

SUCCESSFUL PIONEERS:
IRISH CATHOLIC SETTLERS
IN HIBBERT

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IRISH CATHOLIC SETTLERS
IN THE TOWNSHIP OF HIBBERT, ONTARIO, 1845-1887

By

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Abstract

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The study of Irish Catholic immigrants is interesting as a part of the wider issue that has consumed Canada since its inception - immigration and immigrant communities. By testing the assumptions of historical literature, we can see how different stories have been told about the Irish Catholic immigrant experience in Canada and the variety of reasons given for the communities' relative successes or failures.

The Township of Hibbert affords an opportunity to study Irish Catholic Immigrants in somewhat uniquely promising socioeconomic, demographic and geographic circumstances. The settlers developed into a strong and confident rural community. And though many of the articles and monographs published in the past twenty years have discredited the assumptions of the earlier cultural deterministic models of Irish Canadian studies, the literature concerning the nineteenth century rural experience continues to place Irish Catholics on the periphery. This despite the fact that most Irish Catholics in Canada during this era lived in rural communities.

The central thesis of this paper is that the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert were not as downtrodden as the historical literature concerning the subject of Irish Catholics usually suggests. The Irish Catholics' of the Township of Hibbert were economically, politically and socially more secure than any other community discussed in the Canadian historical literature. They found it was neither necessary nor desirable to publicly demand recognition, as an ethnic or cultural group, from their local society and therefore expressed moderation concerning the issues of Irish nationalism and religious rights. It is this story that this paper will attempt to discuss.

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Introduction

The study of the Irish in nineteenth century Canada had been dominated by literature that adopted the traditional American historiography of Irish immigrants. The 'Boston Model'¹ has been used by influential Canadian historians such as H. C. Clare Pentland and Kenneth Duncan to argue that Irish immigrants reacted to their new Canadian environment according to their cultural traditions. Such traditions were generalized in terms of the religious and ethnic backgrounds of the immigrants.² The Protestant Anglo-Irish and Scots-Irish were described by proponents of the model as hard-working, God-fearing, ambitious and individualistic.³ Essentially these historians argued that the Protestants were more successful immigrants in the New World because of their 'Protestant work ethic'⁴. In comparison, the Catholic Celtic-Irish were given less flattering attributes than those assigned to Protestants in the traditional Irish immigrant

¹In Terence Punch, Irish Halifax: The Immigrant Generation. (Halifax: International Education Centre, Saint Mary's University Press, 1981), p. 16. A Reference to Oscar Handlin, Boston's Immigrants 1790-1865: A Study in Acculturation. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941).

²H. C. Clare Pentland, Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 104-109. Kenneth Duncan, "The Irish Famine and the Social Structure of Canada West," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology. (1965), pp.159-60.

³Ibid(same as above)

⁴Reference to Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

historiography.⁵ Irish Catholics were described pejoratively as lazy, immoral, superstitious, simple-minded and communalistic.⁶ Pentland and Duncan used this interpretation of the Irish Catholics to suggest that in Canada they were a poor urban dwelling minority lacking the cultural or historical roots to succeed as did their Protestant compatriots.⁷ Traditional historiography therefore has often used a cultural determinism theory to explain the Irish experience in Canada.

This traditional view of the Irish experience in Canada has come under vigorous examination in the last two decades. Studies by Donald Akenson, Bruce Elliot, Cecil Houston and William Smyth have argued effectively that the Irish in Canada were influenced by a complicated series of social and economic factors, not simply by cultural traditions, that largely shaped their experience.⁸ Subsequently, recent works by Brian Clarke and Mark McGowan have dramatically modified the historiography of Irish Catholics in nineteenth century Canadian cities. Hardly a homogeneous group, these historian's works describe

⁵David Cairns, Writing Ireland: colonialism, nationalism and culture. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.). p. 2.

⁶Aidan McQuillan, "Beuridge: The Development of an Irish Ethnic Identity in Rural Quebec, 1820-1860." in O'Driscoll and Reynolds (eds), The Untold Story: The Irish in Canada. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 264. McQuillan argues that sharing these characteristics with the French majority in Quebec made Irish Catholics more likely to assimilate into the Quebec rural culture.

⁷Pentland, Labour and Capital in Canada, pp.104-109. Duncan, "The Irish Famine and the Social Structure of Canada West," pp. 159-60.

⁸Donald H. Akenson, Being Had: Historians, Evidence and the Irish in North America. (Canada: P.D. Meany Publishers, 1985), p. 73. Bruce Elliot, Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach. (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), pp. 237-239. Cecil Houston and William Smyth, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement: Patterns, Links and Letters. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 29-34.

an energetic and diverse Irish Catholic community which willingly modified their culture to meet the challenges of their new home while still maintaining their identity.⁹ In short, the traditional historiography has been effectively challenged and modified in recent years.

This modification to the historiography leads directly into the subject of this paper; the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert, Perth County, Ontario; a land locked area in Central-West Ontario approximately 50 Kilometres North of London. (See Map: Appendix A) For, within the framework of the traditional historiography, the study of an Irish Catholic rural community is considered irrelevant. The traditional interpretation of the Irish experience in nineteenth century Canada has allowed only for ambitious Protestant pioneers and impoverished Catholic city dwellers. There has been no space for the study of an Irish Catholic rural community. This has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. Using a large sample of the 1871 Canadian Census, Professors Darroch and Ornstein found that forty-four percent of Irish Catholic head of households were farmers and that sixty-six percent resided in rural areas.¹⁰ Not surprisingly historians, with this new statistical evidence, began to question the traditional

⁹Brian Clarke, Piety and Nationalism: Lay Voluntary Associations and the creation of an Irish-Catholic Community in Toronto. (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), pp. 3, 5 & 28. Mark McGowan, The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto. (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1999), pp. 11,12, 286.

¹⁰A. G. Darroch and M. D. Ornstein, "Ethnicity and Occupational Structures in Canada in 1871: The Vertical Mosaic in Historical Perspective," in The Canadian Historical Review. (Volume LXI, No. 3., 1980.), pp. 304-306.

view of Irish Catholics in Canada. In the 1980s historians such as Donald Akenson, who was the most strident in his criticism of the traditional historiography, argued for a new emphasis on economic factors in contrast to the cultural determinism concepts of Pentland and Duncan.¹¹ Historians began to ask a new set of questions in order to understand the Irish immigrant experience. (When did the immigrant settle in Canada? Where did they settle? What opportunities did the local economy offer the new arrivals? These and other related socioeconomic questions replaced the preoccupation in earlier studies with ethnic or cultural explanations of assumed differences between Protestant and Catholic Irish immigrants in Canada.) An examination of an Irish Catholic nineteenth century rural community has not only been made relevant by the new historiography, but actually has become integral to its central thesis; that the Irish Catholic community was not simply the impoverished urban working class of Canada.

Given the above context, it is the purpose of this study to examine the economic, cultural and social experience of Irish Catholics in a rural community. The Township of Hibbert in the period from 1845 to 1887 affords a researcher that opportunity. Demographically, nineteenth century Hibbert is of interest to the study of the Irish in Ontario because of its large number of Irish settlers. By

¹¹ Akenson, Being Had, pp. 102 & 111.

1862 the township's land was almost completely settled and settlers of Irish origin made up over forty-five percent of the population.¹² This was a significantly larger proportion as compared with the approximately twenty-five percent province-wide in the 1871 census. Even more important to this study was the large number of Irish Catholic settlers in the area. The Township of Hibbert's population in 1862 was recorded as 2 848 and of which 1 012 were Catholic.¹³ Since the township's Catholic population was overwhelmingly Irish (in 1871 Census 95% of township's Catholics were Irish), the Irish Catholic community equalled slightly less than thirty-five percent of the township's population. The proportion of the Irish Catholic community in Hibbert was therefore four and half times larger than their proportion in Ontario as a whole(In 1871 Census, 8%). The large concentration of Irish Catholic settlers alone provides a researcher with the opportunity to examine the assumptions and questions of Irish Canadian historiography.

Another obvious characteristic of the township of Hibbert is the fact that it was, and remains today, an agricultural community. According to the 1871 Canadian Census sixty-three percent of the 683 heads of households in Hibbert listed their occupation as 'farmer'. However that number underestimates the percentage of the head of households who were farmers since the 1871 census

¹²County of Perth Gazetteer. 1863-1864., p. 15.

¹³Ibid.(same as above)

listed orphaned or 'stray' children and single 'stray' women as head of households. These so-called 'strays' accounted for the vast majority of the 106 individuals who did not have an occupation listed in the 1871 census. If these 106 individuals are set aside, farmer was listed as the occupation of 75% of heads of households in 1871. There can be no doubt that agriculture was the main economic pursuit in the Township of Hibbert.

In relation to the study of Irish Catholics, the fact that the Township of Hibbert was almost exclusively agricultural economically is very inviting. It gives a researcher the opportunity to study an Irish Catholic community outside an urban locale and to evaluate their experience in a similar environment in to which the majority of Irish Catholic Canadians lived; in a rural agricultural community. Moreover, the Irish Catholic heads of households in Hibbert, like their neighbours, were overwhelmingly farmers. In the 1871 Census, seventy-five percent (119 of 159) listed farmer as their occupation(See Appendix B). In the Township of Hibbert the experience of the Irish Catholic settlers in this period was certainly influenced by the community's rural environment and agriculturally based economy. This was the typical environment most Irish Catholic settlers experienced in the era but one that has rarely been examined by Canadian historians.

One explanation for this omission is chronological. One consequence of the Great Famine on Irish migration patterns was that it represented a change and

perhaps an end to Canada's relationship with the Irish exodus.¹⁴ This may seem counterintuitive given the fact that 1847 was the year Canada received its single largest number of Irish immigrants. It is also true that Canada received a significant number of Irish immigrants until approximately 1855. However, the Great Irish Famine altered Canada's relationship with the Irish exodus, and ultimately redirected the arrivals overwhelmingly to the United States.¹⁵ Canada's decision to increase the head tax on Irish immigrants in 1848 and, more importantly, the colonial economy's inability to continue absorbing the large number of immigrants pushed the Irish flow increasingly in the American direction.¹⁶ In fact, between 1845 and 1855 it is estimated that over seventy-five percent of the Irish migrants who landed on Canadian shores moved to American destinations within a few years.¹⁷ Therefore, Canada's relationship to the famine exodus was demographically, and, arguably, culturally different than the American experience. The chronology of the Irish diaspora has shaped the historiography of the Irish in Canada in such a manner that the resulting study of the Catholic population here has been less vigorous than in comparison to American research

¹⁴ Houston and Smyth, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement, p.29.

¹⁵ Ibid(same as above)

¹⁶ Ibid(same as above)

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 25-28. Peter Toner, "Another 'New Ireland' Lost: The Irish in New Brunswick," in The Untold Story, p. 231. 90% of the Irish who entered N. B. in 1846 had left by 1851, the majority of Boston.

The above point is crucial in the context of the study of Irish Catholics in Canada. First, during the period from 1815 to 1845 Canada's relationship with the Irish diaspora was at its most intense. Over 500 000 Irish migrants reached Canada in those thirty years.¹⁸ Relatedly, Irish Catholic emigration from Ireland to North America did not surpass that of the Irish Protestants until the 1840s. This created a demographic reality that was very different than the United States. For in Canada (the BNA colonies) fifty-five percent of Irish settlers in Canada were Protestant.¹⁹ The reasons for this will be discussed in later chapters, but for now it is sufficient to remember that this far exceeded the proportion of the contemporary Protestant community in Ireland. At that time only twenty percent of the population was Protestant.²⁰ Actually, Irish Protestant migrants to Canada outnumbered Catholics three to one until the 1830s when fares to North America dropped tremendously.²¹ This has given the study of the Irish in Canada a very 'Orange' flavour. Unlike the United States, the study of the Irish in Canada has concentrated on the Protestant population and the influence of the Orange Lodge on Canadian society. Often in these narratives, the Irish Catholic population is reduced to the role of the Orangemen's ever present Green adversary on the

¹⁸Houston and Smyth, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement, p.8.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 226.

²⁰Kerby Miller, Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.), p. 41. Based on 1834 numbers when Ireland's population was just over 8 000 000.

²¹Ibid., 103.

streets of Toronto, Saint John or Montreal. Their lives and experiences in between street fights, St. Patrick's Day parades, and "Glorious 12th" confrontations is hardly covered by the Canadian historiography. And even with the recent monographs by Clarke and McGowan, Irish Catholics outside the urban centres are often treated as an afterthought; acknowledged, but rarely closely examined. Given this background, this paper is a modest attempt to address that omission in the literature.

Chronology plays an important role in the reasons why the Township of Hibbert provides an excellent opportunity to study an Irish Catholic rural community. Given the township's geographical location it was not settled in large numbers until the late 1840s. Being an inland area in Western Ontario it was settled later than Eastern Ontario and the north shore regions of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The area was heavily wooded and located over 40 kilometres from the nearest port, Goderich, delaying any attempt to even survey the region until the 1830s when the Canadian Land Company began advertising the availability of farm lots in the area.²² The opening of the Township of Hibbert and the surrounding area coincided precisely with the increase in Irish Catholic immigration to Canada in the 1830s. When the township received its largest influx of settlers, in the late 1840s and early 1850s,²³ Canada had just received its

²²Earliest reference in *Huron Expositor* in 1848. Advertisements refer to land sales in the region since the 1830s.

²³Census Records

largest influx of Irish Catholics.²⁴ In the case of Ontario, Toronto alone received 38 000 Irish immigrants in 1847 who were overwhelmingly Catholics escaping the famine in Ireland.²⁵ One year later only 2 000 of these famine migrants remained in Toronto.²⁶ Though many died in the fever sheds and most moved to the United States, large numbers of Irish Catholic immigrants were in search of farmland and employment in rural Ontario during the period that the Township of Hibbert was settled. Thus the timing of the township's settlement largely explains why thirty-five percent of the population was Irish Catholic in the period shortly after the famine.

The chronology of the settlement in Hibbert and the arrival of Irish Catholic immigrants to Ontario not only help explain why such a large community formed in the township, but it also provides a researcher of Canadian Irish studies with an unique historical situation. A situation where Irish Catholic settlers arrived at the same time as their Protestant neighbours. Usually in Ontario, because of the Irish immigration chronology discussed above, Irish Catholics arrived later than most of their Protestant neighbours. This often greatly diminished an Irish Catholic immigrant's opportunity at settling on the best quality land. Akenson, Elliot, Houston and Smyth, and others have often

²⁴Houston and Smyth, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement, p. 8.

²⁵Ibid., p. 29..

²⁶Ibid.(same as above)

referred to the fact that Irish Catholic settlers usually had inferior lots due to their relatively late arrival in the region.²⁷ Thus the later settlement of Township of Hibbert provided Irish Catholic immigrants with the rare opportunity, compared to most townships in Ontario, of claiming the best farm lots.

The settlement and demographic patterns of the Township of Hibbert therefore created a pioneering community in which Irish Catholics were certainly members of the 'charter group'.²⁸ They arrived in large numbers as soon as the lots were available in the township thus avoiding many of the disadvantages their brethren endured in other areas of the country. These starting conditions for the Irish Catholic community in the township created what can be considered unique circumstances. At the same time, the situation of Hibbert can inform us about the experience of the average Irish Catholic Immigrant to Ontario as they were typically rural-dwellers.

Understanding the somewhat paradoxical context outlined above, it is challenging to place the pioneering experience of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert within the current historiography. Though many of the articles and monographs published in the last twenty years have completely discredited the assumptions of the earlier cultural deterministic models of Irish

²⁷ Akenson, *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1815-1922. An International Perspective*, pp. 93-99. Elliot, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas*, p. 136. Houston and Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement*, p. 43.

²⁸ A claim that Donald Akenson in his works stresses. In the case of rural Canada he makes this claim in *The Irish in Ontario: A Rural Study*. (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985).

Canadian studies, the literature concerning the nineteenth century rural experience continues to place Irish Catholics on the periphery. What this means precisely is that the literature acknowledges the fact that most Irish Catholics were rural inhabitants in Canada, however there is still a disproportionate number of studies concerning the urban situation exclusively. In a sense the existence of an Irish Catholic rural experience has become generally accepted, but, oddly, still generally ignored by researchers.

