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# Equitable Claims and Future Considerations: Road Building and Colonization in Early Ontario, 1850–1890

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### Résumé de l'article

Dans les années 1850, les députés du Canada-Ouest ont lancé un projet visant à coloniser de vastes terres en friches connues sous le nom d'Ottawa-Huron Tract. Le gouvernement a encouragé le repeuplement en construisant un réseau de chemins de colonisation et en octroyant des terres gratuitement le long des routes. Dans la région inexploitée, où la topographie défiait la logique du réseau, le tracé et l'entretien des chemins étaient cruciaux, non seulement pour des raisons pratiques, mais aussi pour la survie. En analysant le processus par lequel les colons et le gouvernement ont négocié les modalités des projets de construction des chemins, le présent article révèle une culture démocratique locale émergente dans laquelle la frustration à l'égard de la bureaucratie avait souvent plus d'importance pour la formation d'une collectivité que le statut social, la religion ou l'origine ethnique. Dans une série de lettres et de pétitions envoyées au service responsable des chemins de colonisation de 1863 à 1888, les résidents de Brudenell (Ontario) ont proposé une vision du repeuplement dans laquelle l'État jouerait un rôle de soutien plutôt qu'un rôle déterminant. Même si l'échec de l'agriculture commerciale intensive sur le bouclier précambrien a déjà fait couler beaucoup d'encre, le présent article fait ressortir les façons dont les colons ont réussi à constituer des collectivités et, parfois, à canaliser les ressources gouvernementales vers des initiatives locales.

# Equitable Claims and Future Considerations: Road Building and Colonization in Early Ontario, 1850–1890\*

DEREK MURRAY

## *Abstract*

*In the 1850s, the government of Canada West initiated a project to colonize a vast “waste land” known as the Ottawa-Huron Tract. Resettlement was encouraged through the building of a network of colonization roads and the offer of free grant lots along the roads. In the backwoods, where topography defied the logic of the grid, the placement and maintenance of roads was crucial, not only for convenience, but for survival. Analysing the process whereby settlers and the state negotiated road construction projects, this article reveals an emerging local democratic culture in which frustration with bureaucracy often meant more to community formation than did social status, religion, or ethnicity. In a series of letters and petitions sent to the colonization roads administration from 1863 to 1888, residents of Brudenell, Ontario, articulated a vision of resettlement in which the state played a supporting rather than determining role. While much has been written about the failure of intensive commercial agriculture on the Precambrian Shield, settlers succeeded in building communities and, sometimes, in channelling government resources toward local initiatives.*

## *Résumé*

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## Introduction

In the 1850s, the government of Canada West initiated a project to colonize a vast “waste land” known as the Ottawa-Huron Tract.<sup>1</sup> Resettlement was encouraged through the building of a network of colonization roads and the offer of free grant lots along the roads.<sup>2</sup> The Minister of Agriculture predicted that the region was “capable of sustaining a population of some eight millions of people.”<sup>3</sup> The project was deemed a failure by contemporary observers and historians alike because of the region’s apparently inhospitable climate and thin, unyielding soils.<sup>4</sup> Many continue to view the project as a misguided attempt to transform the wilderness of the Canadian Shield into an agricultural hinterland.<sup>5</sup> Recent work by John C. Walsh re-examines the colonization of the Ottawa-Huron Tract not as a failed settlement scheme, but as an important episode in early Canadian state formation — a massive and influential experiment in liberal governance.<sup>6</sup> As Douglas McCalla has shown for the rest of Upper Canada, the main goal of most settlers was not the production of wheat for export, but the establishment of independent family

farms.<sup>7</sup> Rather than blindly follow the dictates of colonization boosters, settlers carefully assessed the landscape and articulated their own vision of the colonization process, one that did not always align with the plans of politicians and bureaucrats.

A key element in this vision was the development of local infrastructure: roads, in particular, were essential to initial resettlement and to the long-term success of local communities. Though officials in the Bureau of Agriculture and the Department of Crown Lands took the lead in implementing the colonization roads scheme, settlers played an active role in its articulation. In the backwoods of Upper Canada, where topography defied the logic of the grid, the placement and maintenance of roads was crucial, not only for convenience, but for the settlers' very survival. Analysing the process whereby settlers and the state negotiated road construction projects, this article reveals an emerging democratic culture in which frustration with bureaucracy often mattered more to community formation than did social status, religion, or ethnicity. While a number of scholars have considered the larger social, political, and economic contexts of colonization roads, this study seeks to reinterpret colonization from a local perspective, an approach that has long been the proprietary domain of local amateur historians.

In a series of letters and petitions sent to the colonization roads administration from 1863 to 1888, local residents articulated a vision of colonization in which the state played a supporting rather than determining role. Settlers drew upon a democratic culture originating in early modern England and adapted to the Canadian frontier;<sup>8</sup> their petitions channelled the energies of local residents, and they furnish us with a means of assessing the views of so-called "ordinary" Canadians in the past. Below, I outline how the state envisioned the colonization of the Ottawa-Huron Tract and how local settlers responded to that vision with their own. This process was not a wholly top-down imposition of settler space upon the landscape by the state. Rather, while the state attempted to redefine the landscape as a controllable, governable space, colonization was a lived experience — a negotiated process in which government agents, local residents, and the land played significant roles.

The colonization of the Ottawa-Huron Tract was the first truly

“Canadian” colonization project, undertaken by Canadian authorities and with Canadian objectives in mind. It is often overlooked as such. Rather than being directed by the Colonial Office in London, the project was undertaken by officials in Canada and was intended as a nation-building project that would allow Canada to compete with other world powers. In his intellectual history of expansionism, Doug Owram shows how Canada in the second half of the nineteenth century was shaped by the idea of bringing a vast northern hinterland under Central Canadian authority.<sup>9</sup> More recently, A. A. den Otter shows how Victorian-Canadian colonists worked rhetorically to transform Rupert’s Land from an inhospitable northern waste into a region fit for agricultural cultivation.<sup>10</sup> Yet, even before embarking on the colonization of Rupert’s Land, Canadian officials experimented with a civilizing mission closer to home. This critical moment in the development of the colonial-bureaucratic state in Canada was an important step in the rhetorical work of transforming the West into a field for colonization. It furnished the state with practical technologies of rule, allowing it to plan the colonization of Rupert’s Land, while helping to bridge the gap, physically and psychologically, between Central Canada and the West.<sup>11</sup>

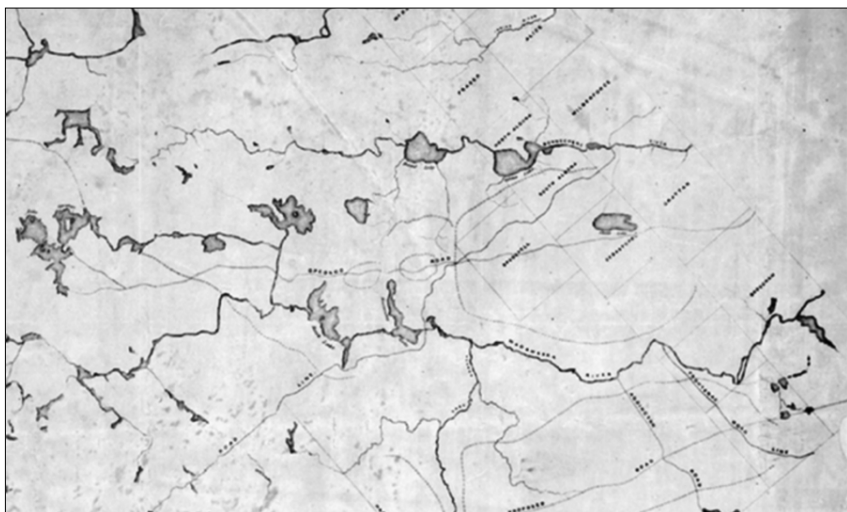
In the early 1850s, the Ottawa-Huron Tract (top-centre in Map 1) was represented on maps as an empty space, waiting to be filled. Though of course it was not empty, the government focused its efforts on facilitating the movement of settlers onto the land. This article focuses on the Upper Ottawa Valley, or Renfrew County: in general, the southeastern section of the Ottawa-Huron Tract within the Bonnechere and Madawaska River watersheds, where much of the state’s effort was concentrated (see Map 2).<sup>12</sup> In outlining the state’s plan for the Ottawa-Huron Tract, I refer to surveyors’ reports and diaries, emigrant pamphlets and settler guides, private correspondence among civil servants in the Bureau of Agriculture and the Department of Crown Lands, and the reports and observations of the agents and inspectors who were on the front lines of the colonization roads project. Resettlement was as much a bureaucratic process as it was physical; it depended on management by bureaucrats, who in turn archived a wealth of documentation recording the process as they saw it.



