernicious consequences." Brown had no desire to thwart Capreol's efforts on Toronto's behalf, "but let him do it by the legitimate means of subscription for shares," he wrote. Upholding the moral tone associated with the Reform press, the *Globe* called gambling in lotteries as great an evil as drunkenness.²¹

The Tory newspapers did not delve into the sin of holding lotteries and generally supported Capreol. After the city council had agreed upon a referendum for a stock subscription rather than a lottery, they continued to print editorials and letters recommending the investment. In the *Patriot*, Capreol warned Torontonians that their decision would determine their own and their children's prosperity. Oppose the northern railway, his letter asserted, and Torontonians would forfeit the benefits of other public works for many years to come.²² Three days later the *Patriot* continued to defend the expenditure of £100,000 by printing an anonymous letter. The author predicted economic stagnation if Toronto denied itself the means of capturing the trade of the western states. Citizens in other parts of Lake Ontario would build railways connecting their cities with Michigan via Lake Huron.²³ The Tory *British Colonist* also defended the stock subscription and insisted that other towns and counties along the route of the line invest in it.²⁴

The Tory press reflected the position taken by most of Toronto's wealthy landowners. George Allan, H.J. Boulton, Captain J.M. Strachan and the Jarvis, Baldwin, and Robinson families headed the committee which backed the municipal investment. These families had dominated local and provincial politics for over forty years; they had been the objects of George Brown's ire in 1846 when he blamed them for Toronto's lack of internal improvements.²⁵ Now in 1850 Brown was assisted by the very group whose enterprise he had once praised: the merchants.

When it attacked the lottery and subscription, the *Globe* often used mercantile labels, probably to counteract the great influence of the Tory elite upon the people of Toronto. Before the Toronto Board of Trade had even begun to debate the question, the *Globe* printed a letter with a pseudonym that added weight to its author's opinions. Contending that the northern railway could never show a profit, "A Member of the Toronto Board of Trade" opposed the lottery and the directors of the line. The correspondent did not oppose railways as such, but he did oppose "overspeculation, and especially ... Railroad manias" and implied that the northern line typified such overspeculation.²⁶

During the last weeks before the referendum, many merchants in Toronto declared openly against the £100,000 invest-

ment. They circulated a broadside in late May which cast doubt on the profitability and necessity of a railway to Lake Huron. Calling for specific answers on such questions as the route, terminus, estimated costs, probable revenue, and probable increase in city taxes, their open letter left little time for answers and little doubt that the line had not been well planned. Of the fifty-six men who signed this broadside, merchants predominated, though there were also names of the landed gentry, professionals and labourers.²⁷ Merchants in Toronto usually specialized in dry goods, groceries, or hardware. The bulk of dry goods came from Great Britain whereas hardware and grocery dealers depended upon American trade.²⁸ One might expect those merchants engaged in American trade to appreciate railway connections more than dry goods dealers. But of the twenty merchants who signed the broadside, nine were in the hardware or grocery business.

Some merchants, however, favoured the stock subscription, and some of the gentry opposed it. A lineup of the leaders on both sides of the question cannot explain why Torontonians defeated the proposal in the June vote. Torontonians of all classes had overwhelmingly supported and continued to support the Tory gentry in local and provincial political contests, but in 1850 they did not accept the Tories' prescription for economic development. A study of the arguments used by the opponents of the city's investment helps to explain why the citizenry did not accept that prescription. It offers a clearer understanding of the actions of Torontonians in 1850 and 1851 by revealing a persistence in the cautious approach towards internal improvements.