One reason the historiography has not been modified completely successfully to incorporate the rural experience of Irish Catholics is the emphasis placed upon the Catholic Church itself. Historians who chose to research Irish Catholic studies learn quickly that it is difficult to exclude or avoid focussing on the issue of the Church's influence and role in organizing the communities. For the Church was usually the sole Canadian institution Irish Catholic immigrants would have been familiar with upon their arrival. Therefore the Church was not exclusively a place of religious worship for Irish Catholics, it was often the only Canadian institution that provided them with cultural, political and economic leadership.²⁹ The Catholic Church's *ultramontane* theology and organizational structure worked to strengthen this bond in the years following the influx of Irish Catholics into Canada making the Church the central to the communities' public

²⁹ Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. 41.

lives.³⁰ In nineteenth century Ontario, the words Irish and Catholic became synonymous as membership in the Church became the defining characteristic of the ethnic group. Following this line, Irish Catholic studies have emphasized the individuals' and communities' relationship with the Church-laity relationship over and above other relationships. Recent monographs by both Clarke and McGowan examine this relationship in Toronto. An important reason for concentrating on the Irish in cities, such as Toronto, is the reality that the Catholic Church was a very centralised and hierarchical institution. The diocese and, then by 1868 the archdiocese of Toronto, was the centre of Catholicism in Ontario. Given the hierarchical organization of the Church and the importance of the Church to Irish Catholic communities, it is understandable there has been a preference to study cities such as Toronto. Not surprisingly then some historians, such as Murray Nicolson, have argued that Toronto was the Metropolis of Irish Catholicism in Ontario; the centre from which all Canadian Irish Catholic culture originated³¹. There is also an obvious advantage in terms of the primary sources available to researchers. The archive at the Archdiocese of Toronto is well organized with full-time archivists to assist historians. In addition, Toronto was, and still is, the media centre of English-speaking Canada. The large number of

³⁰Ibid, 45.

³¹Murray Nicolson, "Irish Experience in Ontario: Rural or Urban?" Urban History Review. (Vol. 14. No. 1. June, 1985.),

newspapers and periodicals published in Toronto provide historians with many primary sources to evaluate. Considering the above, it is unsurprising that the rural situation of many Canadian Irish Catholics has often been overlooked.

Thus, in the case of Irish Catholic communities in nineteenth century Canada, their social and cultural experiences have been examined in urban situations, while their economic experience has been examined in both the urban and the rural environments. The problem with the economic evaluation of the rural situation is that it has been brief and inadequate. Donald Akenson's monographs, The Irish in Ontario and Small Differences, have both examined the economic situation of Irish Catholics in the rural environment.³² These works are almost exclusively statistical comparisons between Irish Protestant and Irish Catholic communities.³³ By using census data and land records Akenson has convincingly argued that the economic experience of Irish Catholics in Canada was not substantially different than Irish Protestants.³⁴ Relatedly, Akenson concluded that the small economic differences between Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics were not the result of assumed cultural differences, but the consequences of a complicated mix of socioeconomic factors.³⁵ In short,

³²Akenson, Irish in Ontario: A Rural Study. (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1884.) Small Differences.

³³Akenson, Small Differences, pp. 92-95.

³⁴Ibid, p. 98.

³⁵Akenson, Being Had, p. 73.

Akenson attempted to replace a cultural determinism model with an economic determinism model. A model which is an improvement over the simplistic and often racist cultural theory, but a model that is still inadequate. Inadequate in the context of creating a new, more thorough historiography of the Irish Catholic experience in Canada because it almost completely ignores the cultural and social experience of the immigrants. Basically, Akenson is demanding that the historiography of Irish immigrants be rewritten, but he has largely left that endeavour to future historians.

For purposes of this paper, the greatest contribution of Akenson's work has been making the rural situation relevant to the history of Irish Catholics in Canada. In his efforts to bring the statistical finding of Professors Darroch and Ornstein (introduced above) to the attention of historians, Akenson has made it possible to ask new questions. Kenneth Duncan's query, "Why did the Irish peasant become a city man?"³⁶, is no longer relevant. Akenson has also effectively discredited the cultural theories of H. C. Clare Pentland's study, Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860,³⁷ and Kerby Miller's monograph, Emigrants in Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America.³⁸ Both

³⁶Kenneth Duncan, "Irish Famine and the Social Structure of Canada West," p. 155.

³⁷Pentland, Labour and Capital in Canada, p. 104.

³⁸Kerby A. Miller, Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America, p. 4. Discusses a Catholic World-View which discouraged them from becoming pioneers.

authors, Pentland and Miller, have used versions of the cultural deterministic theory to explain the Irish Catholic experience in North America. Pentland's assumption that Irish Catholics were simply a poor, urban working class is easily discredited by the demographic evidence which proves that it was not the case in Canada.³⁹ Moreover, Miller's argument that Irish Catholic immigrants were not prepared for the rigours of pioneer life because of their "Irish Catholic World View" is also challenged by the statistical data in Canada.⁴⁰ Despite the theories of Pentland and Miller, it is obvious that Irish Catholics in Canada were not averse to the rigours of pioneer life.

The question still facing historians, despite the work of Akenson, is: 'What was the Irish Catholic experience in rural Ontario?' Though the publications by Cecil Houston and William Smyth, including their monograph, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement,⁴¹ and Bruce Elliot, Irish Migrants in the Canadas,⁴² have compared the geographical and economic conditions of Irish Protestant and Irish Catholic rural settlers, studies focussed exclusively on the Irish Catholic rural experience are very rare. Two articles which do examine the Irish Catholic experience in rural Ontario are Glenn Lockwood's, "Success and

³⁹Pentland, Labour and Capital in Canada. Is discredited by the work of Darroch and Ornstein. "Ethnicity and occupational Structures in Canada," pp. 307-311.

⁴⁰Miller, Emigrants and Exiles, p. 4. Darroch and Ornstein(same as above)

⁴¹Houston and Smyth, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement, p. 44.

⁴²Elliot, Irish Migrants in the Canadas, p. 136.

the Doubtful Image of Irish Immigrants in Upper Canada: The Case of the Montague Township”,⁴³ and Pauline Ryan’s, “A Study of Irish Immigration to North Hastings”.⁴⁴ These articles contribute to the understanding of Irish rural studies, but the circumstances in the Township of Hibbert were very different than both of these local situations in two very important ways. First, Lockwood studied the eastern Ontario Township of Montague which was settled by American, Scottish and English immigrants decades before the Irish arrived in the area. Lockwood cited this as the main reason that the Irish settlers, including a large number of Catholics, could not purchase the good quality land in the area and therefore found it difficult to succeed in comparison to the earlier settlers.⁴⁵ In the Township of Hibbert, Irish Catholic Settlers did not arrive later than their Protestant neighbours. Secondly, in Ryan’s study of North Hastings, the land was of a very poor quality since it was on the south end of the Canadian shield. Although when the free land grants were offered in 1856 it attracted the attention of many Irish Catholic settlers, the newcomers soon discovered the land was of very poor quality.⁴⁶ Fortunately for the Irish Catholic settlers in the Township of

⁴³ Glenn Lockwood, “Success and the Doubtful Image of Irish Immigrants in Upper Canada: The Case of the Montague Township,” in The Untold Story.

⁴⁴ Pauline Ryan, “A Study of Irish Immigration in North Hastings,” in Ontario History. (Vol. 83. No. 1, 1991)..

⁴⁵ Glenn Lockwood, “Success and the Doubtful Image of Irish Immigrants in Upper Canada: The Case of the Montague Township,” p. 326.

⁴⁶ Pauline Ryan, “A Study of Irish Immigration to North Hastings,” pp. 27-29.

Hibbert, the land was very good for farming.⁴⁷ In comparison to these two articles, studying an Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert offers a researcher the opportunity to evaluate their experience in more promising circumstances.

Studying an Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert also allows for an examination of their public life in a rural situation. Clarke in his monograph, Piety and Nationalism, and McGowan in his book, The Waning of the Green, both evaluate the public activism of Irish Catholics in Toronto.⁴⁸ Both works argue that the Irish Catholic laity was very active within the Church and in the community despite pressure from the hierarchy to conform to their will.⁴⁹ In this context, the public lives of the Irish Catholics in Toronto was a constant balancing act between asserting their independence while continuing their relationship with the Church. The most obvious example of this was the often strained, but usually respectful relationship between the Irish nationalist movement and the Catholic Church.⁵⁰ Also, Irish Catholics in Toronto publicly expressed their willingness to be active in the community through membership in

⁴⁷Perth Gazetteer, 1863-4.

⁴⁸Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. 3. McGowan, The Waning of the Green, p. 149.

⁴⁹Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p.3 . McGowan, The Waning of the Green, p. 91.

⁵⁰Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. 163.

Catholic devotional societies and the union movement in Canada.⁵¹ The old caricature of the priest-ridden, docile Irishmen does not truthfully describe their experience in Canada given the findings of Clarke and McGowan. But was the experience outside of Toronto in a rural context different? In the Township of Hibbert the Irish Catholic public experience was different in a few obvious aspects. First, at thirty-five percent of the population, there was a proportionately larger Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert than in Toronto.⁵² Secondly, they were very active in the municipal politics of the township. From the township's inception in 1853, Irish Catholics were elected repeatedly to the municipal council.⁵³ Thirdly, there was very little public acknowledgment or explicit expression of Irish nationalism in the township.⁵⁴ Essentially, given their socioeconomic situation in the Township of Hibbert, they likely felt more secure and, possibly, more accepted than their Irish Catholic brethren in Toronto.

Before introducing the subject of this paper more thoroughly, the chronological limits of this paper must be more clearly defined. This is an evaluation of the Irish Catholic experience in the Township of Hibbert between 1845 to 1887. This period has been chosen simply because it was during this

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 226-228.

⁵²1871 Census

⁵³*Mitchell Advocate*, 1860-76. *Huron Signal*, 1848-1864. *Stratford Weekly Herald*, 1863-1890.

⁵⁴Survey of the local newspapers found no references to aggressive nationalist rhetoric. In fact, the local Protestant papers congratulated the Irish Catholic community for their Canadian patriotism and moderation.

time that the township was settled. As mentioned earlier, this created the unique situation in which Irish Catholics actually arrived in the area at the same time as their Protestant neighbours. Therefore, many of disadvantages Irish Catholics settlers endured in other townships were not present in Hibbert. As a closing point, the year 1887 represents an important community marker for Irish Catholics in Hibbert; the opening of their first Catholic school. A central component of this paper is an attempt to explain the reasons why a separate school was not opened until 1887 in this community. It took over forty years for this to occur for many reasons which will be discussed in greater depth in the third chapter. It is important to recognize immediately, however, that the Catholic community was certainly numerically large enough and concentrated enough to establish a separate school much earlier than 1887. The Catholic community simply did not feel it was necessary to open a separate school until that year, and even at that later date its establishment was controversial within the Catholic community.

Indirectly, one of the important reasons that the Irish Catholic community did not feel it necessary to establish a separate school in the area was their economic stability. As previously stated, the Irish Catholic community was overwhelmingly comprised of farmers in the township. Seventy-one percent of the heads of households listed farmer as their main occupation in the 1871

census. Just as importantly the majority of these farmers owned their land.⁵⁵ The conditions that the Canada Company stipulated for title of the land were within the means of most of the Irish Catholic settlers in the township. Their relative economic security is also reflected by the fact that less than ten percent (15 of 129) of the Irish Catholic heads of households listed labourer as their occupation.⁵⁶ Irish Catholics were also well represented in the business community. Though only six Irish Catholics listed merchant or owner as their occupation in 1871, individuals such as Thomas King and, especially, Joseph Kidd were very successful merchants in the village of Dublin (Carronbrook until 1878).⁵⁷ Their wealth made them leaders of the entire township, not just within the Irish Catholic community.

Their sense of security within the township was also derived from their numerical size. Since the community equalled thirty-five percent of the township's population, they were able to influence local affairs much more successfully in comparison to many other Ontario regions, including Toronto. The numerical strength of the community enabled it to consistently elect Irish Catholic councillors to the municipal government. During the entire period of

⁵⁵ 1871 Census and Land Assessment Rolls 1871

⁵⁶ 1871 Canadian Census.

⁵⁷ As local newspapers repeatedly stated. *Stratford Beacon*, *Stratford Weekly Herald*, *St. Mary's Argus*, *Mitchell Advocate*, and *Huron Signal*.

this study, Irish Catholics held at least two, and sometimes three, of the five councillor positions in the municipal government.⁵⁸ In recognition of this situation, the office of Reeve or Deputy-Reeve in the township was almost always awarded to an Irish Catholic representative by the council. In similar fashion, the Catholic community's numerical strength, but also its concentration in the northwest corner of the township, allowed them to influence the administration of the public schools in their neighbourhood. In the case of the two schools S. S. No. 3 and S. S. No. 4, the majority of the trustees were Irish Catholic.⁵⁹ Though the trustees were not all Irish Catholic, their majority status created a situation in which the schools' teachers were usually Catholics.⁶⁰ Therefore the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was very active in local affairs. Their ability and willingness to exercise authority and power in the township's political proceedings contributed significantly to their sense of security in the wider community. They were not a small minority under siege.

The above situation influenced the Irish Catholic population's relationship with the Church. At first the contact between the Church and the community was irregular and limited. Though the first mass was conducted in the area in 1835 at

⁵⁸Survey of Newspapers, especially *Mitchell Advocate*, which published electoral results for the Township of Hibbert.

⁵⁹*Mitchell Advocate*. September 16, 1860.

⁶⁰*Ibid*(same as above). A point of concern as some letters to the editor indicate.

Dennis Downey's home,⁶¹ the inhabitants of Hibbert did not have a parish with a full-time priest until Reverend Dean James Murphy arrived at St. Columban Church in 1865 in the village then named Irishtown.⁶² The Catholic Church, as documented by the numerous studies concerning the Catholic Church in Toronto, struggled with the increased demands created by the massive influx of Irish Catholic immigrants in the 1840s.⁶³ Given these circumstances, the community in the Township of Hibbert received mass and other religious services from a Priest who travelled throughout the counties of Huron and Perth,⁶⁴ A regular and intensive relationship with the church therefore could not even be attempted by the Catholic clergy until 1865 with the arrival of Reverend Murphy. Combined with the Irish Catholic community's successful and active participation in the wider community of the township, the Catholic Church's personnel and resource challenges delayed and hindered its reach into the Catholic community of Hibbert until it was already well established. In the areas of charity, social interaction, social activism, and education the church did not build the foundations of its relationship with the Catholic community in the township as quickly as some other areas of Ontario, especially in comparison to the cities. Relative to the

⁶¹*Mitchell Advocate*, June 12, 1865.

⁶²*Ibid.* (same as above)

⁶³Clarke, *Piety and Nationalism*, p. 13.

⁶⁴*Mitchell Advocate*, June 12, 1865.

situation in Toronto, for example, the process of community building in the Township of Hibbert by the Catholic population was not as reliant upon clerical leadership.

What follows is the history of one rural Irish Catholic community, and as such it can hardly be taken as the definitive account of the Irish Catholic experience in Canada or indeed in Ontario. Still, if the story of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was unique in some respects, it nevertheless affords a wonderful opportunity to study several important aspects of their nineteenth century rural experience. In the first chapter a brief introduction to the township's early history will be followed by a more detailed description of the Irish Catholic economic experience in the area. The second chapter will discuss Irish Catholic participation in local affairs; particularly municipal politics and public school administration. The third chapter of this paper will attempt to address the issue of Irish Catholic identity. For the central thesis of this paper is the idea that the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert were not as downtrodden as the historical literature concerning the subject of Irish Catholic identity usually suggests. The reasons for this conclusion will be explored more thoroughly throughout this paper, but, in short, the Irish Catholics of the Township of Hibbert were economically, politically and socially more secure than any other community discussed in the Canadian historical literature. This sense of security created a socioeconomic environment in which the Irish Catholic

community came to the understanding that it was neither necessary nor desirable to publicly demand recognition, as an ethnic or cultural group, from their local society. The combination of security, economic success and community participation developed a confidence in the Irish Catholic community which encouraged moderation concerning the issues of Irish nationalism and religious rights. It would be inaccurate to imply that the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert were not emotionally attached and supportive of those cultural goals, but their relative security diminished the sense of urgency and injustice that many Irish Catholics experienced in some other communities in Canada. It is this story that this paper will attempt to discuss.

Chapter 1: Building A Home

To begin an economic evaluation of the Township of Hibbert's Irish Catholic population it is imperative to remember that the goal of the overwhelming majority of Irish immigrants in Canada was to acquire land. Historians, such as Bruce Elliot, Donald Akenson, Catherine Wilson, and others, have usually attributed this desire for land to these immigrants' experience in their homeland.¹ The tragic events of the Great Famine of Ireland, 1845 to 1850, obviously caused disaster for millions of Ireland's inhabitants and convinced those who survived that emigration may be the only means of survival. But the influx of Irish immigrants to Canada actually began after the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.² Once the war ceased, an agricultural recession hit Ireland almost immediately.³ With peace on the continent achieved, normalization of trade between Europe and the United Kingdom depressed the commodity prices of all agricultural products.⁴ For example, the linen industry in Ulster was hurt by the

¹Donald Akenson, Being Had, pp. 74-75. Bruce Elliot, Irish in the Canadas, pp. 69 & 148.