Map 1

Source: Thomas, Cowperthwait, Co., "Canada West, Formerly Upper Canada," 1851, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), H3/400/1850 (rev 1851) copy 1, NMC 119071. Detail.

Crown Lands' agents operated offices "in the field" and consulted local informants, but the grunt work of resettlement was done by settlers, in this case, the residents of Brudenell, a township officially surveyed in 1857 and resettled by migrants of Irish, Polish, English, French-Canadian, and Prussian descent. Most of these settlers had already resided in Canada for years before relocating to Brudenell. Records of their perspectives are not as plentiful as those of the state, but there is enough to make a convincing case about their vision for the local landscape. This evidence comes primarily from the Municipal Council minute books (1864–1878) and from letters and petitions sent to the colonization roads branch in roughly the same period. Unfortunately, letters, petitions, and council minutes did not usually record the intimate thoughts and desires of settlers. These documents were written with a practical and prag-



**Map 2:** Detail of a section of a government map of the Ottawa-Huron Tract showing the Bonnechere and Madawaska rivers and colonization roads in 1857. Source: Crown Lands Office, “Map of the Ottawa and Huron Territory,” 1857, LAC, H1/400/1857, NMC 11257.

matic purpose in mind — the maintenance and improvement of a way of life. Statistics from tax assessments and censuses add socioeconomic layers to the discussion where necessary.

Land and landscape represent a more muddled constellation of meanings, but together they formed an indispensable element in the project of agricultural colonization. Land was acted upon, but it also acted and reacted,<sup>13</sup> and in so doing caused settlers and the state to rethink their methods and motivations — and perhaps also their madness, for this could be a maddening landscape. The local landscape in Brudenell, as in other local contexts, was shaped by forces of nature, by dictates of the state, by the actions of settlers, and by the reactions of the land itself. As scholars of rural history have noted, control over access to and use of land was an important factor in shaping power relationships in nineteenth-century Canada.<sup>14</sup> Surveyors mapped and categorized, settlers cleared trees and drained swamps, built roads, and erected homes, barns, and fences, and the land changed and resisted — it was, to use Cole Harris’ phrase, a reluctant land.<sup>15</sup> The Ottawa-Huron Tract was, and is, a rugged

landscape, situated on the southern fringe of the Canadian Shield. The very ruggedness of the terrain frustrated attempts to impose the grid that characterized longer-settled parts of the province.

The scope of this study is local in nature, since people's relationships with land are fundamentally shaped by their specific and intimate local contexts. I begin by considering the character of the landscape when the state first initiated its colonization project in the 1850s. I highlight the relationship between people and land, noting the increasing importance of roads in this period. Next, I outline the vision of the state for colonization at a regional level and the place of Brudenell within that vision. Narrowing the focus from region to locality reveals the importance of specific interactions among bureaucrats, settlers, and the land. Third, I trace the process of road building from a local perspective. I use the negotiation of road construction as a lens through which to understand the processes of colonization and resettlement in general.

## Surveying the Landscape

When the state decided to "open" the Ottawa-Huron Tract for resettlement, officials were not working with a *terra nullius*. Before the colonization roads project was implemented, human beings had been living and working in the Upper Ottawa Valley for at least a thousand years.<sup>16</sup> Before the epidemics of the mid-seventeenth century, the area was home to both Iroquois and Algonquin, with the Madawaska River being an important and contested east-west conduit of the fur trade.<sup>17</sup> In the early nineteenth century, Algonquin-speaking peoples practised a form of market-oriented agriculture in the region along the Madawaska River, mostly serving local timber shanties.<sup>18</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, a local economy based on forestry, hunting and trapping, and subsistence agriculture had developed in the Upper Ottawa Valley. The presence of merchants, lumbermen, teamsters, and farm families foreshadowed the adaptation to a new form of social organization in the region centred on permanent, as opposed to seasonal, habitation and on roads and railways, as opposed to lakes and rivers, as primary modes of transportation.



Former Hudson's Bay Company factor Charles Thomas ran a trading post at Golden Lake, about 80 kilometres west of the Ottawa River and about 30 kilometres northeast of Brudenell. In his journal from 1850 to 1852, Thomas recorded numerous observations about weather conditions, activities on his farm, his family and business, and his recurring bowel complaints. Thomas' journal provides us with some insights into the relationship between natives and newcomers, while also highlighting the slow transition from Aboriginal to European — or Canadian — ways of knowing and behaving in the Ottawa Valley. Though Thomas was not himself an agent of the state, he was an agent of colonization — his meteorological observations, his records of economic transactions, and his descriptions of primary economic practices (lumbering and agriculture) were part of a shift toward the accelerated exploitation of natural resources and the expansion of a settler population.

The development of a local and regional transportation system figured key in Thomas' worldview. His winter entries were peppered with references to teams of horses and men taking supplies into the bush, while in the spring he noted the frequency of timber rafts coming down the river and across the lake. For example, on 10 November 1851, Thomas hosted a surveying party. The next day he noted that "Canoe Navigation [was] closed for the Shanty men."<sup>19</sup> In the second year of his journal, references to local Algonquin became more scarce, while commercial transactions and the activities of surveyors and shantymen increased in prominence. During the winter of 1851–1852, teams running supplies to the shanties routinely stopped in at "Charley's Hope." The constant traffic caused Thomas to remark on Christmas Day: "No visitors, consequently Peace and quietness."<sup>20</sup> By the end of April the ice had become untrustworthy, and only a few weeks later Thomas noted the first timber rafts of the season. The state of local roads by the middle of spring was deplorable. On 11 March 1852, several teamsters passed through and declared the roads toward the Opeongo country to be completely impassable.<sup>21</sup> Several days later, another teamster pronounced the road to Bark Lake to be impassable for teams, and he was forced to travel some 60 kilometres by foot. Though most of those passing through were men working in the forests, in the fall of

1852 Thomas noted a number of families making their way into the interior.<sup>22</sup> Settlers followed the timber frontier in the early 1850s, producing crops for the shanty market while also establishing a presence in the very townships that would be officially opened a few years later.

Organized or state-directed resettlement did not begin in earnest until surveys of roads and townships were completed later in the 1850s. The survey of the line for the Ottawa and Opeongo Road was conducted by Provincial Land Surveyor (PLS) Robert Bell and his assistant Hamlet Burritt in 1851–1852, while the survey of Brudenell Township was undertaken by PLS H. O. Wood in 1857. Burritt's survey diary, along with Thomas' journal, provides a link between the world of the fur trade, lumbermen, and squatters to the world of the "actual" settlers. Between 1851 and 1857, daily life in the region changed considerably. However, it was not a clean break; those who came as part of the colonization project were not ignorant of the landscape they entered. Their contacts included immigration and settlement agents, but they were also in communication with lumbermen, with the first settlers (or squatters), and with traders and merchants like Thomas.