When the Toronto Board of Trade opposed the investment at a meeting held on May 28, its special report repeated the questions raised earlier by the broadside about the financing of the line, expected completion date and the problem of whether "there would be a sufficient amount of traffic ... to pay its working expenses...." Contented with their city's rate of growth, the board feared that a "hazardous speculation ... might weigh down the energies of its inhabitants with an enormous load of debt and taxation for the next twenty years." As if there were no Guarantee Act and Hamiltonians were not already constructing a railway to the west, the report contained developmental shibboleths of prior decades. Though admitting the general desirability of railways, the board concluded that "in a new country like Canada, when capital is scarce, the population small and scattered, the whole country to be reclaimed from a state of nature, good macadamized or plank roads are more suitable to our condition and better adapted for developing the resources of the Country, than railroads."²⁹

In a more colloquial form, a hardware dealer named J. Shepard Ryan had earlier expressed the same opinions as the board in a broadside issue on May 22. Ratepayers of Toronto should vote down the proposed subscription, Ryan argued, since the city had not yet cleaned up the streets or built adequate markets. Why increase taxes, he asked, to build a speculative venture designed to increase the value of the lands of the property class? Finally, Ryan wondered, "Can any one pretend to say that the road will ever answer, or pay six percent per annum? Who is to travel on it, and where is it intended to lead to? (From Toronto to *no place*, that is the only answer.)"³⁰ His insistence that the line would lead to "no place" was frequently mentioned by opponents of the line and provides an explanation of the

town's vote to take £100,000 of stock in another line a year later. A railway from Toronto to Guelph would go "someplace."

Ryan specifically denied, and the Reform editors did so incidentally, that Canada's economic development would parallel that of America. The rapid settlement of wild lands which accompanied the opening of railways in New England would not occur in Canada. The American experience, Ryan claimed, offered Canadians chimeras rather than exact guidelines.³¹ The *Mirror*, a conspicuous champion of railways in the 1840s, questioned the honesty of directors who would run the line "through large blocks of wild land (if it ever reached them), belonging to this Honourable and that Honourable friend and patron of the great Mogul F.C. Capreol..."³² While such a line might conceivably benefit those who held property along its route, it would not repay the citizens of Toronto for their considerable investment. If the local government did help in financing a railway, the *Mirror* continued, the line should run through a populous area which could send trade and travellers to the city. Since the proposed route did not do so, the editor concluded that the citizens should not be taxed to support it.³³

The *Globe* did not rely solely on charges of immorality and letters from local merchants to defeat Capreol's project. In a series of editorials the paper detailed Brown's ideas on internal improvements. These discussions implied that transportation schemes could be pushed too rapidly in a country which was not yet ready for them. A slow accumulation of capital in private hands and subsequent reasoned investment guaranteed a permanent prosperity which railway manias did not. Significantly, when the *Globe* called for an end to internal jealousies and the construction of a rail line, it proposed one which would run from Toronto through the well-established communities of Hamilton and London and terminate at Windsor.³⁴

When Toronto's public officials debated the question of investment in the spring of 1850, many spoke in terms similar to those used by the *Globe* and the various broadsides. At a council meeting held in late April, Alderman Beard opposed the proposed expenditure. He claimed to favour most transportation schemes but said that his study of English railways convinced him that the northern line would lose money. Railways were best suited for settled countries, not new ones. If Toronto needed one, Beard concluded, the city should help construct a line due west which would pass through the province's most prosperous section. Alderman Duggan was so convinced of the northern route's unprofitability that if it were already built and offered for sale, he thought the city should refuse to buy it. Duggan admitted that the citizens of Hamilton, Dundas, and Galt were voting appropriations for their local railways but expected that those in Toronto would vote otherwise because they were not convinced that the northern line would benefit the city.³⁵

As public ward meetings portended the defeat of the investment, the defenders began to hedge on their earlier pronouncements. In the second week of May the editor of the *Patriot* asked the citizens to vote in favour of the subscription because the line would double Toronto's resources within five years. But on May 28 the editor conceded that the benefits of the railway were not as conspicuous as its promoters had claimed. He blamed them for not providing sufficient information on how the line would benefit all of the citizens. In a phrase which epitomized Toron-

to's prudent past, the editor called the railway a "great scientific work" which required thorough explanation.³⁶

Their cautious approach to such projects was, of course, not the only reason why Torontonians voted down the investment on June 11. There was a belief, expressed by Ryan and the *Mirror*, that the Tories promoted the line to increase the value of their land holdings along its route.³⁷ Many objected to the fact that Capreol would receive a twelve per cent commission regardless of whether the railway was ever completed. But a review of subsequent decisions in favour of municipal expenditures on the northern road and on a line to Guelph reveals that when certainties and guarantees had replaced vague promises of what a railway would mean to Toronto, the city's citizens were eager to support rail development.