²Donald Akenson, "Whatever Happened to the Irish?," reprinted in Gerald Tulchinsky (ed), Immigration in Canada: Historical Perspectives. (Mississauga: Copp Clark Longman Ltd., 1994), p. 88. Houston and Smyth, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement, p. 14.

³Cormac O'Grada, "Some Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Irish Emigration," in Cullen and Smout (eds), Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic Social History. (Edinburgh, 1976.), pp. 66-69.

⁴Ibid.(same as above)

decreasing in demand for Irish products and consequently began reducing their workforces.⁵ Suddenly it became a difficult for thousands of families to procure the basics of life.

This economic recession in Ireland was exacerbated by the concurrent population explosion in Ireland. The Irish population jumped from approximately 4.4 million in 1791 to 6.8 million in 1821.⁶ At this time Ireland was overwhelmingly an agricultural society, the rise in population increased the demand for land encouraging families to subdivide their holdings repeatedly until the lots held by many families were less than five acres.⁷ In the case of the densely populated County of Tyrone, Ulster, forty percent of the tenant farms were five acres or less.⁸ The situation of most Irish farmers was made even more tenuous by the fact that most landlords in Ireland were attempting to make their lands more profitable by switching from tillage to pasture farming.⁹ This resulted in a very high number of tenant evictions and rent increases.¹⁰ It became increasingly difficult for many Irish families to rent enough land for even just

⁵Ibid.(same as above)

⁶Miller, Emigration and Exile, p. 44.

⁷Miller, Emigrants and Exiles, p.10.

⁸Ibid.(same as above)

⁹Ibid., p. 45. And O'Grada, "Some Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Irish Emigration," pp.66-68.

¹⁰O'Grada, "Some Aspects...", pp. 66-68.

sustenance farming.

With prospects diminishing in Ireland, emigration became the economic strategy of more and more families. At first, it was overwhelmingly Protestants from North Ireland who immigrated to North America.¹¹ One reason for this phenomenon was the reality that it was very expensive to travel from Ireland to North America. Given the high cost, it was predominately Protestants who could afford the voyage since they earned, on average, an income four times greater than the Catholic majority in Ireland,¹² a consequence of the British government's sporadic enforcement of the penal laws. But when costs of the voyage to Canada began to decrease in the 1830s the number of Catholic immigrants steadily increased and indeed surpassed the number of Protestants by the 1840s.¹³ Still, the expense of immigrating to North America was too high for most families. For instance, it cost the equivalent of nine months of work at a labourer's wage for to send a group of four to Canada in 1834.¹⁴ Despite these costs Canada received five hundred thousand Irish immigrants in thirty years immediately following the Napoleonic Wars. What the overwhelming majority of these immigrants held in common, regardless of their religious or cultural background, was the belief that

¹¹S. H. Cousens, "The Regional Variations in Emigration From Ireland, 1821-41," Institute of British Geographers, Transactions, (Vol. 37, 1965), pp 18-21.

¹²Miller, Emigration and Exile, p. 41.

¹³Ibid., p.

¹⁴Miller, Emigration and Exile, pp 103-155. Houston and Smyth, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement, P. 58.

the New World offered a fresh opportunity to acquire land and achieve economic stability for their families. Families pursued these dreams with determination once in Canada.

The history of the creation and establishment of the Township of Hibbert is very important in understanding the experience of the Irish Catholic community in the period 1845 to 1887. The following brief account of the history of the township, the local settlement pattern, politics, land quality and climate will provide an introduction to the socioeconomic environment in which Irish Catholic settlers encountered during this period. In the process, some of the local factors which altered and influenced the history of the Irish Catholics of in the Township of Hibbert, in comparison to some other areas of Ontario, will be assessed. This will add context to the later discussion in this chapter concerning the relative economic experience of the Irish Catholic community in the township.

Originally, the township formed a part of what became the District of Huron with its council in Goderich, in the year 1842. In 1847 the eight Eastern townships of the district, including Hibbert, began to agitate for their own District.¹⁵ By 1853 these eight townships achieved County status, in the process acquiring a further 168 000 acres to the north of their townships borders, with its

¹⁵*Huron Signal*, March 3, 1848.

council in Stratford.¹⁶ Originally, not all residents of the Township of Hibbert were supportive of their inclusion in the newly formed Perth County. Since Hibbert is at the extreme western boundary of Perth County, many residents felt geographically and politically more connected to the neighbouring county of Huron.¹⁷ Relatedly, since the Canada Company opened the area to settlers from its regional office in Goderich, the pattern of settlement that the Township of Hibbert was involved with followed an Easterly direction. Hence, the Township of Hibbert received settlers a few years earlier than its neighbours to the east. This created the situation in which the infrastructure investments of the Canada Company and the district ratepayers reached the Township of Hibbert earlier than their new county partners. Most residents of the township resented being forced to share the expenditures and the inevitable debts of the new county,¹⁸ a grievance which the residents of Hibbert would hold for many decades.

Though the above regional political issue was important to the residents of the township, it did not affect the pattern of settlement in the area. The actions of the Canada Company had the greatest influence on the early years of settlement. The company's efforts to promote sales through advertising and by providing

p. 13.

¹⁶W. S. Johnston and H. J. M. Johnston., History of Perth County to 1967. (Stratford, Ontario: County of Perth, 1967),

¹⁷*Huron Signal*, March 3, 1848.

¹⁸*Ibid.*(same as above)

infrastructure improvements, such as roads and grist mills, were substantial in comparison to the various government programs. Pamphlets with titles such as “Statistical Sketches of Upper Canada” and “The Life of a Backwoodsman” advertised the prospects of settling in areas such as the Township of Hibbert to many potential pioneers. The location of roads and mills also directed the location of settlement. In the case of Hibbert, settlement slowly established itself in the northwest corner of the township since that was where the Huron road, starting in Goderich, was built.

For the purposes of this paper, it is significant that the northwest corner of the township was the area in which the first arrivals settled as it was in this area that the Irish Catholic community settled. Though in 1842 only thirty-six individuals resided in the township, Irish Catholics such as Patrick, Hugh and Thomas Carlin, Dennis and Edward Downey, Daniel Keenan, Arthur and Miles McCann, and Matthew Ward were among the first to settle their families in the Township of Hibbert¹⁹. Indeed, most of the original settlers were Irish Catholic. Thus, despite being unable to claim the notoriety of being the very first settler in the township (an Englishman and a tavernkeeper in Carronbrook, Robert Donkin was the first), Irish Catholics were the overwhelming majority in the early years of settlement. (This continued into the early 1850s until large numbers of Scottish

¹⁹Land Titles, 1843. Land Assessment Records, 1843.

and English settlers began to arrive in the township.) Since the northwest corner of the township was settled almost exclusively by Irish Catholics by this time, Scottish, English and Irish Protestant arrivals established their farms mostly north and west of the Irish Catholic community.²⁰

In terms of development of the geographical boundaries of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert the key period was in the 1840s coincided with the timing of the largest influx of Irish Catholic immigrants into Canada. For instance, Akenson has estimated that approximately 104 518 Irish immigrants arrived in the year 1847 alone.²¹ The 1840s was also the only decade during the nineteenth century in which Catholic arrivals from Ireland outnumbered their Protestant counterparts. This immigrant demographic phenomenon combined with the earlier arrival of Irish Catholics to the Township of Hibbert significantly influenced the region's first ten years of settlement. The availability of land and the initial establishment of an Irish Catholic community by the earliest settlers created a very desirable situation for those Irish Catholic families who were searching for farms to acquire in Ontario. The earliest settlers constituted the impetus of a 'chain migration'²² situation in the area which attracted many members of their extended family and some of their

²⁰Land Title Records. 1850-1860.

²¹Houston and Smyth, Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement, pp. 8, 29 & 30.

²²Elliot, Irish Migrants in the Canadas, P. 114.

acquaintances. Thus, a large number of the Irish Catholic settlers in the township would have immediately experienced a social and familial environment that was both familiar and comforting. Therefore, the early years of the Township of Hibbert were favourable for Irish Catholic settlement in comparison to most regions of Ontario.

Another reason the conditions were ideal for Irish Catholic settlement in the Township of Hibbert during the 1840s were the financial terms for land acquisition set by the Canada Company after 1842. In that year the company made land very affordable in the Huron Tract by offering ten year leases with no money down with the right to purchase the land outright secured in the contract at a fixed sum.²³ Most of the Irish Catholics who came to the township after 1842 took advantage of these terms, providing those with very little capital the opportunity to acquire land. Since land values in the area were relatively low until the late 1850s,²⁴ most Irish Catholics were able to purchase the title of the lots they originally leased before the ten year contract expired at prices based upon assessments taken before the value of the land increased.²⁵

With these favourable conditions in place, the population of the township increased from one hundred fifty-six residents in the year 1846 to one thousand

²³*Huron Signal*, February 4, 1848.

²⁴Land values began to increase in the late 1850s when most of the lots were occupied and significantly improved.

²⁵Land Assessment Rolls, 1850-1865.

one hundred ninety-one residents in the year 1851,²⁶ representing a population increase of over seven hundred percent in just five years. It was in these same five years that the majority of the Irish Catholic settlers arrived in the township. In fact, until the mid 1850s, the Irish Catholic community accounted for over half of the township's land holders²⁷ and it was not until the 1861 census that their proportion of the population settled at the thirty-five percent level. Therefore, a large proportion of the Irish Catholic families who settled in the township arrived in the five years from 1846 to 1851, the same years as the Great Irish Famine.

Not surprisingly then, the non-Irish population and local newspapers concluded that the Irish settlers of the township were 'famine Irish'.²⁸ In some cases this was certainly accurate, but, as indicated above, several families arrived years before the famine, and many of the Irish Catholic settlers who arrived during the same period and after the famine were actually migrants from other areas of Canada. For example, the Atkinson brothers, James and Patrick, arrived in the township in 1852 and both acquired 100 acre lots.²⁹ Though both were born in County Longford, Ireland, they had moved to Canada with their parents in

²⁶ 1851 Census

²⁷ Land Assessment Rolls, 1856.

²⁸ *Huron Signal*, March 10, 1854. *Mitchell Advocate*, August 24, 1860.

²⁹ Land Assessment Rolls, 1853.

1836 or 1837 when James was seven years old and Patrick was just an infant.³⁰ Their family eventually settled in the Township of Tecumseh, Simcoe County.³¹ Therefore, James and Patrick Atkinson had already spent most of their lives in Canada. Despite this fact, the non-Irish population usually assumed that the Atkinson brothers, and many others similar to them in Hibbert, were 'Famine Irish',

In fact, forty percent of the Irish Catholic settlers in the Township of Hibbert arrived in Canada before the famine.³² Many of them had similar family histories as the Atkinson brothers and, therefore, arrived in the township having already experienced the challenges of pioneer life in rural Canada. This core of early arrivals were an invaluable source of expertise and aid for the rest of the Irish Catholic community. Indeed, individuals such as James and Patrick Atkinson, Arthur and Miles McCann, and Dennis Downey were certainly recognized leaders in the community. James Atkinson was elected to municipal council on several occasions³³, while Arthur McCann and Dennis Downey hosted the earliest Catholic Masses in their Inn.³⁴ Also, Dennis Downey was an agent for

³⁰*Mitchell Advocate*, July 13, 1866.

³¹*Mitchell Advocate*, 1860. Tecumseh, Land Assessment Roles.

³²Of those arrival times identified. 21 of 51 head of households arrived to Canada before the famine migration.

³³*Huron Signal*, January 15, 1858. *Mitchell Advocate*, August 26, 1870.

³⁴*Irish Canadian*, April 19, 1866.

the Canada Company and would have surely been the representative with whom most of the Irish Catholics in the area dealt with to acquire their land in the early years. These individuals, and others like them, formed a leadership core in the Irish Catholic community providing the new arrivals with much needed support and guidance.

Challenges facing the new arrivals to Hibbert would have included the physically arduous tasks of clearing their lots of trees for cultivation and the technical difficulty of building their new log homes. For those families who had not experienced the rigours of pioneer life in North America before arriving in the township these chores would be very daunting. Due to these challenges, the settlers' were generally extremely vulnerable for the first five to eight years on their lots. On average, families only had five to ten acres cleared and under cultivation in the early to mid 1850s.³⁵ For most families this would have been enough for subsistence, but one bad year could prove disastrous. In the early years of settling the township, many pioneering families likely also experienced a strong sense of isolation as the Huron road was often impassable, especially for weeks during the spring thaw, and the township did not have railway service until 1858. And though these Irish Catholic families had the support of each other and their new Irish Catholic neighbours, carving out a home and life for themselves in

³⁵Land Assessment Rolls, 1856.

'the wilds' of North America must have been a very intimidating experience at the best of times.

Fortunately for these Irish Catholic settlers and their neighbours, the quality of farm land in the region was very good. Like most of the land in Perth County, the land in northwest section of the Township of Hibbert, the Irish Catholic region of the township, was very suitable for cultivation with the exception of a few low lots which were very swampy.³⁶ Since the township is in a snow belt, the region receives a large amount of moisture each year³⁷ which made the low lots unsuitable for cultivation and were purchased much later for the purposes of pasture. Regardless, the climate in the area is conducive to agriculture since the summers are usually warm and produce a favourable growing season. These conditions rewarded the hard work of many of the settlers once they were able to clear enough land to cultivate for the market, in addition to food for sustenance.

Relatedly, the completion of the Buffalo & London-Hamilton (B&L. H.) railway in 1858 connected the Township of Hibbert to the port at Goderich and the arrival of the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) in Stratford in 1856 connected the county to Toronto.³⁸ By 1864 the GTR had purchased the struggling B&L. H.

³⁶ Johnston & Johnston, History of Perth County to 1867, p. 287.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 210 and 217. *Stratford Beacon*, September 5, 1856. *Huron Signal*, June 18, 1858.

railway and residents of Hibbert were connected by rail service to all the main agricultural market villages and cities.³⁹ With the arrival of the railway, the village of Carronbrook, Hibbert Township, became an important grain market for the local residents.⁴⁰ These extensive infrastructure improvements combined with the favourable local land quality to produce a very vibrant agricultural market economy in Perth County by the 1860s. In the early 1850s Perth County had actually been described by some newspapers and commentators as a 'rural slum', but in 1863 the county produced more than one million bushels of wheat and had an impressive railway network.⁴¹ Therefore in just one decade Perth County, including the Township of Hibbert, had grown from a struggling pioneering 'slum' into a vibrant rural agricultural economy.

This regional economic development was, obviously, very significant to the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert. After several years of hard work the Irish Catholic settlers in the township found themselves in an improving economic environment. An environment which would prove profitable to the majority of Irish Catholics in the area. Having arrived earlier than most of the Protestant inhabitants of the township (of primarily Scottish and English extraction) many of the Irish Catholic settlers had more land under

³⁹ Johnston & Johnston, Perth County, p.220.

⁴⁰ *Mitchell Advocate*, December 13 and December 20, 1967. Usually advertised the market prices in Carronbrook.

⁴¹ Johnston & Johnston, Perth County, p. 17.

cultivation in the late 1850s when railway service commenced in the county. Still, the level of market activity in the township should not be exaggerated. In 1863, only seventeen of the three hundred farmers in the township owned more than one hundred acres and it was still rare for a family to have more than twenty-five acres cleared.⁴² Most farmers were cultivating only ten to twenty acres. The average family's participation in the market economy was remained in the year 1863, but most farm lots were purchased by that year,⁴³ and the township's production for the market increased on an almost yearly basis. By the 1870s it would not be inaccurate to characterize the local situation as an agricultural market economy.

The development of a market economy in the region, though a modest one, was a crucial factor in the lives of most of the settlers in the Township of Hibbert, including the Irish Catholic community. In terms of the settlers economic well being, the existence of a market economy is an important indicator of financial stability. It is also indicates to historians that the various ethno-cultural communities in the region probably adapted favourably to their new environment. In the case of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert, the 1974 publication, Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation, by John Mannion is instructive. In his

⁴²Land Assessment Roles, 1863.