Hamlet Burritt's diaries (1851–1852) record his observations on the landscape, his daily activities on the survey, his relationship with colleagues, and his interactions with locals, both Indigenous and otherwise. In the early summer of 1851, Burritt and his crew reached Lake Clear (about midway between Golden Lake and Brudenell), where there was a road and a settlement. He remarked: "Lake Clear is as fine a lake as I ever saw ... the water is as green and clear as can be — on one side it is all hardwood ... it is very high ... but of a very good soil."<sup>23</sup> Burritt's comments about Lake Clear foreshadowed those of later observers who, though they deplored the potential of the land for agriculture, appreciated its "natural" beauty. Burritt routinely hired canoes and bought moccasins and other goods from local Algonquin, while hiring local farmers and lumbermen to provide labour and furnish the crew with supplies: "Sent two men out to Lake Clear for provisions and one to Byers farm. Five men away ... This morning men arrived from Lake Clear and also from Byers farm. An Indian came to camp to sell moccasins."<sup>24</sup>

Farms such as that run by Byers, as well as other lumbermen like John Egan, were important in establishing the potential of the region for farming. While in many places the land was unsuited to crops like wheat, it was suitable for the growing of oats, potatoes, and hay and provided ample land for pasture. Burritt recorded his own impressions of the local landscape, as in these passages from September 1851:

Took a walk up on the farm which is on the side hill and extends up towards the top. There is a fine view from the farm. The country (and we can't see a great way) is all hardwood nearly rough and spotted with high round pinacles topped with green timber and (from experience) I should judge rocky ... We are camped by the side of a fine large creek, the same creek that ran past our last camp. We are in low swampy country, but we can see hardwood ahead.<sup>25</sup>

Burritt described a varied landscape, from hardwood and decent soils, to stands of red and white pine timber with sandy soils, to ridges and hills, swamps, creeks, rivers, and lakes. Burritt's descriptions were part of the assessment and categorization of the land that provided a foundation for the bureaucratic management of the landscape.

Numerous surveyors and explorers were involved in mapping and assessing the Ottawa-Huron Tract as a potential field of colonization. Data were accumulated by the Commissioner of Crown Lands, the Provincial Geological Survey, and the Bureau of Agriculture. The findings of the surveyors were not always entirely positive, but they offered enough evidence of agricultural potential that the Bureau was eager to bring in settlers to fill this "empty" space. In referring to the colonization roads in the eastern part of the Ottawa-Huron Tract in 1856, the Minister of Agriculture wrote: "There are, of course, in such a large extent of country as that referred to, great varieties in the character and quality of land — some lots being much superior to others; but there is an abundance of the very best land for farming purposes."<sup>26</sup> The production and accumulation of knowledge about the landscape and its potential for

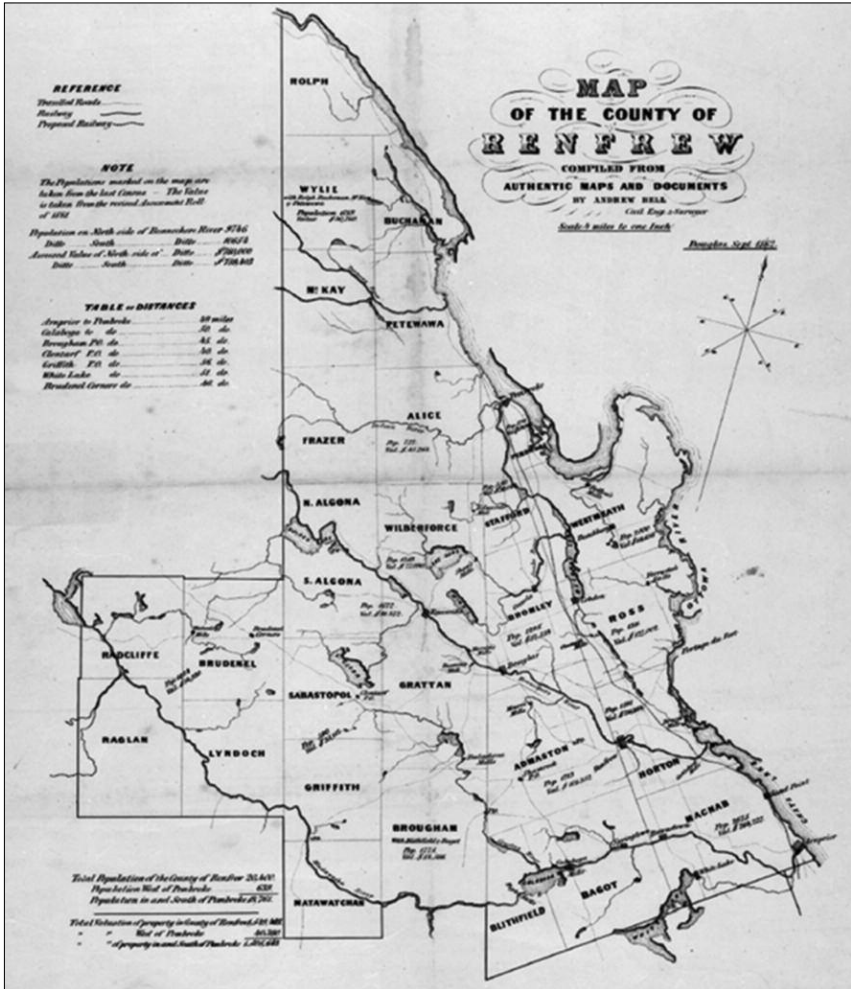
agriculture furnished the state with the confidence to open the Ottawa-Huron Tract for settlement by laying out townships and building colonization roads.

### **Colonization Roads and Resettlement in the Upper Ottawa Valley**

In the middle of the nineteenth century, when the state re-imagined the potential of the Upper Ottawa Valley for agricultural colonization, the relationship between the state and local populations changed significantly. Local Indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their claim to the land and were either dispersed to other parts of their traditional territory or confined to a small reserve at the eastern edge of Golden Lake in the vicinity of Thomas' trading post. In either case, their rights were articulated quite differently from the settler population, and they were officially excluded from the resettlement project. There is currently a treaty in negotiation covering much of the land area of the historical Ottawa-Huron region. During the resettlement process, however, while free land grants were given to settlers, local Algonquin petitioned the state for their own lands and were rejected. A reserve was established at Golden Lake in 1873.<sup>27</sup> With the attempted imposition of colonial authority over the Ottawa-Huron Tract, settlers were identified (as we will see) as a distinct class with a particular task. Indigenous participation in local affairs was marginalized with the waning of the fur trade and the increased emphasis on agricultural settlement.

Emigration boosters like the *Canadian News* released advertisements, especially in England and northern Europe, extolling the virtues of the Province of Canada as a field for emigration. They described the country as "the 'land of hope,' not only for the capitalist who has money at his command, but also for the person of limited means, and still more for those who possess no other resource than labour, whether skilled or unskilled."<sup>28</sup> They were not necessarily looking for the tired, poor, huddling masses, but they in theory opened the door to those who were willing to work to be part of a new society. In its own publications, the recently created Bureau of Agriculture (1852) drew on the same allusion to Canada as the "land

of hope,” attributed to a French observer attending the Paris Exhibition in 1855. In an 1862 pamphlet, the Bureau advertised the opening of “...seven great lines of road in Upper Canada,” with free grants of “lands of excellent quality, and well adapted in respect of soil and climate, to all the purposes of husbandry.”<sup>29</sup> By this time,



Map 3:

Source: W.C. Chewett & Co., "Map of the County of Renfrew Compiled from Authentic Maps and Documents by Andrew Bell Civil Eng. & Surveyor, Douglas, Sept. 1862," 1862, LAC, H2/420/Renfrew/1862, NMC 22310. Detail.

the colonization roads project was already well underway. Foremost among these roads was the Ottawa and Opeongo Colonization Road — commonly abbreviated as Opeongo Road, or Opeongo Line — which was eventually supposed to connect settlements along the Ottawa River with Lake Huron, thus extending the farm frontier well into the northern part of the province.

Internal correspondence within the colonization roads administration reveals an emphasis on the Opeongo as the focal point of settlement efforts in the Ottawa-Huron Tract in the early 1850s. William Hutton, secretary of the Bureau of Agriculture, promoter of immigration, and chief administrator of the colonization roads project, was aware of the importance of the Opeongo. In a private letter to Hutton, dated Christmas Eve, 1855, A. J. Russell, a Crown timber agent in Bytown and one of Hutton's primary informants, urged that emphasis on the Opeongo Road would have the greatest "effect toward settling the largest interior country now vacant in the Province."<sup>30</sup> In a letter to Vankoughnet the following October, Russell again urged that improvement of the Opeongo Road would bring essential access to "the greater part of the large block of country suitable for settlement lying between the rivers Bonnechere and Madawaska and which is connected with the great interior region favorable for settlement by another large fertile tract lying on the south side of the Madawaska."<sup>31</sup> The Opeongo Road was clearly an important part of the bureaucratic vision of the colonization roads project.