Deciding to forego a further referendum in November 1850, the city council voted eleven to four in favour of issuing £25,000 in debentures for the northern line. Authorizing the investment only after incorporating stringent requirements, the city agreed to give the company the money in stages: £10,000 for every 100,000 actually spent on building the line. The council also claimed the right to appoint two directors in the company and stipulated that the railway would have to extend its track along the entire length of the city's water lots. Even with these guarantees, Alderman Beard said he would have voted against the debenture bill if it had not required the company to build an engine house in his eastern section of the city. Doubting the lines' potential for realizing a profit, Beard demanded a conspicuous advantage. According to Samuel Thompson, city councilman and editor of the *Patriot*, Beard was not the only man asking for specific guarantees. Thompson maintained that the bill would have lost without the stipulative amendments.³⁸

Torontonians did not get to vote on this subscription, but there was no reported public outrage after the city council had passed the bill. The *Globe* and the Board of Trade both approved its passage, praising the railway in the glowing terms which they had earlier contradicted. The *Globe* foresaw the railway increasing property values in the city while the board stressed the maintenance of Toronto's commercial position and the promotion of "our agricultural interests." Both, however, hinted that they had not entirely succumbed to the railway mania. The board recommended an investment of £25,000 only "when so much of the Railroad shall have been completed as will justify such advance and satisfactory security obtained for the completion of the road." The *Globe* admitted that precedents had shown that railways aided cities, but beyond this it would not go. "Small towns and villages," Brown insisted, "are not benefited by their influence."³⁹

With Toronto's subscription the Northern Railway Company succeeded in raising enough capital to begin construction, for the American contractors, M.C. Storey and Company, had already agreed to take £150,000 of their fee in stock. At 1:00 p.m. on October 15, 1851, a procession for the line's sod-breaking ceremonies began at Toronto's City Hall. It included most of the city's social societies, school children, the press and local officials, each group marching under its own banner. Lady Elgin, the provincial governor's wife, turned the first soil with a silver spade, and with an estimated 15,000 citizens in attendance, Mayor John Bowes spoke of the benefits which the rail-

way would bring to Toronto.⁴⁰ As Bowes assisted Lady Elgin to growing cheers, he may have thought back to a stormy ward meeting almost a year earlier in which he had spoken in favour of the £25,000 debenture bill. Amid much noise and confusion someone had extinguished the lights, and opponents of the bill had taken over the meeting. After Bowes and other friends of the railway had stalked out, those who remained had approved a resolution opposing any increased taxation to invest in the line. The northern railway, they had claimed, might assist the wealthy merchants in Toronto but not the poor shopkeepers.⁴¹ Bowes must have wondered whether the current applause or the year-old ward meeting reflected the prevailing mood of the citizenry, for the city council had recently accepted a resolution calling for another public referendum. This time the voters would decide whether or not the city would purchase £100,000 of stock in the Toronto and Guelph Railway Company.