⁴³Land Assessment Rolls, 1863.

comparison of three Irish communities in nineteenth century Canada, Mannion found, unsurprisingly, that the more dynamic the local economy, the more opportunities it provided for settlers.⁴⁴ Interestingly, Mannion also found that the Irish immigrants that settled in areas where the local economy was dynamic were more willing and capable of adopting new agricultural techniques.⁴⁵ In an environment similar to that of the Township of Hibbert in Peterborough, Ontario, Mannion discovered that the Irish Catholic settlers quickly modified their material culture to the local farming conditions.⁴⁶ In comparison to his findings in the isolated Irish Catholic community in the Avalon Peninsula, Newfoundland, the Peterborough settlers modified their material culture to their new environment quickly and successfully.⁴⁷

In most respects the situation in the Township of Hibbert was congruous to the one in Peterborough and the Irish communities adapted similarly well to their new surroundings. The development of the agricultural market economy created a 'dynamic' environment in the region that allowed many of the Irish Catholic settlers to accomplish economic security, if not to acquire wealth. The fact they were not isolated from the surrounding Protestant community was also

⁴⁴ John Mannion, Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.), p.173.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-171.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* (same as above).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* (same as above).

beneficial in the context of knowledge transferral. For Mannion argued convincingly that Irish communities that were in regular contact with the other ethno-cultural communities were able to learn new and, possibly, more suitable farming techniques.⁴⁸ In this sense the local situation in Hibbert was very favourable for the Irish Catholic community in comparison to many areas in Canada and, in fact, North America.

In summary, the conditions in the Township of Hibbert were relatively favourable for the Irish Catholic settlers in the period from 1845-1887. Affordable high quality land was made available in the area during the same period of time that a large influx of Irish Catholics had arrived in Canada creating opportunities for its settlers.

Now the topic of the Irish Catholics' economic experience in Hibbert Township must be examined. How much land did the Irish Catholic families own? Did they own cattle? Did they participate in the market economy? What kind of businesses did Irish Catholics operate in the community? These and other questions will be addressed while comparing the results to the findings of other studies concerning agricultural communities of the same period in Canada. Highlighting selected statistics from these related studies, combined with the above description of the socioeconomic environment of Ireland in the first half of

⁴⁸Ibid.(same as above).

the nineteenth century provides context for the study of the community in the Township of Hibbert. Also demonstrated is that the goals of the Irish Catholic community in this township were not unique and that the goal of acquiring land was one many Irish immigrants in Canada realized.

Using the 1871 Canadian Census, Professors Darroch and Ornstein found that fifty-eight percent of Irish Protestants heads of households listed 'farmer' as their occupation while forty-four percent of the Irish Catholics listed the same.⁴⁹ In the case of Ontario, where two thirds of the Irish immigrants in Canada settled, forty-eight percent of the Irish Catholic head of households listed farmer as their occupation.⁵⁰ Relatedly, Akenson has estimated that sixty-six percent of the Irish Catholic population in Ontario lived in rural communities.⁵¹

The most obvious feature of the economy in Hibbert was that it was overwhelmingly based on agriculture. As mentioned, seventy-five percent of the heads of households in the 1871 Census listed farmer as their occupation. In the case of the Irish Catholic population in the township, seventy-five percent did the same. Hence, a description of the economic experience of the Irish Catholic community in Hibbert must start with a description and analysis of the life on the family farm.

⁴⁹Darroch and Ornstein, "Ethnicity and Occupational Structures in Canada in 1871," pp.311-312.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 323.

⁵¹ Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish," p. 111.

In terms of the economic success of the Irish Catholic population on the farms in the Township of Hibbert, most families achieved a modest living. This achievement however, was the result of an arduous existence, especially in the early years of settlement. Most Irish Catholic families in the township arrived in the period from 1845 to 1855.⁵² Since this was a pioneering community in the mid nineteenth century, the families' immediate challenge was clearing their farm of trees and building a log cabin. With the combination of long hours and help from their neighbours and family, most Irish Catholics farmers in the township were quickly established on their new farms. One indication that the Irish Catholic settlers were adequately established on the land in the township was the low level of outward migration among land holders. Of the Irish Catholic settlers that acquired land before the year 1860, less than fifteen percent of them sold all of their land in the township before the 1871 Census.⁵³ The majority of the Irish Catholic families listed in the 1871 census were therefore long term residents of the township.

The situation described above was probably not the common experience for Irish Catholic settlers in nineteenth century Ontario. Mainly because it appears to have been unusual for Irish Catholics to have settled in such large numbers on good quality farm land in Ontario. One clear example of how

⁵²Land Assessment Roles, 1855-1865. Census 1851 and 1861.

⁵³Land Assessment Rolls, 1850-1871. 1871 Census.

precarious the situation for Irish Catholic settlers could be in nineteenth century Ontario can be found in Peel County. David Gagan's study of Peel settlers uncovered that Catholic settlers, mostly Irish and Scottish, were more likely to emigrate out of the region than Protestant settlers.⁵⁴ Gagan argues that this was partly due to cultural intimidation exerted, implicitly or overtly, by the Protestant majority.⁵⁵ The Township of Hibbert was, therefore, unique demographically providing the Irish Catholic settlers in the region with unusually favourable conditions in which to develop a community.

(Another obvious feature of the Irish Catholic farms in the Township of Hibbert was their modest size. Most Irish Catholic pioneers acquired fifty to one hundred acres from the Canada Company or land speculators and never purchased more during the entire period of this study. Of the one hundred-forty Irish Catholic land holders that this study has been able to identify in the years 1845-87, thirty-four percent owned fifty acres, another thirty-five percent owned one hundred acres, and eighteen percent eventually acquired more than one hundred acres (See Appendix C).⁵⁶ There are two important points related to these numbers. First, over eighty-eight percent of the Irish Catholic farmers

⁵⁴David Gagan, Hopeful Travellers: families land, and social change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 120.

⁵⁵Ibid(same as above)

⁵⁶Land Assessment Rolls, 1850-1887.

identified in this study owned the land they farmed.⁵⁷ Though this number may be artificially inflated since ownership records are more available than private leasing agreements, the large proportion of ownership indicates that many Irish Catholic families in the Township of Hibbert achieved a moderate level of economic prosperity; a living that afforded them economic stability if not wealth.

In the pursuit of land, Irish Catholic settlers in the township were very successful. This high rate of ownership was a source of pride for the community.⁵⁸ As discussed, their experience in Ireland had taught them that land ownership was a means of achieving stability and, possibly, prosperity. The main goal of most Irish immigrants was therefor to acquire land for themselves and, in the future, for their sons. Professor Elliot has estimated that only one in seven (14%) of the Tipperary Irish Protestant immigrants he studied were successful in acquiring land for all of their sons in Peel County.⁵⁹ In the case of the Township of Hibbert, less than five percent of the original settlers identified provided land for all of their sons.⁶⁰ One reason this percentage was significantly lower than the numbers tabulated by Professor Elliot was the fact that the Township of Hibbert was settled later than the period of his study. Therefore, as farming became more

⁵⁷Ibid.(same as above).

⁵⁸Often mentioned in public addresses at community celebrations including St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

⁵⁹Elliot, Irish Migrants in the Canada, p. 213.

⁶⁰Land Assessment Rolls, 1870-1887.

commercial and mechanized in the second half of the nineteenth century, the size of farms increased while the numbers of owners-occupiers decreased and trends towards urbanization had started to accelerate in Ontario. Once the territory progressed beyond the pioneer stage into a market economy, the number of settlers in the region began to decline.⁶¹ The western territories of Canada and United States were also opening to settlement in the late nineteenth century attracting thousands of migrants from Ontario. Therefore, the population of the township actually began to decrease steadily from the 1870s until the 1940s.⁶² This same pattern had developed in Peel County a decade earlier.⁶³ This serves as an indication that the number of opportunities for the original settlers' children in the township diminished in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

In some respects the case of the Hastings family was quite similar to the experience of their Irish Catholic compatriots in the township. The four Hastings siblings -John, William, Hanora and Mary- emigrated from Limerick, Ireland, in the late 1840s and settled in the Township of Hibbert by 1855.⁶⁴ First, William Hastings purchased one hundred acres in concession six of the township. Then one year later, 1856, William sold fifty acres of the lot to his brother John. Both

⁶¹Ibid(same as above).

⁶²Canadian Census, 1871-1941.

⁶³Gagan, Hopeful Travellers, pp. 45, 94 &95.

⁶⁴Land Assessment Rolls, 1856. 1871 Census. *Mitchell Advocate*, 1860.

brothers were married and raised their families on these farms.⁶⁵ Over time both of the brothers increased the size of their farms by purchasing more land in the area. In 1862 John Hastings bought one hundred-fifty acres from Peter Donnally, also an Irish Catholic, in concession seven and five years later William bought an one hundred acre lot neighbouring his brother's.⁶⁶ Then in 1877 William bought another fifty acres from his Irish Catholic neighbour in concession six, James Friel, while John purchased the other fifty acres of the Friel lot in the 1890s.⁶⁷ Though the Hastings brothers owned more land than most families in the township, their central familial economic strategy paralleled that of most Irish immigrants; the acquisition of land.

The land the families acquired in the township allowed the two Hastings brothers to raise large families in the area. William married Mary Dillon and raised three daughters and two sons.⁶⁸ John married Margaret Waters and raised five sons and one daughter.⁶⁹ Even though both of these families owned more land than most of their neighbours, neither family could acquire enough land for all of their sons. William and Mary Hastings' farm was acquired by their son-in-

⁶⁵1871 Census.

⁶⁶Land Assessment Rolls, 1862 and 1867.

⁶⁷Ibid. 1877 and 1892.

⁶⁸1871 Census.

⁶⁹1871 Census.

law, Miles McMillan.⁷⁰ Both of their sons moved west before the parents passed away in the early 1900s.⁷¹ John and Margaret Hastings' two hundred-fifty acre farm was divided between two of their sons, James and William, and a son-in-law, Thomas Connolly.⁷² Two of their sons also moved west, including John who moved to California.⁷³ Therefore, even the relatively prosperous Hastings' brothers with their larger farms could not provide land for all of their sons.

Though most farmers in the community were not able to provide land for all of their children, the development of a commercial agricultural market in the region allowed many of them to assist their children financially in their future endeavours. At first, the commercial activity in the region was virtually non-existent. The average farm had only between five and ten acres under cultivation in the 1850s and transportation was extremely difficult until the railway arrived in the township in 1858.⁷⁴ But by the early 1860s a vibrant commercial agricultural economy began to emerge in the township. In 1863, for instance, one million bushels of wheat was harvested in Perth County.⁷⁵ This appreciated the value of

⁷⁰1901 Census. Land Assessment Rolls.

⁷¹*Stratford Herald*, April 10, 1903.

⁷²Land Assessment Rolls, 1900, 1901 Census.

⁷³*Mitchell Advocate*, September 29, 1876.

⁷⁴Johnston & Johnston, Perth County, P. 207

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.

the farms in the county and provided a greater incentive to continue clearing land to increase improve production. The development of the market economy continued to progress during this period creating the opportunity for many farming families in the Township of Hibbert to modestly assist in their children's future away from the family homestead in a modest fashion. In many cases, similar to the Hastings, this involved financially assisting the family's eldest sons departure west in search of their own land.⁷⁶ In other circumstances the family was able to provide an education or a trade for their children. In one exceptional case, John Prendergast had one son become a doctor, two sons who became dentists, another son was a school principal, and a daughter who was a school teacher.⁷⁷ But, despite the economic growth in the community, most families could not offer a secure future for their children locally. Therefore, many of the sons and daughters of these Irish Catholics settlers continued the family economic tradition of migration.)

A related measure of wealth or economic stability for a nineteenth century Canadian agricultural community was ownership of livestock. Cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry provided farming families with needed nourishment, and, in the case of larger farms, extra income from the sale of their livestock. American studies

⁷⁶Local papers including *Stratford Beacon*, *Huron Signal* and *Mitchell Advocate* often reported the departure of residents to the western settlements and advertised opportunities in western Canada in the 1870s and 1880s.

⁷⁷1871, 1881 & 1891 Census.

have estimated that a family of six required twenty acres of improved land and a small number of livestock -six cows, a few sheep or pigs and chickens- to be considered self-reliant.⁷⁸ The Irish Catholic farmers in the Township of Hibbert were quite comfortable by the 1860s according to this criteria. In addition to the increase in the number in the number of acres improved, the level of livestock ownership increased steadily throughout this period. By the 1860s many Irish Catholics exceeded the above criteria and in 1871 the average was even higher.⁷⁹ In 1871 the average Irish Catholic farm had twenty-two sheep, sixteen pigs, eleven cows and two horses. Though this average is inflated by a few families who were attempting to develop large scale cattle farms, most Irish Catholic farms exceeded this minimum criteria by the 1871 census which indicates a situation of economic security if not wealth.

In comparison to their Protestant neighbours, the Irish Catholic farming community had slightly less invested in livestock.⁸⁰ But the higher level of livestock ownership in the Protestant community was again significantly inflated by a few large scale owners.⁸¹ These large cattle farms were owned primarily by

⁷⁸In Wilson, *A New Lease on Life...* p. 189.

⁷⁹1871 Census.

⁸⁰1871 Census.

⁸¹Land Assessment Rolls, 1870 & 1875.

individuals that were wealthy before settling in the township.⁸² A situation that the majority of the settlers obviously did not enjoy. For this reason it was mostly the second generation of Irish Catholic farmers in the township that began to aggressively invest in cattle. With only a few exceptions, such as John McConnell's sons, John, David and Frank who became large scale cattle ranchers before the late 1880s⁸³, most Irish Catholic farmers modestly increased their herds during the period of this study. Though the increases in terms of livestock ownership were usually modest, most Irish Catholic farming families achieved levels of ownership that indicate viable mixed farming operations. This accomplishment of mixed farms indicate economic stability and in some situations wealth accumulation. not significantly lower than their Protestant neighbours.

Another important area of economic activity in the township for the Irish Catholic community was business. It has been noted by several historians that the most successful and secure settlers in rural Ontario in the nineteenth century combined various commercial enterprises with their agricultural activities.⁸⁴ In the early period of settling a recently opened pioneering region this usually included the operation of Inns, taverns, and stores providing the new arrivals with

⁸²Land Assessment Rolls, 1855-1871. 1871 Census.

⁸³1891 Census. Assessment Rolls, 1887-1890.

⁸⁴Elliot, Irish Migrants in the Canadas, p. 219. Wilson, A New Lease on Life, p. 185.

needed accommodations, food and drink, and supplies. As the township's population expanded, increased commercial activity developed, and farm production increased, local investment in various businesses multiplied and diversified to meet the demands of the local consumers. Grist mills opened. Butchers, blacksmiths, and tailors became a part of the local business community. The Irish Catholic population in the Township of Hibbert was intimately involved with the expansion of local investment.

It has been thoroughly documented by Clarke and McGowan in their studies of Toronto that there were many Irish Catholic small business owners that served their compatriots in the various neighbourhoods. Tavern owners, hotelkeepers, and storekeepers provided the local Irish Catholic community with supplies, and, just as importantly, with a welcoming social environment.⁸⁵ The business activity of the Irish Catholic population in the Township of Hibbert was initially paralleled the above description of Toronto. The first tavern and in the township opened as early as 1835 by the Irish Catholic settler Dennis Downey, and, soon after, purchased by his compatriot, Arthur McCann.⁸⁶ Then as settlers arrived in the northwest corner of the township a small business centre developed in the village of Carronbrook. Carronbrook soon emerged as the business centre of the Irish Catholic population in the township.

⁸⁵ Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p.21.

⁸⁶ 1839 Land Assessment Rolls.

In Carronbrook the majority of the businesses were owned by Irish Catholics. In the 1870s there were seven hotels and taverns in the village of which five were owned by Irish Catholic proprietors.⁸⁷ All three general stores, two blacksmith shops, the shoemaker shop, all three sawmills, the cooperage, the grist mill, the livery stable, the tailor shop, and the harness shop were also owned by Irish Catholics.⁸⁸ In terms of wealth accumulation, no business owner in the area was more successful than Joseph Kidd who was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1825 and immigrated to Canada with his parents and siblings in 1844.⁸⁹ The family eventually settled in Simcoe County where Joseph established himself as mercantile merchant and community leader. In the 1850s Joseph followed his brother, John, to Carronbrook and immediately opened a general store.⁹⁰ He soon built an impressive business empire in the village by combining the expansion of his general store with the opening of sawmills, a cooperage, and, on July 1, 1868, the 'Joseph Kidd & Sons Salt Works'.⁹¹ The salt works was advertised as the largest salt producer in the Dominion at two hundred barrels per day.⁹² These

⁸⁷ 1871 Census. Land Assessment Rolls.