T. P. French, the Crown Lands agent in charge of settlement on the Opeongo, envisioned it as a place where all "industrious" and "honorable" settlers could thrive. In an 1857 pamphlet for intending settlers, French advertised, "The best possible feeling prevails among the Settlers, and no kindness that any one of them can render is ever denied to the stranger, no matter from what country he hails, or at what altar he kneels."<sup>32</sup> French's pamphlet, published early in the settlement process and distributed throughout Europe by the Bureau of Agriculture, focused primarily on the practicalities of emigrating from England, but he also saw fit to outline his impressions of the culture he envisioned emerging:

Liberty, in the most extended sense of that soul-stirring word, prevails in Canada. We have here a happy and har-

monious blending of the best parts of the Monarchal and Republican forms of Government, and all who know aught of our institutions and laws must admit that the Constitution under which it is the proud privilege of Canadians to live will contrast favourably with that of any country in the world.<sup>33</sup>

French was directly responsible for placing settlers on the land and ensuring that they followed the “rules” of colonization. Settlers were required to take possession of their land within a month of being issued a location ticket. Within four years they needed to bring at least 12 acres under cultivation, build a house, and reside on the lot.<sup>34</sup> French’s letters and reports reveal both the “progress” of colonization as well as the ways the bureaucratic state kept track of its subjects. For example, on 10 January 1859, French submitted his report on the previous year, “giving the names of the locatees, and such other information as will in my opinion enable you [Vankoughnet] to form a correct estimate of the many advantages which have accrued to this portion of the country from the opening of this road and the adoption of the free grant system upon it.”<sup>35</sup> While French’s reports allowed the state to keep track of settlers, they also provide some perspective on the lives of the earliest colonists.

In his official report for 1859, French made specific remarks about Brudenell. Within two years of being officially opened, the township boasted a store, “to supply the temporal wants of the settlers,” a post office, a Catholic church, and several taverns, “where travellers can be tolerably well accommodated.”<sup>36</sup> There was no mill at the time, but one was under construction, and, since Brudenell had not yet been officially incorporated as a municipality, there was at that time no council, nor schools, nor any municipal officers (such as pathmasters or fence viewers, for example). French was hopeful for the future of the township: “The land in Brudenell is, I believe, fully as good as any to be found in Canada, and from the number and intelligence of those by whom it is now peopled, I am satisfied that the system of farming will soon be improved, and that it will rank as one of the most productive and prosperous Townships in the Province.”<sup>37</sup> Satisfied with the industriousness of the settlers, French

also noted the integral role of the Opeongo Road in allowing lumbermen access to the region and, conversely, allowing locals access to regional markets in Renfrew and Ottawa in the opposite direction. Of course, French knew that the advancement of his career in the public service would be hastened by the success of his agency on the Opeongo Road. An ambitious bureaucrat, French wrote to John A. Macdonald in 1861 asking for a higher appointment.<sup>38</sup> Despite the clouds of his ambition, the descriptive aspects of French's reports are helpful in reconstructing the local circumstances of resettlement in Brudenell in the 1850s. French's assessment of Brudenell can also be compared with the first detailed survey conducted by PLS H. O. Wood, the Crown Lands' inspection reports of 1863, and the experiences of the settlers themselves.

In his 1857 survey of Brudenell, Wood reported in detail on the quality of the land, from certain concessions down to specific lots. Wood's assessment was much less ambitious than that of the colonization agent French, likely because he was much less invested in the success of settlement. In excerpts from his survey notes, published in the 1861 report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wood described parts of the township as fit for settlement, while other parts he described as swampy, uneven, and rocky, with poor quality soils. The northeastern section was "in general arable," with the lots north of the Opeongo Road "nearly all fit for cultivation."<sup>39</sup> In contrast, the southwestern portion of the township was "very uneven and broken ... the soil is of poor quality; timber chiefly red and white pine on ridges, and small cedar and tamarack in swamps."<sup>40</sup> Wood's classification of the landscape was updated in the 1970s by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, whose 1975 report categorized 50,370 of Brudenell's 55,490 acres (roughly 91 percent) as unsuitable for agriculture.<sup>41</sup> These classifications have since been read by scholars to mean that agriculture in Brudenell was impossible.<sup>42</sup> However, it is questionable whether one can extend soil classifications from the 1970s back over 100 years to the nineteenth century since the landscape undoubtedly changed over time. Rather than relying on modern assessments, we need to imagine the landscape from the perspective of those who encountered it in their own time.

A hand-drawn version of Wood's 1857 survey map shows that



settlers already occupied by that time most of the arable lands described in his report, though no names are listed on the Opeongo Road free grant lots (not because they were unoccupied, but because of limited space on the map).<sup>43</sup> These early settlers tended to be relatively successful; of the 63 names listed on the map, 49 can be linked forward to the 1871 Census. Thirty-nine of those are exact matches of name and location, while the others are matches in name only; either they moved within the township, or they were originally mislabelled. In 1863, 106 of 158 lots on the Opeongo Road in Brudenell were occupied by settlers, most of whom had been there since 1855, before the rest of the township was surveyed. Inspection reports for these occupied lots indicate that their quality ranged from “[h]illy and broken, large boulders and rocks, inferior land” to “[r]ich, sandy soils.”<sup>44</sup> The Opeongo Road was important to the settlement of the first lots in Brudenell, but by 1857 there were almost as many lots occupied in the rear of the township, and by 1863 there were more families located away from the Opeongo Road than on it. In 1871, only 34 of 126 farm families were located on the Opeongo.<sup>45</sup> The importance of local roads should therefore not be underestimated. While the Colonization Roads branch determined the route of the Opeongo Road, the location of local side roads had much to do with the interest and initiative of local residents.

### **Negotiating Governable Spaces-in-the-Making**

In this context we begin to witness the negotiation of local space among settlers and the state, with the land itself playing a key role. Coming from a perspective influenced by the social theory of Nikolas Rose, amongst others, Walsh examined the colonization roads as governable “spaces-in-the-making,” which “would become central to producing the region’s material landscapes.”<sup>46</sup> In addition to being governable spaces, the colonization roads and their local offshoots were also lived spaces. Exchanges between state agents, settlers, and the landscape that appear in official records provide valuable evidence of local community processes. While it is important that we acknowledge that these records have been represented in a particular way as part of a deliberately constructed colonial

archive,<sup>47</sup> we should not ignore this opportunity to study the lives and behaviours of the majority of people affected by the colonization roads project — the settlers. There is a middle ground between replicating the perspective of the colonial archive and seeing it only as a social construction of the colonial élite.

A. A. den Otter argues that “most mid-nineteenth-century British North Americans disliked, and sometimes feared, their natural surroundings and that they transformed that distrust into a confident management philosophy, which they called civilizing.”<sup>48</sup> Yet, although settler families may (or may not) have had liberal civilizing ideals in mind when they set out, their objectives in daily life were usually much more practical, such as the twin goals of immediate survival and generational persistence.<sup>49</sup> In attempting to meet these goals, local residents sometimes diverged from the path set out for them by the state, much to the distress of the bureaucrat-managers of the colonization roads project. For example, in a private letter from A. J. Russell to William Hutton, Russell expressed considerable frustration over a petition from Irish Catholic free grant settlers on the Opeongo Road; he deemed them to be neglecting their statute labour responsibilities and protesting government policies, while English Protestants, who had paid for their land in the rear of the township, went about their business as a more “respectable” class of immigrants. According to Russell, the purpose of the petition was twofold:

First, a dishonest attempt on the part of the Irish Catholic settlers on the road who got their land free to get rid of the obligation to keep it in repair, which the English Protestant settlers who have to pay for their lands and make roads for themselves for miles back in the rear would have been glad to have had the opportunity of doing. Second, a design to get the road business under Irish Catholic management entirely and particularly to get rid of my overseer David Bremner who has been making himself so serviceable in directing and conducting in emigrants in this and the previous season (including a very respectable class of English Protestants) that Mr. Clemow the Emigrant Agent at Ottawa insists that he is much more use to him in securing

the location of settlers (immigrants) than Mr. French.<sup>50</sup>  
(Emphasis in original)

As Walsh also points out, Russell saw these Irish Catholics as “bad citizens” and as an impediment to progress.<sup>51</sup> Russell ignored two important circumstances: First, the English Protestant settlers chose their lands away from the road for a reason — water power. Second, though Russell may have perceived such divisions between Irish Catholics and English Protestants on the Opeongo Road, a series of letters and petitions from the 1860s and 1870s reveals that not only Irish Catholics were upset with management of the colonization roads, nor were grievances necessarily organized along ethnic or religious lines. As we will see below, in Brudenell, Catholic and Protestant settlers actually joined in significant numbers to request funds for road construction and to protest what seemed to them to be poor or ill-informed decisions by the administration.