The Guelph *Advertiser* had suggested the construction of a railway between Guelph and Toronto in the late 1840s. Viewing the project as totally outside his town's control, the editor had urged Toronto's capitalists to build a macadamized road if they could not raise enough money for a railway. Until 1851 the *Advertiser* had spoken of this link as desirable but not necessary. But with a rival town, Galt, attempting to make rail connections with Hamilton, the leaders of Guelph changed their minds. One of these men, John Smith, admitted the change in a letter to the *Advertiser*. "I have long been under the impression that it was necessary that something should be done for the prosperity of the place," he wrote, "but my ideas scarcely extended as far as Toronto."⁴² Smith now suggested that the Guelph city council invest £20,000 in a proposed railway to Toronto, a decision which the council decided to place before the voters as a referendum. Admitting that such a large stock purchase would result in heavy taxes for several years, the editor of the *Advertiser* told the citizens of Guelph that they really had no choice. "The railroad must be made," he claimed, "[I]n a commercial sense, it is a question of life and death."⁴³ On December 18, 1851 he proudly announced that 112 persons had voted for the subscription and six had voted against it.

Nearly one month earlier the citizens of Toronto had approved an investment of £100,000 in the railway to Guelph by a vote of 781 to 170. During the months which preceded this referendum, there was no recurrence of the contentious pamphleteering which had taken place in the spring of 1850. When the city council discussed aiding the line to Guelph, Alderman Beard spoke in favour of the grant. He acknowledged that he had led the opposition to the investment in the northern line, but he claimed that he had always favoured a line to Guelph because it would pass through an extremely prosperous district. Councilman Carr regretted that the city could not annul its grant to the Northern Railway and transfer the funds to the Toronto and Guelph Company. He, too, had always favoured this line "for he knew the country to be wealthy, and one of the best wheat growing districts in the Province."⁴⁴ Both Councilmen McLean and Prince who had voted in August against the issuance of another £35,000 in debentures for the Northern Railway spoke for the subscription in the western route. The son of Chief Justice John Beverly Robinson, Alderman John Robinson, Jr., perhaps had the failures of his father's friends in mind when he told his fellow councilmen that Toronto should copy the American example of cities financing the railways which private citizens could not.⁴⁵

Publishing arguments similar to those used in Guelph, Toronto editors recorded no opposition to the investment. Reform and Tory newspapers attempted to educate the public about a competitive struggle that they may have overlooked. The railway to Guelph could not be judged in isolation but rather as a part of a struggle between Hamilton and Toronto. Prodding the city to take stock in the line, the *Globe* gently reminded citizens that "it opens up a splendid field for trade, almost every penny of which now goes to Hamilton...."⁴⁶ In sketching a brief history of the commerce of Canada West, the *Examiner* began with the observation that Hamilton and Toronto presently vied for her western trade. Hitherto, this was impossible because farmers west of Hamilton would never think of hauling their produce to Toronto. With railways displacing wagons, however, such geographical spheres were no longer impregnable. "This competition," the *Examiner* observed, "could not commence before the railway era, on which Western Canada is just entering, nor can it be longer delayed after this period."⁴⁷

Those Toronto conservatives, who could not abide the liberal politics of the *Globe* and the *Examiner* and restricted their daily reading to the Tory press, found the same developmental arguments in an even more laconic form. Samuel Thompson's *Patriot* did not bother to give a history of Canadian commerce; it simply equated the railway to Guelph with Toronto's future prosperity. If Toronto's citizens voted down the stock subscription, their city would lose the western trade to Hamilton and never recapture it.⁴⁸

The voters of Toronto approved the subscription and committed their city to a future based on transportation projects. In April 1852 with two railways from Toronto under construction and more being proposed, George Brown asked his fellow citizens and people throughout Canada West not to lose their faith in what these lines could accomplish. Canada West, he asserted, had to move with the rest of the world; it could not afford to lag behind.⁴⁹ Contemporary observers of Toronto in the 1850s concluded that it had moved with its American counterparts. In 1855 the *Globe* reprinted an article describing a Kingstonian's travels through the province. After visiting London, Hamilton and Toronto, he proclaimed that Toronto was truly the great metropolis of Canada.⁵⁰