⁸⁸ 1871 Census. Assessment Roles. *Perth County Gazetteer*, 1873.

⁸⁹ *Mitchell Advocate*, July 17, 1868.

⁹⁰ Assessment Rolls, 1855-61.

⁹¹ *Mitchell Advocate*, July 17, 1868, *Perth County Gazetteer*, 1863-4 & 1873.

⁹² *Mitchell Advocate*, November 22, 1872.

operations combined to make Joseph Kidd the largest employer in the township with a payroll of over fifty people at its peak in the 1870s.⁹³ Indeed, many of Hibbert's business leaders were Irish Catholic individuals centred in the village of Carronbrook.

It is true that demographic and settlement patterns partially explain the concentration of Irish Catholic proprietors in Carronbrook. The northwest corner of the township was overwhelmingly Irish Catholic making Carronbrook the main commercial and service village of that population. Therefore in the Township of Hibbert the early arrival and settlement patterns of the Irish Catholic population worked in their favour in terms of the commercial and business activity of the community. It is also likely, however, that the Irish Catholic population preferred patronizing the businesses of their compatriots. The predominately Protestant villages of Cromarty and Staffa never achieved the same amount of commercial activity as Carronbrook.⁹⁴ This was due mainly to the location of the villages. Carronbrook was located on the GTR railway line and the Huron Road providing it with unmistakable transportation advantages. These transportation advantages provided the proprietors of Carronbrook with the head start of operating in the commercial hub of the township. This was a situation that benefited several individuals, especially Joseph Kidd, substantially.

⁹³*Perth County Gazetteer, 1873.*

⁹⁴Newspapers and Perth County Gazetteer identified Carronbrook as the township's economic centre.

The story of Joseph Kidd was certainly exceptional. Most proprietors in the township had modest sized businesses often in addition to their farming operations. The stories of Felix Gallagher and Cornelius Prendergast are more representative of the community at large. Both men came to the township in the early years of its settlement and purchased farm land. Felix Gallagher, in 1847, was one of the first settlers in the township to have purchases his ownership deed for his one hundred acre lot.⁹⁵ Sometime soon after the arrival of the railway line in 1858, with the capital he received from the sale of his farm, he was thus able to purchase the Railway Hotel.⁹⁶ Since his lot was probably one the most improved in the region, its value in the late 1850s would have been higher than the usual selling price of twelve to fifteen dollars per acre for a farm in the Township of Hibbert at this time.⁹⁷ When Felix died in the late 1860s his widow, Mary, was able to earn a respectable income from the hotel. She later sold it, in 1875, to John McConnell Sr., another Irish Catholic resident who was the deputy-reeve of the township between 1874-75.⁹⁸

In another case, Cornelius Prendergast opened the Dominion Hotel in the

⁹⁵ 1847 Assessment Rolls.

⁹⁶ 1859 Assessment Roles. *Perth County Gazetteer*, 1863-4.

⁹⁷ Assessment Rolls, 1855-60. Advertisements in newspapers.

⁹⁸ Assessment Rolls. 1870-75.

early 1850s.⁹⁹ Unlike Felix Gallagher, he did not purchase farm land in the township until after the hotel was already operational. In 1857 he purchased fifty acres from his brother, John, and the two operated the farm in partnership for many years.¹⁰⁰ In 1879 Cornelius built a three storey brick hotel and operated it in the village until he sold it in 1898.¹⁰¹ In both situations these newcomers were able to parlay their small agricultural holdings into a commercial enterprise in Carronbrook to earn a modest, but stable, living - an accomplishment that would have made any immigrant family feel rightly proud.

Many Irish Catholics in the community subsidized their farming incomes with work as tradesmen, professionals or labourers. One example of this was Thomas Ryan. Thomas continued to assist his parents on the family farm while working as a shoemaker -usually at Cornelius Friel's, and Irish Catholic, shop in Carronbrook- until he inherited the land around 1880.¹⁰² He became an important community leader for the Irish Catholic community and, eventually, for the entire township when he was elected the Reeve of the Township of Hibbert and the Perth County Warden in the 1890s.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ 1853 Assessment Rolls.

¹⁰⁰ 1859 Assessment Rolls.

¹⁰¹ Advertisements in *Mitchell Advocate*, *Stratford Beacon-Herald*, *St. Mary's Argus*. 1898 Assessment Rolls.

¹⁰² 1871 and 1881 Census. 1880 Assessment Roles. *Perth County Gazetteer*, 1873.

¹⁰³ *Stratford Herald*, October 11, 1895.

James Conlogne worked as a carpenter in the area while farming a fifty acre lot that he received from his father-in-law, John Crowe.¹⁰⁴ Though James did not achieve the same level of prestige as Thomas Ryan, it appears that this combination of carpentry and farming was able to provide adequately for the Conlogne family. This brief account of the Conlogne family is the more representative example of local families. There were thirty-one heads of households in the 1871 Census that listed a trade, profession, or labourer as their occupation. In the case of the thirty-one men in the 1871 Census records that listed their occupations in these categories, nine also owned farm land. Some of the twenty-two individuals in these categories that did not own land also had occupations that were lucrative enough on their own: Timothy Carroll was the GTR railway agent, Henry Smith was a section foreman for the railway, Daniel King was the community physician, Cornelius Kennedy was a blacksmith and William Dunne combined school teaching with work as the township's town clerk.¹⁰⁵ Though the landless five women and three men listed as labourers probably endured very precarious lives, these individuals represented the exception in the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert. Also, Irish Catholic heads of households were not disproportionately dependent on wage labour for income. In the 1871 Census only 7.8% (15 of 193) of the Irish

¹⁰⁴ 1871 and 1881 Census. Assessment Rolls, 1880-1885.

¹⁰⁵ 1871 Census.

Catholic head of households were labourers while 7.7%(35 of 451) of the Protestant head of households were the same. Therefore -as the above numbers and examples attest- the Irish Catholic community was certainly not an impoverished, second-class minority in the Township of Hibbert.

Another reason that the Irish Catholic community in the township experienced greater economic stability in comparison to some other areas of Canada, was their prominent position in the local political scene. Since there were always Irish Catholic representatives in the township council, many of the appointments and contracts offered by the government went to Irish Catholics. Positions such as liqueur license issuer, town clerk and assessor did not have large salaries, yet the additional income from these part-time positions were a definite asset. In the 1860s an assessor earned sixty-eight dollars, the town clerk one hundred dollars while a license issuer earned three dollars per license issued.¹⁰⁶ In addition to these positions there was always work being contracted out by the council. Local residents were retained, for example, to maintain and build roads and bridges.¹⁰⁷ They were often paid for providing the township with building materials and gravel as well.¹⁰⁸ There was tenders offered for larger infrastructure projects that were sometimes awarded to members of the Irish

¹⁰⁶*Mitchell Advocate*. March 29. 1866.

¹⁰⁷*Survey of the Township Council Minutes*. 1853-1887.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid*(same as above).

Catholic community.¹⁰⁹ It was not unusual for individuals to receive payments totalling hundreds of dollars over a year from the council for various services.¹¹⁰ Clearly, the Irish Catholics of the township benefited from their representation on the council.

The local Irish Catholic business community also benefited from the patronage of the local council. The council attempted to purchase their materials for local infrastructure improvements from Catholics and Protestants equally. However, Irish Catholic proprietors often received more business from the council since the stores of Joseph Kidd and Thomas King were the largest in the township.¹¹¹ It probably did not hurt these store owners that Thomas King was the reeve of the township for many years while Joseph Kidd's wealth made him a very influential man in the area.

In summary then, many Irish Catholics were members of the local business and political establishment ensuring they received patronage placements and favours from their local government. The Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert were then not an impoverished, vulnerable minority group. Since the land in this area of Ontario was not settled in large numbers until the 1840s, a disproportionately large number of Irish Catholics migrated to the

¹⁰⁹Ibid(same as above)

¹¹⁰Ibid(same as above)

¹¹¹*Perth County Gazetteer*, 1863-4 and 1873.

township, Irish Catholics arrived, in general, earlier than their Protestant neighbours allowing them to purchase land of good quality near the major transportation arteries of the Huron Road and, later, the GTR railway. This all combined to create a local environment, described above, that permitted Irish Catholic families in the township to achieve the security they sought after. This security allowed the Irish Catholic community in this township to mature into confident and active members of the wider society, an accomplishment that will be assessed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Political Activism

The economic security and success discussed in the preceding chapter was intimately related to the Irish Catholic community's public activism in the Township of Hibbert. For, the same socioeconomic factors that allowed the Irish Catholic population to participate successfully in the local agricultural economy also informed their political and social experience in the township. The combination of their early settlement in the area, their geographically advantageous location in the northwest corner of the township, and their large numbers ensured that this Irish Catholic community was very active and influential in local affairs. In fact, similar to their economic experience, many Irish Catholic individuals were members of the local political establishment. In the following discussion it will be therefore argued and demonstrated that these factors contributed to the Irish Catholic community's sense of security and confidence in the Township of Hibbert; a confidence that encouraged Irish Catholic participation and leadership in local affairs.

To initiate this examination of the Irish Catholic population's involvement in local affairs their portrayal in the local press will first be evaluated. The evolution of the local newspaper's coverage of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert during this period highlights or magnifies their

accomplishment in local affairs. The local press gradually and, in many cases, grudgingly recognized the Irish Catholic population in the Township of Hibbert as respectable members of a successful community, an accomplishment that has been perceived as unusual in Canada.) This positive portrayal, in itself, indicates the importance of the Irish Catholic community to the local economic and political situation.

The eventual respect, if not complete acceptance, of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was certainly not immediately extended from the region's Protestant-dominated press.¹ In the early years of settlement in the township, the press portrayed the Irish Catholic population as lazy, immoral, drunkards that threatened the ability of the local establishment to create a respectable community for good, hard working (i.e. Protestant) families.² The press in the region basically echoed the sentiments of the *Globe* and other influential tribunes in the colony that associated Irish Catholics with disease, poverty, immorality and 'Papal Aggression'.³ The papers also often published 'actual' Irish Catholic authored stories or letters that portrayed them as simple-

¹Local newspapers were from neighbouring villages and townships since no Hibbert newspaper before the 1920s had been archived.

²The *Huron Expositor*, *Huron Signal*, *Mitchell Advocate*, *Stratford Weekly Beacon* all published racist stories concerning Irish Catholics.

³Cited in McGowan, Waning of the Green, p. 17.

mindful buffoons.⁴ These caricatures were also usually extended into the newspapers description of the Irish Catholic population in the Township of Hibbert.

Therefore, the early press coverage of the Irish Catholic settlers in the Township of Hibbert was very negative and prejudiced. One common example of this was the area newspapers' analysis of the Irish Catholic population's use of communal labour to improve their farms. They depicted the Irish Catholic population's use of communal labour to build their farm buildings or clear land as acts that encouraged laziness and immorality.⁵ There never was an explanation in these papers why the use of communal labour on Protestant farms did not have the same dangerous moral consequences. The papers also stressed reports of excessive consumption of alcohol by Irish Catholic settlers.⁶ In short, the Irish Catholic population was labelled with all the usual deleterious ethno-centric generalizations of the era.

Interestingly, the local papers gradually began to express a conditional respect for the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert. This respect was conditional in the sense that it was based upon the social and

⁴*Mitchell Advocate*, June 8 & June 20, 1860. A section of the newspaper was called "An Irishman's Answer" which reported 'typical' conversations Protestant people had with Irishmen. The was Irishmen always portrayed as the inferior person both morally and intellectually.

⁵*Mitchell Advocate*, November 20, 1860. *Huron Signal*, September 14, 1855. *Stratford Weekly Times*, April 24, 1862.

⁶*Mitchell Advocate*, November 20, 1860. January 11, 1861.

economic success of the Irish Catholic community. Essentially, the local press could not ignore the success of the local Irish Catholic community nor the importance of Irish Catholic individuals such as Joseph Kidd and Thomas King.⁷ Likewise, local politicians also could not ignore the demographic reality that one third of the voters in the township were Irish Catholic. In consideration of this reality, the politicians and their press organs actually attempted to create a positive image of themselves in the Irish Catholic community. For instance, the Tory campaign strategy in the township was to stress the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish rhetoric of George Brown and other grit leaders.⁸ Basically, the socioeconomic situation in the Township of Hibbert forced the local Protestant press to acknowledge the accomplishments of their Irish Catholic neighbours. Accomplishments that disproved the racist caricatures of Irish Catholics.

Despite acknowledgements by the local press of the accomplishments of Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert, they continued to publish insulting and racist stories concerning Irish Catholics in their papers. Local writers basically considered the Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert to be the exception to the rule. This is not surprising considering the media representation

⁷The local press, especially the *Mitchell Advocate and Stratford Weekly Herald* praised the accomplishments of Thomas King and Joseph Kidd. This became especially common by the late 1860s. *Mitchell Advocate*, April 15, 1867. Expresses its disappointment that the Grits did not nominate Joseph Kidd as their nominee for Perth County South Riding. Editorial comments such as this became common

⁸*Mitchell Advocate*, April 15, 1867.

of Irish Catholics in the English-speaking world.⁹ The colonial press was dominated by English and Scottish Protestants who were certainly socialized in the Old World and New World to distrust Irish Catholicism. The situation in the Township of Hibbert therefore could not be considered anything but the exception to the rule by the Protestant population.

In a fascinating example of simplistic and convenient deduction, the Protestant population, through their media, began to express the belief that they were responsible for the Irish Catholic community's accomplishments.¹⁰ They could not accept that such Protestant ideals as hard work and ambition could be attributed to Irish Catholics without their positive influence. This was a common Protestant interpretation of Irish Catholic society. Protestant commentators, with self-serving bias, often anglicized the positive features of Irish Catholic society while blaming their Gaelic and Catholic heritage for their failures.¹¹ In this context, it was easy for the local press to consider the success of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert as a strange and wonderful accomplishment. An accomplishment that the local press was anxious to explain in a manner flattering to Protestants.

⁹David Cairns, Writing Ireland: colonialism, nationalism and culture. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p. 2 and 28. Especially common in the *Mitchell Advocate*. The topic was more commonly discussed in this weekly given the close proximity of the village of Mitchell to Hibbert Township and the village of Carronbrook.

¹⁰*Huron Expositor*, September 9, 1864. *Mitchell Advocate*, May 29, 1868.

¹¹Cairns, Writing Ireland. P. 24 and 79.

The success of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was most evident to the area residents in public affairs; notably in local politics. The combination of the Irish Catholics early arrival, economic success, and large numbers in the township ensured that there were always representatives from the community on local councils and boards. These representatives gave the Irish Catholic community not only a voice in local affairs, but effective power, a power that the leaders of the Irish Catholic community used to ensure that their brethren received their share of local government services, finances and patronage. This was a situation that was certainly vastly different than the traditional description of most Irish Catholic communities in Canada.

To begin the evaluation of Irish Catholic participation in local affairs of the Township of Hibbert the municipal council will be discussed. From its inception in 1847 it was made up of five representatives elected in geographical wards.¹² The concentration of the Irish Catholic population in the northwest corner of the township gave the community a majority in two wards.¹³ These two wards consistently elected Irish Catholic councillors throughout this period.¹⁴ After the annual election the council would select a Reeve and Deputy-Reeve. The township council usually elected an Irish Catholic member to one of these

¹²*Huron Signal*, February 25, 1848.

¹³Land Assessment Records, 1850-1887. 1871 Census, Township Council Minutes 1853-1887.

¹⁴Council Minutes, 1853-1887

two offices.¹⁵ Politically it was probably an acknowledgement of the demographics of the township. Catholics were approximately forty percent of the township's population in the early years and were never lower than thirty-five percent throughout the period of this study.¹⁶ The sharing of the offices was also a recognition of the geographic settlement patterns in the township. The concerns and interests of the township's residents were often differentiated in terms of a north-south perception.¹⁷ The northern half of the township had the advantage of being closer to the main transportation links and included the economic and market centre of the township, Carronbrook. This created a situation that often shaped political alliances in the township's politics and one of the accommodations reached was to always have a representative from the northern and the southern sections selected for the two leadership offices on the council.¹⁸ The north-south geographic accommodation combined with the apparent ethno-religious agreement to ensure that a member of the Irish Catholic community was always either the Reeve or Deputy-Reeve in the Township of Hibbert.

This was significant both symbolically and politically for the Irish Catholic community. Symbolically it was a public expression of their importance

¹⁵Ibid(same as above)

¹⁶1851 Census, 1861 Census, and 1871 Census

¹⁷*Mitchell Advocate*, October 21, 1864. *Stratford Weekly Times*, June 29, 1887.