While the state claimed a monopoly on official knowledge — and consequently on the power to decide on matters important to local affairs — locals protested, offering their own visions for the built landscape. In an 1863 letter to David Gibson, superintendent of colonization roads in Canada West, John S. J. Watson, Reeve of Brudenell Township, expressed his disapproval with the government’s handling of road construction in his municipality:

Dear Sir, I [recently] learned some facts which lead me to the conclusion that the Road now making from the Snake Bridge on the Madawaska to this Township is another piece of jobbery. Of three brothers named Perry, the one is the surveyor, another the contractor, and the third the inspector of said road. If this be true, then the government on the Reform ticket should be ashamed of themselves ... The surveyor and company seem bent on taking the benefit of the settlers work and charging the government for the same as done by themselves.<sup>52</sup>

Gibson, himself an avid Reformer, rejected Watson’s claims on the grounds that they were not supported by facts, despite Watson’s acute knowledge of the local landscape.<sup>53</sup> Watson had been living

there for six years, was reeve of the township at its incorporation, and was involved in almost every aspect of the local economy — as landowner, merchant, and mill owner. This episode encapsulates the politics of settlement in this part of the province through the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Settlers were understandably interested in road development. Sometimes they took it upon themselves to build and maintain bush roads, they worked on road crews for wages, and they put in statute labour doing local roadwork. They also sent numerous letters and petitions to the Crown Lands Department expressing their concerns over the plans of the department and the allocation of funds. They knew that funds were available for roads and were eager to see those funds expended on local projects. The 1853 Public Lands Act established an “Improvement Fund” to build and improve roads in settled areas of the province and a “Colonization Fund” for new roads in unsettled areas.<sup>54</sup> Residents of Brudenell attempted to tap into each of these funds for their own purposes. Watson’s 1863 letter to Gibson indicates that he was eager to defend his own interests and those of his community, and he would not shy away from accusing agents of the state of engaging in corrupt practices in making his case. The next year, Watson, acting in his capacity as reeve, sent another letter to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, suggesting changes in the way the Opeongo Road was to be repaired.<sup>55</sup> Even if the changes were not eventually made (we do not know for sure when or if they were), Andrew Russell agreed to send out an inspector to report on the situation.

Once the colonization roads were “completed,” the state divested itself of responsibility and turned over maintenance of the roads to settlers. Completion meant that the initial work of clearing and laying out the road was finished; it did not necessarily mean the road was in a navigable state. These decisions about the fitness of roads for travel did not always reflect the assessments of inspectors or the desires of local residents. In his report of 1861, road inspector J. W. Bridgland noted that the Opeongo Road from Lake Clear westward passed through rough terrain and, though well-travelled, was in a state of severe disrepair: “The road cannot be in this part at all favourably spoken of. Rolling hills and rough from the Clear Lake

throughout nearly the whole distance, badly bridged in places, and chequered with frequent bad mud holes and rocky patches. The bridges are much broken in places, short and uneven.”<sup>56</sup> Bridgland was, however, impressed with the improvements made by the Brudenell settlers, noting “a good many really fine new farms relieve the monotony of hard travelling.”<sup>57</sup> Though much of the Opeongo Road was hard travelling, Bridgland noted that, in Brudenell, “an important amount of Statute labour [had] been done”<sup>58</sup> and argued that additional funds should be expended on improving the road. This recommendation contradicted a directive from Gibson of the previous year that it was “the duty of the settlers to keep the road when made in efficient repair, and if it has got into the state represented, they ought to be compelled to attend to it and to put it into a proper state.”<sup>59</sup> A report from overseer S. O. McGuin in 1865 suggests that the road was not actually finished, despite previous claims:

I found that there are 25 causeways promiscuously scattered along the whole 37 miles of road which are left unconstructed. I also find the hills mentioned in Mr. Snows report on [a] section near Clontarf Post Office are not repaired as they should be. There never has been any care taken in constructing side drains to carry off the water, and those constructed last year are now closed in.<sup>60</sup>

These disputes over the completeness of the Opeongo Road reoccur throughout the overseer’s reports and call into question the degree to which the state had fulfilled its promises.

Local residents had specific reasons to spend their statute labour as they did, and the amount of statute labour spent on any one road was open to debate. Residents were assigned a certain amount of statute labour — usually one to three days per year per adult male over the age of 21 — in correlation with the value of their real and personal property in the tax assessment rolls. The 50-acre free grant lots along the colonization roads were generally “twenty chains” in width, or about 400 metres. This frontage was intended to ensure that the distance between settlers would be minimal and, in consequence, there would be sufficient statute labour available so that each settler might maintain his own section of road. However, because many free

grant lots were unoccupied or abandoned after a few years, there were significant gaps along the roads in many regions. As well, settlers tended to claim neighbouring lots, so that their property was 100 instead of 50 acres. The northwestern part of Brudenell was a case in point. Though there were few settlers on some portions of the road, it was nonetheless used frequently by travellers, especially lumbermen. These lumbermen petitioned the state for aid in repairing rough sections of the road at the same time as settlers argued that they should not be held responsible for keeping such sections of the road in repair. In 1873, for example, timber baron J. R. Booth wrote to the colonization roads branch complaining of the "deplorable quality" of the Opeongo Road between Brudenell and Bark Lake.<sup>61</sup> These portions of road were contested sites of colonization where responsibility was frequently debated and action often delayed.

For the municipal council of Brudenell, roads were a primary concern. In 1864, almost a decade after the initial thrust of resettlement but the first year for which records exist, the vast majority of council meetings were devoted to roads. The very first meeting recorded in the minutes, on 8 July 1864, was convened as a "special meeting for the purpose of receiving applications for aid in the construction of new roads."<sup>62</sup> The council considered 12 such requests, adjudicated their legitimacy, and assigned duties to pathmasters representing different sections of the township. In many cases, residents requested that they be able to spend their statute labour on roads bordering their own property. Though this was not always apparent from the minutes of meetings, it can be deduced by comparing the locations given in the minutes with addresses given in censuses and assessment rolls. Usually these roads connected farms with main side roads or with the Opeongo Road. For example, John Cull and others requested aid to make a road from the border with Hagarty Township (north of Brudenell) along a side line to Christopher Whelan's property on the Opeongo Road. According to the assessment rolls, Whelan lived at Range B North, lots 280 and 281, and this road would travel through John Cull Jr.'s property (as well as his father's), connecting them both with Hagarty Township to the north and with the Opeongo Road to the south. Pathmasters were appointed by the council and were assigned duties prescribed

through by-laws. The elected township council, made up of a reeve and five councillors, assigned work and distributed funds toward various municipal road projects.