Historians and geographers who have written about Toronto's growth in the nineteenth century have agreed with the Kingstonian. During the 1850s Toronto became the hub of the provincial railway system; her property values more than doubled between 1850 and 1856.⁵¹ The city's population increased from slightly over 30,000 in 1850 to 44,821 in 1861 even though she did not capture that elusive trade of the western states. As a commercial centre, Robert Russel wrote in 1857, Toronto was "merely the exporter of the produce of the district that lies betwixt [Lake] Ontario and Lake Simcoe...."⁵² One indication of her economic dominance of this section was the decline of the milling industries, taverns, and hotels along Yonge Street in North York. Many of that village's small industries relocated in Toronto probably to be nearer the railway terminals, and while Toronto's population steadily increased, that of North York declined.⁵³

But the railways which helped make Toronto a commercial metropolis also produced frustrations. They brought with them an American habit of using statistics as a way of comparing and

ranking cities. Torontonians were never entirely possessed by this logic which equated population and trade figures with the status of a city. For them, railways were tools, but these tools gradually assumed an aura of necessity and slowly altered the meaning of being a Torontonian.⁵⁴

III

Recent studies of social mobility have been criticized for their author's assumption that such mobility was a constant desire.⁵⁵ Those who focus upon entrepreneurial decisions must also not assume that businessmen sought similar investment returns for themselves or their communities.⁵⁶ Books by Blumin, Katz, and Tulchinsky on Kingston, New York; Hamilton, and Montreal demonstrate the varied responses of leaders in planning the commercial futures of their cities.⁵⁷ To understand why certain transportation or industrial projects succeeded or failed, it is necessary to analyse (as was suggested during the 1977 Canadian Urban History Conference) both the "actors" and the "arena,"⁵⁸ to examine what citizens wanted their communities to become, and the continual influence of historical perception in determining future growth.

When faced with the implication of an expanding rail network, businessmen in Chicago saw only specific hurdles in the form of competing towns. Worried by the threat of St. Louis and Joliet, Chicagoans never questioned the ability of a line to make money, nor were its economic leaders divided along the lines of Torontonians. At a railway convention held in Rockford, Illinois in 1846, delegates from ten counties in northern Illinois passed resolutions calling for western investments and appointed a committee of seven to forward the project. Reflecting their town's leadership of the scheme, four of the seven com-

mitteemen were from Chicago. When easterners refused to finance a line west to Galena, Illinois (echoing Toronto's argument against the line to Lake Huron), it was a small group of Chicagoans who gathered enough subscriptions throughout Illinois and Wisconsin to begin construction of the road in the spring of 1848.⁵⁹ One of those promoters, William Ogden, complained about a shortage of private investors and banking facilities and concluded that "our only way to get it (capital) is to operate in that which is yet unproductive and to develop it and make it useful and profit by it."⁶⁰ Ogden was not referring specifically to the railway to Galena, but his leadership of that project reflected his belief that wealth could be created.

Starting with divergent sets of values, the elites of Chicago and Toronto did not devise identical techniques to build their cities. More importantly, they would never have agreed about the purposes or possibilities of community growth. To say that one vision was Canadian and the other uniquely American, however, is risky. Only a study of reactions to a myriad of problems could demonstrate the possible validity of this categorization. The most obvious comparative context is that one set of men made decisions in Canada while another group did so in the United States. More important, perhaps, was the social setting within which the decisions were made – a setting related to nationality but not altogether determined by it. A frantic quest for growth did not characterize all American towns nor was caution a constant throughout Canada. With stable, recognized leadership, Natchez, Mississippi and St. Louis, Missouri displayed a quiescence similar to that of Toronto, while the elite of Hamilton, Ontario were notorious for their aggressive economic policies.⁶¹ Decisions made in Chicago and Toronto placed different definitions upon success and failure, but they were rooted more in the history and social structure of the community than in a particular national style.⁶²