¹⁸*Mitchell Advocate*, October 21, 1864.

to the township. It was considered a public recognition of the entire community's involvement and leadership in the development of the township from the inception of its settlement. Politically, it gave the Irish Catholic population a voice and role in local affairs. For, in addition to the constant Irish Catholic representation on the council, the community always had a representative in the two leadership offices. This provided the Irish Catholic population in the Township of Hibbert access to local leadership that most Irish Catholics in Canada did not enjoy.

This access to electoral office also created local leaders whose influence transcended ethno-religious barriers. Though it remained imperative to have a shared balance of power between Catholics and Protestants on the council, the success and popularity of Thomas King was an example of an individual who enjoyed the confidence of the residents of the township regardless of their ethno-religious heritage. Thomas King earned the respect of the entire population of the township and was the Reeve from 1868 to 1873.¹⁹ (Even the local Protestant press praised Thomas King for his ethical leadership and loyalty to the crown.²⁰) In King's case, his experience and seniority in local politics also allowed him to extend his influence into county politics. He was elected deputy-warden by the Perth County Council in 1873 and he was always an important individual during

¹⁹Council Minutes, 1868-73.

²⁰*Mitchell Advocate*, May 29, 1868.

provincial and federal elections.²¹ Afterwards he became the mayor of the growing village of Carronbrook and remained influential in local affairs until he moved to California in the late 1880s.²²

Thomas King's political career was just one example of Irish Catholic influence in the Township of Hibbert. Other Irish Catholic individuals such as John Carroll, James Atkinson and Findlay McCormick served as councillors for many years during this period and each held the office of Reeve or Deputy-Reeve on several sessions.²³ What these individuals, and the many other Irish Catholic residents who served as councillors, held in common with Thomas King was their economic success. Generally, the Irish Catholic citizens who held elected offices in the township council were successful farmers or business proprietors²⁴ and combined their mercantile interests with their farming enterprises to accomplish a modest level of wealth: John Carroll owned a hotel in the 1860s,²⁵ James Atkinson was a very successful farmer in the township owning three hundred-fifty acres of land²⁶ while Thomas King was a wealthy store owner, insurance agent

²¹*Council Minutes*. February 1873.

²²*Mitchell Advocate*. December 11, 1868. January 15, 1869. *Stratford Weekly Herald*, March 21, 1874. *Seaforth Expositor*, August 1887.

²³*Council Minutes*, 1853- 87.

²⁴*Council Minutes*, 1853-87. 1871 Census. *Perth County Gazetteer*, 1863-4 and 1878-79.

²⁵*Perth County Gazetteer* 1863-4, p. 23.

²⁶1871 Census. Assessment Roles 1860-1885.

and land owner in Carronbrook.²⁷ In most cases, the political leaders of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert were relatively wealthy in comparison to the average citizen.

Interestingly, the local Protestant newspapers' evaluation of the Township of Hibbert's Irish Catholic political leadership was often influenced by the economic wealth of the individual. One of the reasons that Thomas King was universally respected in the press and the community was his obvious business success. Thomas King's wealth was proof to the Protestant community that he was not a 'typical' Irishman. Similarly, the *Mitchell Advocate* and *Seaforth Huron Expositor* often publically encouraged Joseph Kidd, the wealthiest resident in the Township of Hibbert, to consider a political career.²⁸ The *Mitchell Advocate*, a conservative newspaper, actually criticized the Grits when they did not nominate Joseph Kidd as their South Perth County candidate in 1867.²⁹

The Protestant newspapers' coverage of Joseph Kidd and Thomas King was in sharp contrast to the coverage of another Irish Catholic councillor, John Carroll. Especially the *Mitchell Advocate* accused John Carroll, who served as reeve of the township for several years in the 1860s, of voter manipulation and

²⁷ 1871 Census, Perth County Gazetteer, 1878-79.

²⁸ *Mitchell Advocate*, April 15, 1867. *Seaforth Huron Expositor*, April 22, 1867.

²⁹ *Mitchell Advocate*, July 10, 1867.

corruption.³⁰ Further, the newspapers published accusations that John Carroll illegally sold alcohol at his home in Irishtown.³¹ Though these accusations and rumours were probably partially accurate, the often vicious coverage of John Carroll was partisan. The newspapers' explanations for John Carroll's activities were typical of the era. Essentially, the newspapers' account of John Carroll's activities employed the usual generalizations of an Irish Catholic individual; conniving, immoral, and 'shifty'. John Carroll was an important Grit organizer in the Township of Hibbert while the *Mitchell Advocate* was a staunchly conservative newspaper. Therefore, the *Advocate's* partisan ambitions also influenced its coverage of John Carroll. Nevertheless, the *Advocate's* characterization of the alleged activities of John Carroll were viciously anti-Irish Catholic.

Despite the tone of the local Protestant newspapers, the political activism of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert cannot be disputed. Even in the formative years of the township when the press was its most hostile towards the Irish Catholic community, the political power held by Irish Catholic individuals was considerable in comparison to most Canadian districts. In the 1850s and early 1860s Irish Catholics often held three of the five township council seats when the community's proportion of the population was still over

³⁰*Mitchell Advocate*, January 10, 1862. July 4, 1862. January 22, 1864.

³¹*Mitchell Advocate*, March 21, 1862.

forty percent.³² This provided the Irish Catholic community in the township with direct access to the local government.

The access that the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert had to local government and leaders was crucial to its collective experience. For not only did the socioeconomic conditions in the township create opportunities for individuals such as Thomas King, Joseph Kidd, and John Carroll to become successful and powerful local leaders, (the socioeconomic conditions allowed the entire community to have access to local public institutions.) This was most evident in relation to patronage, public work contracts, and public social assistance.) In the Township of Hibbert, the Irish Catholic community was not treated nor considered by the local government as second class citizens. Hence, the collective experience of the Irish Catholic community was relatively positive and successful in comparison to many other districts in Canada.

As outlined in the proceeding chapter, the greatest financial impact of the Irish Catholic community's access to local political power was in the area of government public works contracts. Dozens of local residents earned additional income every year by providing labour, services and materials for the township.³³

The building and maintenance of roads was labour and material intensive

³²Council Minutes, 1853-1870. Census 1851 and 1861.

³³Council Minutes, 1853-1887. *Mitchell Advocate*, December 6, 1867. January 8, 1869. January 20, 1871. February 25,

providing opportunities for local residents to subsidize their family income with part-time work. (Local residents also provided the township with gravel for the roads and timber for public buildings, especially schools.³⁴ In some cases individuals were paid hundreds of dollars a year for the services and materials they provided for the township.³⁵

Since most Irish Catholic families were settled in the northwestern corner of the township near the major transportation links of the area they held a geographic advantage in terms of receiving public work contracts. It was simply easier and more financially viable for residents near the public infrastructure to be available for the work since it was usually only part-time and irregular. Also, Irish Catholics were very well represented in the mercantile class of the township. No proprietors in the township received more supply orders from the township council than Joseph Kidd and Thomas King.³⁶ Since these two individuals owned the largest general stores and commercial enterprises in the township they were often the only proprietors in the area who could provide the council with the supplies they requested. Thus, with meaningful Irish Catholic representation in the township council there was a significant financial impact on the community in terms of access to public works contracts.

³⁴Ibid.(same as above)

³⁵Ibid(Same as above)

³⁶Township Council Minutes, 1853-1887.

Dispersing public works contracts also enhanced the prestige of local councillors and politicians. The importance of this for Irish Catholics was that it allowed many individuals to exercise authority outside the auspices of the Catholic Church. This is significant in relation to Catholic Irish studies in Canada since it has been documented in the literature that lay Irish Catholics often relied upon Church societies for leadership opportunities.³⁷ In Toronto, for instance, the only means for Irish Catholic individuals to exercise decision making power was usually to join the various Catholic Church charitable and devotional organizations.³⁸ But in the Township of Hibbert, the Irish Catholic community's access to local government allowed individuals such as Thomas King and John Carroll to assume a leadership role in the community without the direct assistance of the Catholic Church.

Also related to the financial impact on the Irish Catholic community, (the local township government provided modest funds for families and individuals who were impoverished.) Usually only widows or individuals who suffered a debilitating injury received funds from the council,³⁹ therefore, the number of persons receiving charitable funds from the council never exceeded eight per year

³⁷Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, pp. 3 & 251.

³⁸Ibid(same as above)

³⁹Reports in *Mitchell Advocate*, December 15, 1873. *Mitchell Advocate*, November 5, 1875.

during the period of this study.⁴⁰ Despite its limited scope, this aid is of significance in relation to the study of a nineteenth century Irish Catholic community, as the Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert received support from an institution not affiliated to the Catholic Church. This will be further evaluated in the next chapter, but it is suffice for now to suggest that the influence and authority of the Catholic Church in Canada was largely derived from their substantial charitable activities.⁴¹ (With Irish Catholic representation on the township council, the Catholic Church was not the only source of support for Irish Catholics in need. And though the level of aid disbursed by the township council was not substantial, the fact that Irish Catholic families in need could apply to the local council for monetary support bestowed prestige and power upon Irish Catholic individuals that were working outside the auspices of the Catholic Church.

Another obvious advantage the Irish Catholic community's access to local government provided in the Township of Hibbert was patronage.) As mentioned in the previous chapter, it financially benefited several Irish Catholic families every year. Positions such as Township Clerk, Assessor, and License Issuer provided a welcome additional income that certainly stabilised the financial situation of several individual beneficiaries. In one case, Thomas Dunne, a

⁴⁰ Ibid(same as above)

⁴¹ Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. 99. McCowan, Waning of the Green, p. 55.

school teacher in Carronbrook for many years, increased his yearly income by almost twenty-five percent with his wage as the Township Clerk.⁴² Obviously a significant increase in income and financial security. Moreover, Irish Catholic access to government patronage in the township extended beyond local appointments. Their large proportion of the township population and the status of many Irish Catholic individuals as local political leaders captured the attention of first the colonial and then the provincial and federal politicians. The clearest example of Irish Catholic access to federal patronage in the township was the postal service. The postal contract in the township was always held by an Irish Catholic during the period of this study.⁴³ Therefore, the Irish Catholic community's access to government in the Township of Hibbert provided several individuals with patronage appointments that subsidized their family income.

Receiving a patronage appointment was also a symbol of public responsibility and hence it often bestowed respect upon the recipient. Certainly patronage appointments, as it always has been, were often partisan and, therefore, controversial. The recipients of these positions were given a public profile that they would not have otherwise had. In many cases the appointment in itself was a public acknowledgement of the place the individual already held in the community. But, in the case of the Irish Catholics in the township, it allowed

⁴²Township Council Minutes, 1858-71.

⁴³*Mitchell Advocate*, January 19, 1872. *St. Mary's Argus*, January 7, 1858. *Stratford Weekly Beacon*, March 3, 1887.

many individuals to expand their public standing and leadership role beyond their ethno-religious community. Thomas Dunne, for example, served as the Township Clerk for thirteen years and gradually earned the respect of not only his fellow Irish Catholics, but also of the local Protestant leaders.⁴⁴ The respect and authority Dunne and many other Irish Catholic individuals acquired through their duties as employees of the township were a very important consequence of the Irish Catholic community's access to local political power.

The accomplishments of Irish Catholic politicians, township employees, and leaders in the Township of Hibbert also had a profound impact on the entire community as they had extreme pride in the accomplishments of Thomas King, Joseph Kidd, Thomas Dunne and the many other individuals that held positions of public leadership and responsibility in the township. The public acknowledgement of the Protestant community of these individual's success only enhanced this collective sense of pride and accomplishment. Local successes also created a sense of security in the Irish Catholic community that the community in turn attributed to the opportunities that Canada, and, more specifically, the Township of Hibbert afforded them. At public gatherings and celebrations Irish Catholic individuals that addressed the crowds almost always compared their situation in the township to that of their brethren who remained in

⁴⁴*Mitchell Advocate, May 13, 1870. August 3, 1870.*

their homeland.⁴⁵ In short, the Irish Catholic community not only felt proud of their accomplishments, but also believed they were very fortunate to have immigrated to Canada and, more specifically, to have settled in the Township of Hibbert.

Another aspect of public affairs that the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was integral in its operation was the administration of schools. As noted previously in the introduction, the Catholic residents of the township did not establish a Catholic Separate school until 1887.⁴⁶ One important reason for the later establishment of a separate school was that Irish Catholics in the township were involved in all aspects of their children's education at the public schools. (The three schools in the northwest corner of the township all had Irish Catholic trustees, two of which Irish Catholics held a majority, while the teachers at these schools were usually Catholic.)⁴⁷ Therefore, Irish Catholic families were generally comfortable with the education that their children were going to receive from the public school system in the Township of Hibbert.

The clearest example of Irish Catholic control of a public school in the township was at School Section Number Four (S. S. No. 4) in Carronbrook.

⁴⁵*Mitchell Recorder*, June 27, 1878. *Stratford Weekly Herald*, July 3, 1878. *Seaforth Expositor*, September 10, 1887.

⁴⁶Johnston, History of Perth County before 1867, p. 281.

⁴⁷*Huron Signal*, September 12, 1854. *Mitchell Advocate*, June 29, 1860. July 12, 1867.

When the school was established in 1854 two of three trustees, John Lardner and John Torphey, were Irish Catholics.⁴⁸ Subsequently, when the new frame school was built in 1868-69 three of the four trustees were Irish Catholics.⁴⁹ With their majority, these trustees were able to ensure that the teachers were also Irish Catholic. At S. S. No. 4 there was no Protestant school teacher until 1871 when Thomas Dunne retired, and, even then, it was a short appointment.⁵⁰ S. S. No. 4 was essentially an Irish Catholic school: Most of the trustees were Irish Catholics, the teachers were almost always Irish Catholics, and the majority of students were Irish Catholics. This situation reduced the Irish Catholic community's urgency to establish a separate school.

The reality that Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert decided to educate their children in the public school system was significant considering the political atmosphere of the period. The issue of separate schools was one of the most controversial and divisive issues in English-speaking Canada at the time as it amplified all the preexisting distrust and antagonisms between the Catholic and Protestant communities of Canada. Even a cursory survey of the newspaper editorials of this period leads one to appreciate the extent of the controversy.

In this atmosphere of political and religious tension and in the context of

⁴⁸*Huron Signal*, September 12, 1854.

⁴⁹*Mitchell Advocate*, January 8, 1869. 1871 Census

⁵⁰*Mitchell Advocate*, December 23, 1871. January 9, 1874.

the organization and theological reforms within the Catholic Church during this period, it is very interesting that the Irish Catholic community in the township decided to participate exclusively in the public school system until 1887. The establishment of Catholic schools was a crucial element to the *ultra-montane* vision of Canadian Catholicism.⁵¹ The Catholic hierarchy argued relentlessly that separate schools were essential to the survival and advancement of their faith in English-speaking Canada. As Brian Clarke and Mark McGowan have described in their analysis of Toronto Irish Catholics, the Catholic Church initiated in the 1840s a comprehensive system of religious organizations for the laity in order to centre their social lives around the church from cradle to grave.⁵² Separate schools became the central pillar of this initiative by the Catholic Church.

Therefore it is interesting that neither the Irish Catholic settlers nor the Catholic Clergy established a separate school in the Township of Hibbert until a relatively late date in comparison to many other communities in Ontario. The two main reasons for this situation in the Township were related and, probably, mutually reinforcing. First, as discussed above, the Irish Catholic population of the township had confidence in the public school system since they essentially controlled the local administration of the schools. Secondly, in comparison to the cities in Ontario, the Catholic Church in many rural areas did not have the

⁵¹ Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, pp. 34 & 40..

⁵² Ibid, p.34 . McCowan, The Waning of the Green, p.55 .

resources nor personnel to establish an effective leadership role until the late nineteenth century. The local Catholic parish church, St. Columban in Irishtown, did not have a permanent full-time priest until 1865 with the arrival of Father Dean James Murphy.⁵³ In comparison, the two schools that Irish Catholics had direct control over, S. S. No. 3 and S. S. No. 4, were established in 1860 and 1854 respectively.⁵⁴ Therefore, the Irish Catholic population's participation in the administration of their local public schools was an established practice in the township by the time there was a permanent clerical presence in the community. The Irish Catholic community's influence over two public schools combined with the relatively inconsistent presence of any clerical leadership at the parish of St. Columban until 1865 delayed the establishment of a separate school until 1887.