The municipal council also made decisions regarding statute labour, which sometimes seemed to be in opposition to dictates of the state. In a report in 1865, the overseer on the Opeongo Road wrote to the Commissioner of Crown Lands: “[I]n some sections the settlers living on the line have been ordered by their municipal councils not to put their statute labour on the Opeongo Road but to put it upon the several side roads leading thereto. This information I received from one of the Path Masters living on the road and should be reliable.”<sup>63</sup> In contrast with the report filed by McGuin, the Brudenell council did not issue a blanket order for statute labour to be performed only on side roads. Their prescriptions were much more pragmatic and reflected the immediate concerns and applications of individuals and groups of residents. For example, in November 1864, three residents were assigned the task of “cutting out the Dooner Road,” a section of side road that connected several Dooner families to the Opeongo main line. In August 1865, John McCarthy and Patrick O’Brien applied to spend their statute labour on the line between concessions 12 and 13, between their two properties. In March 1866, Desiré Payette, James Grace, John Scharboneau, John Quealy, and Patrick Kiely applied to be able to perform their statute labour on the Opeongo Road at “Brudenell Corners.” Requests to spend statute labour related to the specific needs of residents within the context of the needs of the municipality as a whole. McCarthy and O’Brien were farmers seeking a reliable route from their farms to a main road; Payette, Grace, et al., on the other hand, operated commercial interests in the village of Brudenell and so were more concerned with the state of the main road running through the settlement and to the lumber camps further west. Statute labour lists were given to pathmasters, who oversaw the work, which was required to be completed before October or else defaulted to the tax collector at a rate of \$1 per day.<sup>64</sup> In 1865 there were eleven pathmasters in the municipality.<sup>65</sup> Distributing statute labour and deciding where to build local roads constituted one means whereby local communities could determine the shape of their local landscape.

Sometimes the ability of the municipal council to cause a road to be built was restricted by the size of the task at hand or by the jurisdictions involved. Sometimes, in contrast to the dictates of Superintendent Gibson, council made the argument that the state had a responsibility to build or repair a certain road, for example, in the case of a road that was necessary for local concerns but extended physically beyond local boundaries. At a special meeting in 1862, municipal representatives debated the ideal location for the new county town.<sup>66</sup> John Reynolds, Reeve of Brudenell, argued for Eganville as the logical choice, as did most of the representatives from the southern townships. In February 1865, residents of Brudenell petitioned for a road from Brudenell village to the newly selected county town of Pembroke, in the extreme north of the county.<sup>67</sup> Since the petitioners “would often be compelled to attend at the County Town on Public Business,” this decision caused “considerable inconvenience experienced and loss of time by reason of the circuitous route they must travel.” Because the decision put Brudenell residents at a considerable disadvantage compared with other parts of the county and overlooked the other more “central” locations that were available, the petitioners therefore deemed it the responsibility of the state to provide citizens with access to their political institutions. In these cases, the community came together to petition the state for aid. These petitions allow us to understand some of the motivations and concerns of people who did not leave behind a wealth of written records.

In another instance in 1870, residents of Brudenell petitioned the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario for repairs to the Peterson Road, which ran east to west, connecting the Opeongo Road with the Hastings Road further to the west.<sup>68</sup> This time, their argument was more complex, giving seven reasons for state intervention. The road, which was in poor condition, passed through a region of such “rough character” that there were very few settlers situated on or near it, meaning that statute labour was inadequate to keep it in repair. At the same time, the settlers identified the road as a key thoroughfare for immigrants and settlers heading to newly surveyed townships further west, a claim supported by the very assertions of the colonization roads administration. The road was used regularly by



lumbermen in the region, suggesting that it should not be wholly the responsibility of the settlers to keep it in repair. On this road was located the only mill in the surrounding region, meaning it was prone to heavy local traffic.<sup>69</sup> A sum of \$4,000 had recently been granted for repair of the Opeongo Road from Brudenell to Bark Lake, which was “but little travelled being used only by one or two lumberers and leading to a section of the country not likely to be settled.” Finally, there was an outstanding promise from the Commissioner of Crown Lands that “[t]he improvement asked for, cannot be undertaken at present, but that the equitable claims of the section of the country represented will not be lost sight of in future considerations.” The petition was signed by 127 landowners, including the municipal council, a Methodist minister and Catholic priest, public officials, merchants, business owners of various stripes, and a large cohort of farmers and labourers.

The arguments of the residents of Brudenell were supported by their neighbours to the north in Hagarty Township. The residents of Hagarty depended on the services available at Brudenell and, prior to the building of a railroad through Hagarty in 1893, on the access to regional markets provided by connections to the Opeongo Road. In 1873 alone, the residents of Hagarty sent three petitions to the colonization roads office: one asked for a shorter route to Renfrew, and thus to rail and steamer connections; another requested repairs to the road from Killaloe (the main village in the township) to Brudenell; and a third objected to the proposed route of a new road that would by-pass their village.<sup>70</sup> In the latter, residents of Hagarty presented a comprehensive argument for improving connections to Brudenell, beginning with the assertion that Brudenell was the main centre of commerce, industry, and spirituality and ending with the fact that settlers in both townships had already taken it upon themselves to build and maintain bush roads connecting the two settlements. They further argued that the proposed road would run through the rear of the township and would “double the distance to be travelled to Church, Mill, or Store.”<sup>71</sup> Residents used their familiarity with local circumstances as a powerful bargaining chip in the negotiation of both local and regional infrastructure projects. A rational argument could not be summarily dismissed without raising further questions

and without diminishing the perceived authority of the state to dictate conditions.

From the 1860s to the turn of the century, residents of Brudenell and Hagarty continued to petition and write letters seeking aid for roads. Also during this time, J. R. Booth built his Arnprior and Parry Sound railway through the region, which passed several kilometres north of the village of Killaloe. At the time, two prominent residents of Brudenell (John S. J. Watson and William Haryett) were shareholders in the railway company.<sup>72</sup> The railway's charter allowed for branch lines up to six miles long; though no branch line was ever built to Brudenell, it is likely that Watson and Haryett, both merchants, imagined such a possibility in their future. The presence of the railway diminished the importance of the Opeongo Road as a regional communication route, but cemented the importance of side roads in the local economy. In 1887, the settlers of Brudenell and Hagarty jointly petitioned for an improved road from Killaloe village to the township line with Brudenell, including a surveyor's map with their request.<sup>73</sup> Their petition cited frequently ignored appeals for aid ever since the road had been declared "finished," which had resulted in the road deteriorating to a state of uselessness. Killaloe was a "rising village composed of grist and saw mills, stores, post office, etc." and was then the site of the closest mill for the residents of northern Brudenell. The road was also important for allowing communication between the two settlements, as without it residents had to travel a "circuitous route" to conduct their business. The petition shows a degree of cooperation between communities. It drew on the language of progress in attempting to secure aid, referencing the improvements made by settlers. Residents of Hagarty and Brudenell saw themselves as being on the front lines of settlement, and, since they were fulfilling their duty in the context of the colonization project, the state also had a duty to contribute its share.

The following year, upon hearing of a colonization road grant to be spent on a road ambiguously referred to as the "Hagarty and Brudenell" road, resident J. Roche sent a detailed letter of protest to the Commissioner of Crown Lands.<sup>74</sup> In attempting to shape state policy, Roche drew on his knowledge of the local landscape, develo-

ped over 32 years of residence. He emphasized the health and safety of travellers, as well as the social and economic necessity of the road, and, like Watson before him, referred to work already done on the road by the settlers. Like other letter writers and petitioners, Roche emphasized that progress and prosperity depended on roads, which in turn depended on funds from the state:

I send you in this a sort of map of this road which is about 3 miles long and cannot be opened without some aid from the Government ... The want of this road is the greatest detriment to the prosperity of a large tract of the surrounding country. How can a town or village live when 4 or 5 of the best townships right along side it cannot go into the village to do any business and how can a country do who cannot go to grist mill, saw mill or market without having to go 20 miles? Trusting that you will be able to have this road opened this coming summer, I remain, Dear Sir, Yours Truly, J. Roche

The letter was received by local MPP J. A. McAndrew, who on 29 March forwarded it to the Department of Crown Lands along with a note indicating that the road described by Roche was indeed the “Hagarty and Brudenell” road for which \$500 had previously been allocated and asking that the department expend this sum on opening the road. The note from McAndrew also referenced the petition from 1887, saying, “There is a similar sketch attached in the petition which you have on file.” Residents of Brudenell and Hagarty tapped into the plans of the state for local roads, and their petitions were part of the process of negotiating reconstruction of the local landscape. In some cases, locals took the initiative in building and maintaining their own roads, while in others they appealed to the perceived responsibility of the state to provide aid.