NOTES

1. For this interpretation see J.M.S. Careless, *The Union of the Canada: The Growth of National Institutions, 1841-1867* (Toronto, 1967), pp.139-158; D.C. Masters, *The Rise of Toronto, 1850-1890* (Toronto, 1947), pp.20-27, 64-76; and B.D. Dyster, "Toronto, 1840-1860: Making It In A British Protestant Town," Ph.D.Thesis (University of Toronto, 1970), pp.299-307. See also Douglas McCalla, "The Commercial Politics of the Toronto Board of Trade, 1850-1860," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 50 (March, 1969), pp. 51-68.
2. *Courier of Upper Canada*, July 18, 1832.
3. Frederick H. Armstrong, "Toronto's First Railway Venture, 1834-1838," *Ontario History*, Vol. 58 (March, 1966), pp.21-41.
4. For a list of original stockholders and directors see the *Patriot*, August 16, 1836 and September 21, 1838. For their commercial affiliations see Edith Firth, ed., *The Town of York, 1815-1834* (Toronto, 1966), pp.75-76.
5. Armstrong, "Toronto's First Railway Venture," pp.22, 29.
6. *Patriot*, August 16, 1836; *Toronto Directory* (1837).
7. Armstrong, "Toronto's First Railway Venture," pp.36-41.
8. Archives of Ontario, Toronto and Lake Huron Railroad Company *Letterbook*, 1845-1846, no. 45, September 22, 1845, Secretary to businessmen in Oswego, pp.34-35.
9. *Patriot*, September 9, 1836.
10. Archives of Ontario, Toronto City Council Papers, Thomas Roy to W.H. Draper, February 23, 1837.
11. *British Colonist*, February 21, 1845.
12. *Ibid.*, May 20, 1845.
13. *Examiner*, January 27, 1847. See also *Patriot*, December 10, 1844.
14. Toronto Public Library, City of Toronto Railway Papers, William Allan Papers, Absalom Shade to Edward O'Brien, January 22, 1847, hereafter referred to as Allan Papers - CTRP.
15. W.T. Easterbrook and Hugh G.J. Aitken, *Canadian Economic History*, (Toronto, 1958), p.294.
16. *British Colonist*, August 19, 1845; *Examiner*, January 27, 1847; *Patriot*, January 22, 1847.
17. Toronto and Lake Huron Railway Company *Letterbook*, 1845-1846, Secretary to F. Widder, October 27, 1845, no. 56, pp.48-51.
18. Allan Papers - CTRP., April 13, 1847.
19. Archives of Ontario, Toronto City Council Papers, F.C. Capreol to Mayor, January 2, 1850..
20. *Examiner*, January 16, 1849. See also *Examiner*, January 10, 1849.
21. *Globe*, December 30, 1848.
22. *Daily Patriot*, April 16, 1850.
23. *Ibid.*, April 19, 1850.
24. *British Colonist*, January 29, April 30, May 31, 1850.
25. In January 1846 Brown wrote: "We have long been accustomed to *think* that *the few* rich men must carry out every great enterprise and to find out nothing is done. Let us resolve to *try the many* businessmen, and we doubt not the experiment will show very different results." *Globe*, January 2, 1846; emphasis in original.
26. *Globe*, January 31, 1850.
27. See Toronto Public Library, Small Broadside Collection Toronto, Simcoe and Huron Railroad - 1850. By matching the names on this broadside with occupations in the 1850 Toronto directory, one finds: 10 - unknown, 10 - professionals, 5 - labourers, 6 - manufacturers, 5 - gentry, 20 - merchants.
28. Dyster, "Toronto," p.250.
29. Public Archives of Canada, Toronto Board of Trade Records, *Council Minute Book*, May 38, 1850.
30. T.P.L., Small Broadside Collection, J. Shepard Ryan to Ratepayers, May 22, 1850; emphasis in original.