The reluctance of the Irish Catholic community to establish a separate school was probably the most visible example of their collective sense of security and confidence with their position in the Township of Hibbert. Basically, the same socioeconomic factors that positively influenced their economic experience in the township also granted them the opportunity to take an active and effective role in local government. Their large numbers, early arrival, economic importance and settlement concentration shaped the Irish Catholic community into a powerful and important political demographic group in the Township of

⁵³*Mitchell Advocate*, December 22, 1865.

⁵⁴*Huron Signal*, September, 12, 1854. *Mitchell Advocate*, June 29, 1860

Hibbert. This situation provided the community with direct access to the local government through the electoral success of several and successive Irish Catholic individuals. With constant Irish Catholic representation in local government and public school administration, the community was able to benefit both economically and socially from political power. Economically, government patronage subsidized the incomes of several Irish Catholic families every year. Socially, the community's access to local government created an environment in which Irish Catholics were able to assume leadership positions in the township. The success and authority these Irish Catholic leaders had in the township contributed significantly to the community's sense of security and confidence.

This confidence in the political institutions and general economic success translated into a collective sense of pride in their accomplishments as an Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert. Repeatedly at social events, political gatherings, and community celebrations, Irish Catholic speakers enthusiastically expressed their community's sense of achievement and pride in themselves as a credit to their 'nation'.⁵⁵ But the community also attributed their success partially to the opportunities Canada, and, more specifically, the Township of Hibbert afforded their families.⁵⁶ The Irish Catholic community genuinely felt fortunate to have immigrated to a land where their hard-work and

⁵⁵*Mitchell Advocate*, March 27, 1868. *Stratford Weekly Beacon*, January 22, 1864.

⁵⁶*Mitchell Recorder*, June 20, 1878. *Mitchell Advocate*, May 29, 1868.

perseverance was rewarded. Therefore, when Thomas King addressed Carronbrook residents during a 'Victoria Day Celebration' and described Canada as a country of fairness and opportunity, most of his fellow Irish Catholic citizens in the Township of Hibbert probably concurred.⁵⁷ Local realities thus greatly influenced the Irish Catholic community's relationship to the Catholic Church and to the Irish nationalist movement during this era, relationships that will be evaluated in the next chapter.

⁵⁷*Mitchell Advocate*, May 29, 1868.

Chapter 3: Nationalism, Religion and Identity

The economic success and the active participation in local politics of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert, discussed in the preceding chapters, had an interesting impact on their social, cultural and religious experience. The central aspect of their experience in these three areas of community development was their collective sense of accomplishment and security. Most Irish Catholics in the township could feel secure in their family's economic situation. They could likewise feel secure in their community's political position. They also felt secure in their children's educational experience at the local public school. Essentially this collective sense of security informed the Irish Catholic community's relationship with their Protestant neighbours, within their own ethnic community, and with their church.

One aspect in which the collective experience of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was relatively secure, in comparison to many other districts in Canada, was their relationship with their Protestant neighbours. Their large numbers, economic success, and access to political institutions contributed positively to the Catholic community's ability to protect and promote their interests in the township. These same socioeconomic factors in the township influenced the local Protestant community's treatment, and,

sometimes, opinion of their Irish Catholic neighbours. For instance, individuals such as Joseph Kidd and Thomas King could not fit within the traditional Protestant idea of Irish Catholics. They were both successful and powerful individuals in the local community. Nor did the Protestant community disproportionately control the political and economic power in the township. Therefore, it is not surprising that the relationship between the two communities differed from what is usually considered the 'typical' experience of a nineteenth century rural township in Ontario.

One dramatic example of Irish Catholic precariousness in nineteenth century Ontario was the prevalence and power of the Orange Order. In his study of Peel County, Hopeful Travellers, David Gagan argues that cultural intimidation exerted by the Protestant majority through the Orange Order was an important factor in Catholics disproportionately emigrating from the region.¹ In fact, Peel County had one of the highest concentrations of Orange Lodges in Canada.² Gagan found that, "Foreign-born Roman Catholics, Scots and Irish alike, were the least likely of Peel's principal cultural groups to put down roots in this county..."³ Relatedly, Glen Lockwood's study of Irish settlers in the Township of Montague also argues convincingly that the collective experience of

¹Gagan, Hopeful Travellers, p. 120.

²Ibid(same as above)

³Ibid.(same as above)

the Irish Catholic community in this region was marginal and insecure due in part due to the concentration of local power in the hands of the Protestant majority.⁴ The examples above illustrate the situations that contributed to Irish Catholic social and political insecurity in those regions.

The socioeconomic factors in the Township of Hibbert were considerably different than those in other parts of Ontario and contributed to a more secure relationship with the Protestant majority as Protestants could not dominate local affairs. Therefore, the activities of the Orange Order in the township were not as antagonistic nor as influential in the township's affairs. For instance, a survey of local newspapers found no reports of public rallies nor marches by the Orange Order in the Township of Hibbert.⁵ The important calendar dates of the Orange Order were always commemorated in other townships.⁶ Perhaps it was more difficult for the Orange Order to celebrate the 'Glorious Twelfth', for example, in a township with a proportionately very large Catholic population.

The fact that the Orange Order was reluctant to hold public events in the Township of Hibbert does not indicate, however, a lack of support for the organization among the local Protestant residents. The first Orange Lodge

⁴Lockwood, "Success and the Doubtful Image of Irish Immigrants in Upper Canada," *Untold Stories*, p. 336.

⁵*Mitchell Advocate. Stratford Weekly Herald. Stratford Weekly Times. Seaforth Expositor.*

⁶Survey of the local papers found no announcements or reports of Orange Marches or gatherings in the Township of Hibbert from 1848 to 1887.

meeting in the township was held in the mid 1850s at Henry Winslow's farm where Loyal Orange Lodge number 908 was eventually established.⁷ Also, one of the most successful land speculators in the township, the Honourable John Hillyard Cameron, was the Grandmaster of the Orange Order in the 1850s and 1860s.⁸ However, the economic and demographic reality in the township ensured that the Orange Order did not enjoy considerable influence over local affairs. In this context, the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert did not endure the same level of cultural intimidation that many Catholics endured in numerous other Ontario districts.

The relationship between Catholics and Protestants was less adversarial in the Township of Hibbert because the leaders of the two communities generally avoided cultural or religious confrontation. Almost from the outset, an accepted political culture developed in the township that was first established through elite accommodation, then extended into the wider society. This truce reached between the two religious communities, as discussed earlier, was basically a pragmatic political recognition of the demographic, socioeconomic-economic and geographic reality of the township. Conversely, in the case of Peel County and the Township of Montague, discussed above, the Irish Catholic settlers in those regions formed only approximately ten percent of the population and were,

⁷*Huron Signal*, June 8, 1855.

⁸*St. Mary's Argus*, March 6, 1862. *Mitchell Advocate*, February 3, 1869.

consequently, a socially, economically and politically marginalised minority.⁹

Though it is true that their small numbers were not the exclusive reason for their precarious situation in these regions, it is indisputable that their relative small numbers made them more susceptible to cultural intimidation.

In terms of social interaction, it appears that the relationship between the two communities remained limited and quite formal despite the political accomodation they had reached and the relative low level of Orange Order activity within the township. Social activities that involved both Catholics and Protestants remained civic oriented rather than personal. Consequently, for most Catholics and Protestants, the only time they interacted socially with the other was at civic celebrations organized by the township council or by the local elites. For instance, on a few occasions Joseph Kidd organized a group trip to Lake Huron for a community party on a ferry.¹⁰

One indication of the low level of socially accepted personal interaction between Catholics and Protestants was the virtual non-existence of 'mixed' marriages during this period. Though this will be discussed below in the context of the Irish Catholic community's relationship with their church, it is sufficient here to acknowledge the fact that there was only one occurrence of an Irish

⁹Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers*, pp. 120-123. Lockwood. "Success and the Doubtful Image of Irish Immigrants in Upper Canada," p. 324.

¹⁰*Mitchell Advocate*, June 26, 1868.

Catholic marrying a Protestant over the entire period of this study testifies to the minuscule level of accepted personal relationships between the two religious groups.¹¹ The only consistent reason the two communities interacted on a regular basis was to conduct the politics and commercial activity of the township. In short, the social activities of Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert remained almost exclusively ethnically and religiously segregated during this period.

This situation highlights the complicated social conventions of the era that informed the Irish Catholic community's experience in the Township of Hibbert. Despite their economic and political success in the township, its Irish Catholics remained isolated from mainstream society in Ontario; a society that primarily defined respectability using religious denominational terminology. Thus, regardless of the economic and political accomplishments of the Irish Catholic community in the township, a mutually-accepted cultural barrier between them and their Protestant neighbours remained.

What really differentiated the social relationship between Catholics and Protestants in the Township of Hibbert from many other localities in Ontario, then, was the relatively low level of cultural intimidation and ethnic violence. The same socioeconomic factors that informed the township's Irish Catholics political experience also protected them from extreme levels of cultural

¹¹Survey of Marriage Registrations and 1871 Census.

intimidation. This allowed them to develop their social and cultural experience within the context of economic and political security. This was obviously a situation that not all Irish Catholic communities in Ontario could expect.

In discussing the social and cultural experience of nineteenth century Irish Catholics, the nationalist movement and the Catholic Church are the two obvious pillars of the examination. The town members of Hibbert were not unique in their national or religious sentiment, yet the experience of this Irish Catholic community may be considered unique in its expression of that sentiment as there was a relatively low intensity in publically pronouncing their commitments. Since they were not as vulnerable as their compatriots in other regions of Ontario, the Irish Catholics of the township were confident that they were in control of their cultural identity. Their cultural experience was, therefore, informed by a confidence derived from economic and political security.

Therefore, in the case of the Irish nationalist movement, the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was definitely supportive, but not necessarily enthusiastically involved. The community's St. Patrick's Day celebrations were not boisterous affairs that included nationalist rhetoric or threats.¹² In fact, the Irish Catholic community's celebrations in the township usually stressed their accomplishments in the New World as much as they

¹²The Protestant Press congratulated the residents for celebrating St. Patrick's Day with dignity and for expressing their loyalty to Canada.

publically stated their grievances with the injustices of the Old World. Examples of this were most often reported from the St. Patrick's Day celebrations in Carronbrook during this period. Instead of boisterous parades through the streets of the village common in other communities, St. Patrick's Day was commemorated with a celebratory supper and dance at one of the local halls.¹³ Therefore, even during the hysteria of the Fenian scare in 1866, the *Mitchell Advocate* described the Irish Catholics of the Township of Hibbert, and in fact, the Irish Catholics of the County of Perth, as 'Loyal' British subjects.¹⁴ The evening would include patriotic songs and public addresses by local leaders and special guests that expressed their love for both Ireland and Canada.¹⁵ Prominent local Catholic leaders would often lead the gathering in singing 'God Save the Queen' at St. Patrick's Day celebrations.¹⁶ Additionally, Thomas King and Joseph Kidd often used St. Patrick's Day celebrations to publically pronounce the community's 'gratitude' for settling in a land that provided Irish Catholics with 'opportunity' and 'respect'.¹⁷ In this atmosphere, the story of St. Patrick's Day in the Township of Hibbert reported in the local press was not one of confrontation

¹³*Mitchell Advocate*, March 16, 1866. March 19, 1875.

¹⁴*Mitchell Advocate*, March 16, 1866.

¹⁵Ibid(same as above)

¹⁶*Mitchell Advocate*, March 23, 1866. The *Advocate* stressed the fact that Mr. Thomas King led the enthusiastic Catholic crowd in singing 'God Save the Queen' while American Irish Catholics were planning to attack BNA.

¹⁷*Mitchell Advocate*, March 23, 1866. *Mitchell Recorder*, July 3, 1878.

and violence, as often was the case in other regions of the country, but rather the story of local Irish Catholic accomplishment and contentment.

This collective sense of accomplishment was the main message in the nationalistic public pronouncements of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert. It was the message the community wanted to convey to themselves, to their neighbours, and to their Irish Catholic compatriots throughout Canada. In short, they were demanding respect. (Respect for their nation, religion and culture) What possibly differentiated their attachment to the Irish nationalist movement from that of some other Irish Catholic communities in Canada was the reality that they had actually become 'respectable'. In Saint John, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax, for example, the Irish Catholic community was usually considered to be the antithesis to respectable by the elites of those cities.¹⁸ In part, therefore, the Irish nationalist movement in Canada was demanding that their community, a marginalised minority, receive the respect and rights they deserved as citizens. By contrast, the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was recognized as respectable members of the region's charter group. This reality combined with their economic security and access to political power to moderate the community's expressions of Irish nationalism.

The most publicly expressed example of the Irish Catholic community's

¹⁸Scott See, Riots in New Brunswick: Orange Nativism and Social Violence in the 1840's. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 24, 32 & 54.

importance to the township was in July 1878 when the village of Carronbrook changed its name to Dublin.¹⁹ This large civic celebration not only included Irish Catholic residents, but also many members of the township's Protestant community participated in the event.²⁰ The local Protestant also press took the opportunity to praise the many accomplishments of the Irish Catholic community.²¹ Renaming the village Dublin was a public act of recognition of the importance of the Irish Catholic community to the Township of Hibbert during this period, but it was also an example of how moderate the community's attachment to the nationalist movement was already by 1878. The community purposely chose the July 1st weekend for renaming the village to coincide with Dominion Day celebrations in order to express their loyalty to Canada.²² Also, Dublin, Ireland was the centre of British Ireland and a symbol of imperial power. Therefore, this could hardly be considered an act of ethnic radicals.

The relationship of the Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert with Irish nationalism was similar to that of Toronto's community but comparatively accelerated. For instance, Mark McGowan in his study of Toronto Irish Catholics, The Waning of the Green, argues that the community's attachment to

¹⁹*Mitchell Recorder*, July 3, 1878.. *Stratford Weekly Herald*, July 3, 1878.

²⁰Ibid(same as above)

²¹Ibid(same as above), both papers described the village as an example of Irish Catholic enterprise and hard-work.

²²*Mitchell Recorder*, July 3, 1878.

the nationalist movement diminished significantly in the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century.²³ One reason for this was that their sense of grievance with their socioeconomic situation in Toronto began to dissipate.²⁴ Since Irish Catholics in Toronto were no longer as vulnerable as they had been previously, their sense of urgency and instability was replaced with an emerging sense of security. A security that, over time, replaced ethnic nationalism and radicalism with Canadian patriotism and political moderation.

In some ways the experience of the Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert with Irish nationalism during the 1845 to 1887 period was similar to that of Toronto Irish Catholics in the 1880s and 1890s. By the mid 1860s the Irish Catholic community was relatively comfortable with their socioeconomic situation in the Township of Hibbert. Therefore, it should probably not be surprising that their attachment to Irish nationalism began to moderate during this era despite the tensions that continued to exist. Though it would not be accurate to suggest that Irish nationalism disappeared or became irrelevant to the Irish Catholic community in the township, their sense of grievance and impatience did certainly moderate.

The main reason for this tempering of Irish nationalism in the Township of Hibbert was the high rate of land ownership by Irish Catholic settlers. With

²³McCowan, The Waning of the Green, pp. 191, 202 & 212.

²⁴Ibid(same as above)

almost seventy percent of Irish Catholic head of households owning land in the township, the majority of Irish Catholic family's had achieved their primary goal as immigrants; the acquisition of land. As Donald Akenson has repeatedly stated, Irish Catholic immigrants were as land hungry as the Irish Protestant immigrants. For land not only supplied economic security, but land had always represented power and prestige in Ireland. Therefore, land was also a political issue in Ireland. After centuries of Catholics losing land to Protestants due to British colonial rule in Ireland, the acquisition of land in the New World represented a political victory for Irish Catholics. A victory that contributed to the Irish Catholic community's sense of security in the Township of Hibbert.

The sense of accomplishment, or perhaps victory, that Irish Catholic land owners experienced in the Township of Hibbert would have been foreign to most Irish Catholic residents of Toronto. Though the majority of Toronto's Irish Catholic were not destitute, most did not come to the New World with the intent to work as labourers and tradesmen in urban centres. Therefore, most Irish Catholic families in Toronto were still moving towards their primary economic goal; land ownership. In this context, the Irish Catholic community of Toronto maintained a more enduring attachment to Irish Catholic nationalism than their compatriots in the Township of Hibbert. The injustices of the Homeland were still more relevant to an Irish Catholic in Toronto than to an Irish Catholic in the Township of Hibbert during this period.