These petitions can tell us something about the character of the community. Despite evidence of ethnic tension in the Upper Ottawa Valley,<sup>75</sup> residents of Brudenell are seen here to be acting in cooperation across ethnic or religious lines. In the 1865 petition requesting a more direct route to Pembroke, Catholic and Protestant residents of Brudenell showed a willingness to overcome religious differences

to further a common goal.<sup>76</sup> Reeve John S. J. Watson was Protestant, while the other five members of the council were Catholic. Of the 60 signatories, representing almost half the landowning families in the township, at least 17 percent were Protestant, a number that correlates, almost exactly, with the distribution of religious affiliation within the township as a whole.<sup>77</sup> The petition for improvements to the Peterson Road, submitted in 1870, exhibits the same pattern of representation.<sup>78</sup> Of 127 signatures, again about half the landowning families in the township, at least 18 percent were Protestant. Perhaps religion was not as divisive a category as the outbursts of Russell and French might suggest.

## Conclusion

The negotiation of responsibilities within the colonization roads project reveals a disjuncture between idealized notions of the civilizing process, writ large, and individual acts of civilization in the wilderness. As policies were implemented by state agents, these bureaucrats often encountered resistance and lack of interest, whether on the part of settlers or because of the difficult landscape itself. Local residents navigated the regulations of colonization, as well as the social and physical conditions of their daily lives and surroundings.

By examining the ways the bureaucratic-colonial state envisioned a rural landscape in the Ottawa-Huron Tract and comparing that vision with the actions and opinions of actual settlers, in conjunction with the particular characteristics of the local environment, we come to a better understanding of how colonialism in this period functioned, as well as how people and land shaped, and were shaped by, one another. The petitions and letters referenced above allow us to see into the lives of ordinary citizens through their demands of the state.<sup>79</sup> In this case, settlers wanted access to markets, they wanted to be able to get to church on Sunday, they wanted to participate in local and regional government, and they wanted to have a say in their own destiny. They saw the state as having a duty to facilitate these aims and did not hesitate to make themselves heard. In the arguments of local residents, the state played a supporting rather than determining role in colonization. While much has been written that

emphasizes the failure of intensive agriculture on the Shield, this article highlights the ways settlers succeeded in building communities and, sometimes, channelling government resources toward local initiatives.

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### Endnotes:

- 1 Though its boundaries shifted over time, the province that later became Ontario was known as Upper Canada from 1791 until it was united with Lower Canada through the Act of Union in 1840. It was referred to as Canada West from 1841 until Confederation in 1867.
- 2 The term “resettlement” is borrowed from Cole Harris. See Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997). Though this article deals primarily with settlers of European origin, the Ottawa-Huron Tract in the nineteenth century was not an empty land awaiting discovery; its colonization was part of a larger process of appropriation and displacement — a process that continues to this day and is yet to be resolved. Though local Indigenous populations were sparsely scattered and already significantly diminished by the 1850s, they were not absent and were further marginalized by the colonization project examined in this paper.
- 3 Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), RG 52-15-3, vol. 1, File #74, “To Emigrants and others seeking Lands for Settlement,” P. M. Vankoughnet, Bureau of Agriculture and Statistics, 25 July 1856.
- 4 This interpretation begins with A. R. M. Lower’s condemnation in “The Assault on the Laurentian Barrier, 1850-1870,” *Canadian Historical Review* 10 (1929): 294–307; and *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1936). See also George W. Spragge, “Colonization Roads in Canada West, 1850–1867,” *Ontario History* 49, no. 1 (1957): 1–18;

- Keith A. Parker, "Colonization Roads and Commercial Policy," *Ontario History* 67, no. 1 (1975): 31–9; J. H. Richards, "Land Use and Settlement on the Fringe of the Shield in Southern Ontario" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1954); and R. Louis Gentilcore, "Lines on the Land: Crown Surveys and Settlement in Upper Canada," *Ontario History* 61, no. 1 (1969): 57–73.
- 5 Most notable is the work of J. David Wood. See, for example, *Making Ontario: Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-creation before the Railway* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); and *Places of Last Resort: The Expansion of the Farm Frontier into the Boreal Forest in Canada c. 1910–1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006). See also Brenda Lee-Whiting, *Harvest of Stones: The German Settlement in Renfrew County* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). The "failed settlement" narrative is especially popular amongst writers pushing the region as a tourist destination. See, for example, Ron Brown, *Ghost Towns of Ontario* (Langley, BC: Stagecoach Publishing Co. Ltd., 1978); Larry Cotton, *Whiskey and Wickedness No. 4: Renfrew County, Ontario, 1825–1900* (Lanark, ON: Larry D. Cotton and Associates, 2008); Marilyn Miller, "The Opeongo Road: A Unique Historical Resource" in *Exploring Our Heritage: The Ottawa Valley Experience: Proceedings*, eds. Vrenia Ivonoffski and Sandra Campbell (Arnprior, ON: Arnprior and District Historical Society, 1980), and *Straight Lines in Curved Space: Colonization Roads in Eastern Ontario* (Ottawa: Ministry of Culture and Recreation: Historical Planning and Research Branch, 1978).
  - 6 John C. Walsh, "Landscapes of Longing: Colonization and the Problem of State Formation in Canada West" (PhD diss., University of Guelph, 2001), 38.
  - 7 Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada 1784–1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 9–10.
  - 8 See, for example, David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Though Carol Wilton examined the role of petitions in the popular politics of early Upper Canada, no study of the intricate relationship between petitions and local economic development has yet been attempted. See Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800–1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).
  - 9 Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856–1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).
  - 10 A. A. den Otter, *Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert's Land* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012).
  - 11 John C. Walsh, "Upper Canada and the Mapping of Settler Space" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Fredericton, NB, 30 May–1 June 2011). See also "Landscapes of Longing."
  - 12 Today, the region is largely contiguous with Muskoka, Algonquin Provincial

- Park, and the Upper Ottawa Valley. The “Ottawa-Huron Tract” should not be confused with the “Huron Tract” an area of land in southwestern Ontario that was purchased by the Canada Company in 1826. For the latter, see Robert C. Lee, *The Canada Company and the Huron Tract, 1826-1853: Personalities, Profits, and Politics* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2004).
- 13 See, for examples of the agency of landscape, Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); and Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005).
  - 14 Catharine A. Wilson, *Tenants in Time: Families, Land, and Liberalism in Upper Canada, 1799–1871* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press 2009), 7. See also John C. Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001) and Ruth Sandwell, *Contesting Rural Space: Land Policy and Practices of Resettlement on Salt Spring Island, 1859–1891* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006).
  - 15 Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada before Confederation* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008).
  - 16 Peter Hessel, *The Algonkin Tribe: The Algonkins of the Ottawa Valley* (Arnprior, ON: Kichesippi Books, 1987).
  - 17 Geoffrey J. Matthews, *Historical Atlas of Canada: Beginnings to 1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987–1993), Plate 34.
  - 18 Bill Allen, “Nineteenth Century Aboriginal Farmers of the Madawaska River” in *Partners to the Past: Proceedings of the 2005 Ontario Archaeological Society Symposium*, ed. James S. Molnar (Ottawa: Ontario Archaeological Society, 2007).
  - 19 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), R7271-0-3-E, vol. 2, Journal of Charles Thomas, 1850–1852, 104.
  - 20 Ibid., 116.
  - 21 Ibid., 137.
  - 22 Ibid., 192.
  - 23 AO, F 1061, Hamlet Burritt fonds, 1851.
  - 24 Ibid.
  - 25 Ibid.
  - 26 P. M. Vankoughnet, “Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture for 1856,” *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada* 15 (1857): Appendix 54.
  - 27 See Kim Hanewich, *History of the Algonquins, Omàmiwinini: The Invisible People* (Omàmiwinini Pimàdjowin, 2009), <http://www.thealgonquinway.ca/pdf/Omamiwinini-InvisiblePeople-e.pdf> <accessed 6 May 2013>.
  - 28 Editor of the “Canadian News,” *Canada, the Land of Hope for the Settler and Artisan, the Small Capitalist, the Honest, and the Persevering. With a Description of the Climate, Free Grants of Land, Wages, and its General Advantages as a Field for Emigration* (London: Algar and Street, 1857).