31. *Ibid.*
32. *Mirror*, May 31, 1850.
33. *Ibid.*, September 20, 1850. This was to counteract renewed talk of a municipal stock subscription.
34. *Globe*, February 7, March 19, 1850.
35. Corporation Proceedings given in *Daily Patriot*, May 1, 17, 1850. See also *Ibid.*, September 11, 1850.
36. *Ibid.*, May 28, 1850; emphasis in original. See also *Ibid.*, May 9, 13, 17, 1850.
37. There was little hint that individual Toronto Tories would profit but rather that the Tory-dominated Canada Company would benefit from the construction. Each Torontonian who voted on the subscription had to list his assessed property valuation. The average valuation of those voting in favour was £eighty-eight and of those in opposition was £forty-eight. For list of votes and assessments see *Daily Patriot*, June 12, 1850.
38. *Daily Patriot*, November 26, 27, 28, 1850.
39. *Globe*, September 14, 1850; P.A.C., Board of Trade Records, *Council Minute Book*, November 22, 1850.
40. *North American*, October 17, 1851; Russell D. Smith, "The Northern Railway: Its Origins and Construction, 1834-1855," *Ontario History*, Vol. 48 (Winter, 1956), pp. 24-36.
41. *Globe*, September 10, 1850; *Daily Patriot*, September 10, 1850.
42. *Advertiser*, June 26, 1851. See also *Ibid.*, September 3, 1847, February 25, 1848, June 5, 1851.
43. *Ibid.*, December 11, 1851.
44. See Corporation Proceedings *Daily Patriot*, July 9, 1851.
45. *Ibid.*, August 20, October 8, 10, November 12, 18, 1851.
46. *Globe*, October 2, 1851.
47. *Examiner*, October 8, 1851. See also *Globe*, November 27, 1851.
48. *Daily Patriot*, November 12, 1851.
49. *Globe*, April 20, 1852.
50. *Daily Globe*, November 30, 1855.
51. Careless, *Union of the Canadas*, p. 144.
52. Masters, *Rise of Toronto*, p. 56.
53. H.J.A. Reitsma, "North York: The Development of a Suburb," M.A. Thesis (University of Toronto, 1962).
54. William A. White, "Chicago and Toronto: A Comparative Study in Early Growth," Ph.D. Thesis (Northwestern University, 1974), pp. 112-161.
55. See James A. Henretta, "The Study of Social Mobility: Ideological Assumptions and Conceptual Bias," *Labour History*, Vol. 18 (Spring, 1977), pp. 165-178.
56. One of the best examples of the value of the comparative approach is Julius Rubin, *Canal or Railroad? - Imitation and Innovation in the Response to the Erie Canal in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston* (Philadelphia, 1961).
57. Stuart A. Blumin, *The Urban Threshold: Growth and Change in a Nineteenth-Century American Community* (Chicago, 1976); Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1975); Gerald Tulchinsky, *The River Barons: Montreal Businessmen and the Growth of Industry and Transportation*, (Toronto, 1976).
58. David Knight and John Taylor, "Canada's Urban Past: A Report on the Canadian Urban History Conference," *Urban History Review*, No. 2-77 (October, 1977), pp. 72-86.
59. *Chicago Daily Journal*, October 23, November 6, December 5, 1845, January 12, 15, 1846; Bessie Pierce, *A History of Chicago*, Vol. I, (Chicago, 1937), pp. 114-118.
60. Chicago Historical Society, Ogden Letterbooks III, William Ogden to Captain Swift, November 20, 1846. More complete treatment of this attitude is in White, "Chicago and Toronto: A Comparative Study of Early Growth."
61. See D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge, 1968); Wyatt Belcher, *The Economic Rivalry Between St. Louis and Chicago, 1850-1880*, (New York, 1947); D.A. Phelan, "Boosterism in St. Louis, 1810-1860," Ph.D. Thesis, (St. Louis University, 1970); and Katz, *The People of Hamilton*.
62. The author is presently working on an article which will place entrepreneurial decisions made in a variety of American and Canadian cities within the context of differing rates of modernization.