- 29 Bureau of Agriculture, *Canada: A Brief Outline of Her Geographical Position, Productions, Climate, Capabilities, Educational and Municipal Institutions, Fisheries, Railroads, etc, etc, etc.*, 4th Edition (Quebec, 1862). For political histories of the colonization roads, see Spragge, "Colonization Roads in Canada West"; and Parker, "Colonization Roads and Commercial Policy." Walsh's "Landscapes of Longing," is the most complete history of the colonization roads project, while Joan Finnigan's *Life Along the Opeongo Line: The Story of a Canadian Colonization Road* (Renfrew, ON: Penumbra Press, 2004) is a comprehensive social and oral history of the settlement of the Opeongo Road.
- 30 AO RG 52-15-3, vol. 1, File #55, "re Opeongo Rd.," A. J. Russell to Wm. Hutton, 24 December 1855.
- 31 AO RG 52-15-3, vol. 1, File #104, "re Opeongo Rd and Petawawa Bridge," A. J. Russell to P. M. Vankoughnet, 20 October 1856.
- 32 T. P. French, *Information for Intending Settlers on the Ottawa and Opeongo Road, and its Vicinity* (Ottawa: Bureau of Agriculture, 1857), 18.
- 33 Ibid., 19–20.
- 34 AO RG 52-15-3, vol. 1, File #74, "To Emigrants and others seeking Lands for Settlement," P. M. Vankoughnet, Bureau of Agriculture and Statistics, 25 July 1856.
- 35 AO RG 52-15-3, vol. 2, File #30, "Ottawa and Opeongo Road Agency," T. P. French to P. M. Vankoughnet, 10 January 1859.
- 36 T. P. French, "Annual Report of the Ottawa and Opeongo Road Agency," *Sessional Papers* 12 (1860): "Report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands of Canada for the Year 1859," Appendix 24.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 AO RG 1-9, MS 892 reel 9, French to Macdonald, 16 December 1861.
- 39 H. O. Wood, "Extract from Surveyor's Report, Brudenell," in "Remarks on Upper Canada Surveys and Extracts from the Surveyor's Reports," *Report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands* (1861): Appendix 26.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Douglas W. Hoffman and Henry F. Noble, *Acreages of Soil Capability Classes for Agriculture in Ontario* (Toronto: Rural Development Branch, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 1975).
- 42 See, for example, Lee-Whiting, *Harvest of Stones*, 6-7; and Wood, *Making Ontario*, 161.
- 43 LAC, descriptive record in progress, "Brudenell [cartographic material]," Ottawa, 15 April 1857.
- 44 AO RG 1-95-3-9, MS 482, reel 1, "Inspection and Valuation Reports for the Township of Brudenell by William Bell, P.L.S.," October 1863.
- 45 Manuscript 1871 Census of Brudenell. Of 154 total households identified in the Census, 126 had a household head who was identified as a farmer. Of those 126, 34 were located on the Opeongo Road.
- 46 Walsh, "Landscapes of Longing," 257, 264.
- 47 In particular, I am indebted to the postmodernist critique of Bruce Curtis, and the post-colonial analyses of Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper. See



- Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Cooper and Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- 48 den Otter, *Civilizing the Wilderness*, xx.
- 49 A number of studies have already focused on these motivations and strategies. Those that are most influential in my own imagining of frontier life in nineteenth-century Canada are Wilson, *Tenants in Time*; Sandwell, *Contesting Rural Space*; and Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*.
- 50 AO RG 52-15-3, vol. 2, “A. J. Russell to Wm. Hutton,” 11 November 1858.
- 51 Walsh, “Landscapes of Longing,” 280.
- 52 AO RG 52-1, 1863, File #351, “John S. J. Watson, Advice re the Road from the Snake Bridge on the Madawaska to the township.”
- 53 AO RG 52-1, 1863, File #351, “David Gibson to Andrew Russell,” 18 November 1863.
- 54 Spragge, “Colonization Roads in Canada West,” 5.
- 55 AO RG 52-2, vol. 1, “Andrew Russell to John S. J. Watson,” 28 June 1864.
- 56 AO RG 52-15-4, J. W. Bridgland, “Report on the Inspection of Surveys, and examination of Colonization Roads in Canada West,” 22 August 1861.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 AO RG 52-15-3, vol. 2, “David Gibson to William Hutton re contract of David Bremner on the Opeongo Road,” 13 November, 1860.
- 60 AO RG 51-1, 1865, File #1305, “S. O. McGuin to the Commissioner of Crown Lands re Ottawa and Opeongo Road,” 22 August 1865.
- 61 AO RG 52-1, 1873, File #866, “J. R. Booth to the Commissioner of Crown Lands,” 23 September 1873.
- 62 AO F 1564 Brudenell and Lyndoch fonds, “Township of Brudenell and Lyndoch Minutes and By-Laws, 1864–1878,” 8 July 1864.
- 63 AO RG 51-1, 1865, File #1305, “S. O. McGuin to the Commissioner of Crown Lands re Ottawa and Opeongo Road,” 22 August 1865.
- 64 “Township of Brudenell and Lyndoch Minutes,” 9 September 1865.
- 65 Ibid., 12 August 1865.
- 66 Ernest Lloyd Lake, *Pioneer Reminiscences of the Upper Ottawa Valley* (Ottawa: Le Droit, 1966), 111.
- 67 AO RG 52-1, 1865, File #1007, “Settlers of Brudenell to the Commissioner of Crown Lands,” 13 February 1865.
- 68 AO RG 52-1, 1870, File #94, “Settlers of Brudenell to the Lt. Governor of Ontario,” 14 May 1870.
- 69 This claim is verified by the industrial schedule in the 1871 manuscript census.
- 70 AO RG 52-1, 1873, File #63, “Settlers of Hagarty to the Commissioner of Crown Lands re shorter route to Renfrew,” 8 January 1873; File #75, “Settlers

- of Hagarty to the Commissioner of Crown Lands re connection from the Opeongo Road to the Eganville and Hagarty Road”; and File #182, “Hagarty settlers to the Commissioner of Crown Lands re objection to proposed course of road,” April 1873.
- 71 AO RG 52-1, 1873, File #182, “Hagarty settlers to the Commissioner of Crown Lands re objection to proposed course of road,” April 1873.
  - 72 Canada, “An Act to incorporate the Ottawa and Parry Sound Railway Company” (51 Vic., c. 65), section 1.
  - 73 AO RG 52-1, 1887, File #270, “Settlers of Hagarty and Brudenell for a grant for a road from Killaloe to the township line with Brudenell,” 19 January 1887.
  - 74 AO RG 52-1, 1888, File #395, “J. Roche to J. A. McAndrew,” 20 March 1888.
  - 75 See, for example, Michael S. Cross, “The Shiners’ War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s,” *Canadian Historical Review* 54, no. 1 (1973): 1–26, and Richard M. Reid, *The Upper Ottawa Valley to 1855* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990).
  - 76 For this petition, see AO RG 52-1-6, File #1007, “Petition from settlers of Brudenell for a road to the village of Pembroke,” 13 February 1865.
  - 77 The estimated number of Catholics and Protestants who signed the petition is determined by matching names on the petition to names of residents given in the censuses of 1861 and 1871 and assessment rolls for 1869 and 1871. “Religion” was added as a category to the assessment roll in 1869. Of the 60 names given on the petition, 50 were identified in the corresponding sources. Once my database is complete, I will be able to give a more confident accounting of these names and their affiliation.
  - 78 AO RG 52-1-14, File #94, “Petition from settlers of Brudenell for a grant to repair the Peterson road,” 14 May 1870. In my research I identified a total of eight similar petitions from this one township sent between the years 1865 and 1902. These files also include letters sent from local settlers describing their aims and demands. As Walsh notes, the colonization roads files are full of similar petitions from other locations.
  - 79 Lex Heerma van Voss, ed., *Petitions in Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.