Another aspect of their cultural and social experience in the Township of Hibbert that was influenced by their economic and political security was their relationship with the Catholic Church. For in comparison to some other areas of Canada, Irish Catholic lay activism was not restricted to the church in the township. As Brian Clarke and Mark McGowan have illustrated in their studies of Toronto, the Catholic Church's various devotional and charitable organizations offered the Irish Catholic laity leadership and public activist opportunities.²⁵ In some communities the Catholic Church may have been the only institution or organization that gave Irish Catholics any prospect of pursuing a public role. In most cases joining an Irish nationalist organization was the single alternative to the Church societies for nineteenth century Irish Catholic men in North America.²⁶ The opportunities for Irish Catholics in Toronto, and many other communities in North America, was, therefore, restricted in comparison to the Township of Hibbert.

The late establishment of separate schools in the Township of Hibbert illustrates clearly the influence of the socioeconomic conditions in the region on the Irish Catholic community's relationship with the Catholic Church. The volatile issue of Catholic separate schools inflamed Ontario politics throughout the period of this study. With the arrival of Bishop Charbonnell to Toronto in

²⁵ Clarke, *Piety and Nationalism*, 12, 124, 125. McCowan, *The Waning of the Green*, pp. 22 & 149.

²⁶ Clarke, *Piety and Nationalism*, p. 162.

1850, the establishment of separate schools became one of the pillar's of the Catholic Church's *ultramontane* reorganization.²⁷ For, in relation to the Church's relationship with its parishioners, the *ultramontane* reforms worked to place the parish church at the centre of the social experience of all Catholics. Separate schools were considered necessary by the hierarchy to ensure that Catholic children were introduced to the church's teachings at an early age.

After considering the above, it is interesting and very important that the Township of Hibbert did not have a separate school until 1887. The main reason for this was the demographic reality that Irish Catholic settlers in the township were concentrated in the northwest corner and held the majority of the trustee positions at two public schools in the community thus ensuring that Catholics were hired as teachers on a regular basis.²⁸ Hence, as previously suggested, the fundamental reason for the late establishment of separate schools in the township was the reality that Irish Catholic parents were comfortable sending their children to the local public schools. This school situation influenced the Irish Catholic community's relationship with their Church in two important ways. First, the Catholic children of this township did not attend a separate school until 1887. In the context of the *ultramontane* organization of the Church, this would have been considered a dangerous failure. Secondly, the fact that Irish Catholics were able

²⁷Ibid., p. 40. McCowan, *The Waning of the Green.*, 120.

²⁸As mentioned earlier, Irish Catholics held the majority of School trustee positions at S. S. No. 3 and S. S. No. 4.

to hold trustee positions within the public school system is one example of their leadership opportunities outside the auspices of the Church. In both cases this differentiated the Irish Catholic residents of the Township of Hibbert from many other Catholic communities in Ontario.

The significance of the late arrival of a separate school to the Township of Hibbert, in the context of nineteenth century Canadian Catholicism, is, therefore, very evident in comparison to many other Irish Catholic communities. Without a separate school, the Church was not at the centre of the socialization process of Irish Catholic children in the township. Neither was the Church the sponsor of the Irish Catholic school trustees. In short, the absence of a Catholic separate school until 1887 significantly limited the leadership role of the Catholic Church in the township.

The overall consequence of this is difficult to assess definitively. Since access to the archives of the Diocese of London are quite restrictive, correspondences between the clergy and the parishioners were impossible to include in this study. Therefore, the opinions of the clergy concerning the separate school situation or their impressions of the community's commitment to the Church are not known for the purposes of this paper. One consequence of the school situation, which was discussed even in the Protestant press, was the

clergy's concern with the feminisation of the Catholic church in the township.²⁹

With the high level of public leadership opportunities afforded Irish Catholic men in the township's political and business spheres, the Catholic church's various religious societies may have been less popular with men than they were in some other communities in Ontario. But this was a concern for the Catholic Church throughout Ontario and may have not been significantly influenced by the socioeconomic conditions of the Township of Hibbert. Still, given the socioeconomic security and access to local political power Irish Catholic men in the Township of Hibbert experienced, it would be surprising if this was not a factor in the challenge of the Catholic Church to increase the involvement of men in its lay religious societies.

The Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert were not as restricted in their relationship with the wider society as some other Catholic communities in Canada. In the case of Irish Catholic men, the leadership opportunities outside of the church in the township reduced the direct influence of the clergy. But, interestingly, it probably did not have a dramatic impact upon the Catholic church's indirect influence over the Irish Catholic population, including men, in the township. For the Irish Catholic population in the township defined themselves with the Catholic faith. One aspect of the nineteenth century

²⁹*Mitchell Advocate*, January 21, 1876.

nationalist movement in Ireland was its attachment to the Catholic Church. Since (at the latest) Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation and Act of Union repeal movements, the cause of Irish nationalism had been affiliated with the Catholic faith.³⁰ Therefore, in this tradition, the Irish Catholics of the Township of Hibbert did not distinguish between their Irish and Catholic identity. In fact, with the decline of the Gaelic language during the nineteenth century, Catholicism became the defining feature of their ethnicity.³¹ The two could not be exclusive in the context of nineteenth century political and social relations in Ireland nor Canada.

(Another reason for their strong identification with the Catholic Church was the fact that it was the only institution in the Township of Hibbert that connected the Irish Catholic community to their past and to their homeland.) In this sense, it was a very powerful symbol of permanence and continuity. The Catholic Church was also a very powerful reminder of traditional values and expectations. In a society that defined respectability and personal value with religious and denominational terminology, the Catholic Church remained an integral aspect of these settlers' sense of themselves.³² The Catholic faith was one of the pillars of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert.

The clearest indication of the importance and influence of the Catholic

³⁰Clarke, Piety and Nationalism, p. 150. Akenson, Small Differences, 134.

³¹Akenson, Small Differences, p. 136.

³²Ibid., p. 139.

faith on the township's Irish Catholic community was the almost complete absence of 'mixed' marriages. As noted earlier in regards to ethnic mixing, in a survey of the marriage and census records for the Township of Hibbert, this study identified only one marriage between an Irish Catholic and a Protestant during this era. Mary Delaney, a daughter of the Irish Catholic immigrants John and Mary (Harbour) Delaney, married Roy Potter, a Protestant farmer from a neighbouring township.³³ This nuptial segregation was a result of the continued existence of social barriers between Catholic and Protestant individuals in nineteenth century Canada. During this period it was almost universally accepted by both Catholics and Protestants that a social relationship with an individual outside their denominational heritage was neither desirable or respectable. Also, it was not common for Catholics to receive permission from the clergy to marry Protestants; a reality that discouraged most Catholics in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the demographic make-up of the Township of Hibbert provided an adequate supply of marriage partners. Therefore, the beliefs and instructions of the Catholic Church remained integral to the Township of Hibbert's Irish Catholic community during the period of this study.

In summary, the social and cultural experience of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was dramatically influenced by their

³³*Mitchell Recorder*, June 12, 1877.

economic and political success. Their economic stability and access to local political power enabled the community to develop in a relatively secure socioeconomic environment. One result of these local conditions was that the Irish Catholic population in the Township of Hibbert was not intensely involved in the nationalist movement. Though they were certainly supportive of the various aspirations of the movement, the Irish Catholic residents of the township were generally satisfied with their lives in Canada. This situation moderated their attachment to Irish nationalism and helped to develop a sense of Canadian patriotism. Relatedly, their relative security and access to political power reduced the direct authority of the Catholic Church in the township. Irish Catholic men were able to hold local political office and influence local affairs. Still, despite this independence from the authority of the Church, this Irish Catholic community considered the Catholic faith an integral part of their cultural identity. Their socioeconomic success did not make the Irish Catholic residents of the Township of Hibbert immune to the 'Devotional Revolution'. In this context, the Irish Catholic community did not consider challenging the teaching nor the religious authority of the Church. Therefore, the community willingly remained socially and culturally isolated from the Protestant majority. In this aspect, the Township of Hibbert was not unique.

Conclusion

The story of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert from 1845 to 1887 was influenced by a complicated mix of social and economic factors leading to their success as pioneers. If this study has indicated anything clearly, it is the dramatic impact that local socioeconomic conditions had on the experience of nineteenth century Irish Catholic settlers in Canada. In short, there was no 'typical' Irish Catholic experience in nineteenth century Canada. Thus, the various forms of cultural deterministic theories, that have attempted to explain the experience of all Irish Catholic immigrants in North America with only a limited or, even, no admission of the diverse local conditions these migrants encountered in the New World, can not be accepted as adequate. There is simply no analytical value in the traditional American Irish Catholic historiography which had been used by some influential Canadian historians to create a cultural deterministic framework that categorized Irish Catholic settlers as an urban peasantry that was impoverished as a consequence of their laziness and immorality.¹ A description that was as much a celebration of perceived Protestant superiority as it was an attempt to understand the experience of the

¹Duncan, "Irish Famine and the Social Structure of Canada West," pp. 159-60. Pentland, Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860, p. 105.

Irish Catholics in Canada during the nineteenth century.

In the context of the cultural deterministic values used by some historians to examine the experience of nineteenth Irish Catholics, the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert is incomprehensible. For the theories of historians such as Pentland, Duncan, and more recently Kerby Miller are not applicable to the evaluation of Irish Catholics in a rural society with a dynamic agriculturally based economy such as the Township of Hibbert.² A socioeconomic environment which these historians failed to recognize as relevant to the experience of nineteenth century Irish Catholics in North America.

For this reason, the more recent Canadian academic literature concerning the experience of nineteenth century Irish Catholics has created a more informative analytical framework for rural societies such as the Township of Hibbert. The emphasis that historians such as Donald Akenson, Bruce Elliot, and John Mannion have placed on varied socioeconomic factors has provided students of Irish Catholic studies with a new set of questions³ that this study has attempted to answer. Questions including: What opportunities did the local economic and social environment provide the settlers? How did the various families and individuals react to this local situation? How did the Irish Catholic

²Ibid(same as above), Miller, Emigrants and Exiles, p. 4. Miller describes a Catholic-World-View that made Irish Catholics reluctant to become pioneers in the New World.

³Akenson, Being Had, p. 73. Elliot, Irish Migrants in the Canadas, pp. 239-241. Mannion, Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada, pp. 165-169.

community compare to their neighbours in socioeconomic terms? What socioeconomic indicators explain the differences between individuals and communities in nineteenth century Canada? This new analytical framework allows a researcher of Irish Catholic studies to move beyond the cultural assumptions of the traditional historiography.

In the process of using the above socioeconomic analytical methodology, this study has reached the conclusion that the experience of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was positive and successful. To start, seventy-five percent of the Irish Catholic heads of households in the 1871 Census listed 'farmer' as their occupation while, just as importantly, eighty-eight percent of these Irish Catholic farmers owned their land.⁴ Though just eighteen percent of these farmers owned more than one hundred acres,⁵ the high level of land ownership indicated economic stability and security in nineteenth century rural Canada. Moreover, land ownership was the goal of most Irish Catholic immigrants during this era, since farmland represented security, wealth, prestige and, perhaps even power to most Irish Catholic immigrants.⁶ Therefore, most Irish Catholic families in the Township of Hibbert achieved their primary goal of land ownership.

⁴1871 Census. 1871 Assessment Rolls.

⁵Ibid(same as above)

⁶Elliot, Irish in the Canadas, p. 69.

The Irish Catholic population in the Township of Hibbert were not limited to farming. One important indication of their ability to settle successfully in the township was the high number of commercial enterprises successfully operated by Irish Catholics in the region. In fact, many Irish Catholics were members of the local mercantile elite. For instance, the majority of the hotels, the largest general stores, three sawmills, and a salt mine were owned by Irish Catholic proprietors in the Township of Hibbert.⁷ These Irish Catholic operations were not only an indication of economic success and security but also of economic leadership. Irish Catholic proprietors such as Joseph Kidd and Thomas King were the wealthiest citizens of the township.⁸ As a result of their economic success, these two Irish Catholic individuals were among the most influential citizens in the township during this period.⁹ Members of the Irish Catholic community were, therefore, the economic leaders of the Township of Hibbert.

The influence and success of the Irish Catholic community was not limited to the local economy. Irish Catholics were actively involved in local politics and throughout the 1845-1887 period there was consistent Irish Catholic representation on the Township Council.¹⁰ Moreover, an Irish Catholic always

⁷1871 Census. 1870-1885 Assessment Rolls. Perth Gazetteer 1863.

⁸*Mitchell Recorder*. July 3, 1878.

⁹*Ibid.*(same as above)

¹⁰*Survey of Huron Signal, Mitchell Advocate, Mitchell Recorder, St. Mary's Argus, Stratford Weekly Herald and Stratford Weekly Times* from 1848 to 1887.

held either the council office of reeve or deputy-reeve.¹¹ This local reality contrasts substantially with the common description of Canadian Irish Catholics as an embattled minority given many Irish Catholic individuals held positions of substantial local political power. This created a local situation in which the Irish Catholic community actually had authentic access to local power and the benefits of this were both material and symbolic. For not only did the access to local political power provide the Irish Catholic residents of the township with patronage and material support, this access also contributed positively to their collective sense of security. The Irish Catholic population of the Township of Hibbert did not endure the economic and political disadvantages that many minority communities experienced in nineteenth century Canada.

The brief summary of the economic and political experience of the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert above contrasts significantly with the historical literature. Typically, Irish Catholics have been described as a marginalised minority that endured social, political and economic insecurity in Protestant Ontario.¹² And though this has been challenged vigorously by Donald Akenson, the few recent studies that have examined Irish Catholics in rural communities have found that they did have a more challenging experience in

¹¹Ibid(same as above). *Mitchell Advocate*,

¹²Elliot, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas*, pp125-136. . Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers*, p120. Lockwood, "Success and the Doubtful Image of Irish immigrants in Upper Canada," p. 339.

comparison to their Protestant neighbours.¹³ In addition, Bruce Elliot, David Gagan and Glen Lockwood had all concluded that there was a real ‘Roman line’ that represented not only a cultural divide, but a socioeconomic divide.¹⁴ Where the authors differ with the traditional Irish Catholic historiography is in their explanation of this measurable socioeconomic disparity. They stress economic indicators such as land quality, the settlers time of arrival, and the employment opportunities in the region rather than basing their analysis on the cultural assumptions similar to earlier historians.¹⁵ But, despite the claims of Donald Akenson, these studies detected a real socioeconomic disparity between Irish Catholics and their Protestant neighbours.

In consideration of the above studies, the crucial question in relation to the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert is: How was it possible? For it appears that the Irish Catholic community in the township was a peculiar exception to the rule of Irish studies; that Irish Catholics were a relatively impoverished minority group that endured an insecure existence in Protestant Ontario. Interestingly, the answer can be found in the same indicators that Elliot, Gagan and Lockwood use to explain the relative vulnerability Irish Catholics experienced in the regions of their studies. Specifically, their early arrival in the

¹³Ibid(same as above)

¹⁴Ibid(same as above)

¹⁵Ibid(same as above)

township allowed them to establish themselves on high quality farm land at an affordable price; a situation that contrasts significantly with many Irish Catholic communities in nineteenth Ontario.

In the case of the Township of Hibbert, the fact that the region was opened to settlement in the 1840s was crucial to the Irish Catholic community's economic and political security. Since this coincided with the huge inflow of Irish Catholic immigrants into Canada, the Township of Hibbert was a logical location for these immigrants to consider settling. Why these families chose the Township of Hibbert, over some other townships in Perth County for example, though was related to the significant number of Irish Catholics among the original settlers in the area. Successful pioneering families such as the McCanns and the Downeys first settled in the area in the 1830s providing a positive social environment for the later Irish Catholic arrivals in the township. The combination of land availability and chain migration made the township a logical location for Irish Catholic settlement.

The demographic and settlement patterns in the 1840s created a local situation in the Township of Hibbert that was conducive to large scale Irish Catholic settlement. In fact, the original settlers in the township were disproportionately Irish Catholic totalling just over forty percent of the local population until settling at thirty-five percent for the duration of this period by the

1861 census.¹⁶ This allowed these Irish Catholic families to settle in large numbers in the geographically advantageous northwest corner of the township on high quality farm land which was close to the major transportation links of the region. The Irish Catholic settlers were able to benefit from this situation and establish successful farms and businesses in the region.

The disproportionately large number of Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert also shielded the community from the challenges that Irish Catholics often encountered in other regions of the Canada and in the United States. The most explicit example of the demographic shield the Irish Catholic community possessed in the township was in relation to the education of their children. In most communities and regions in Ontario, Irish Catholics relied upon the Catholic Church's leadership in order to establish separate schools for their children. For, at least, separate schools permitted them to participate in their children's formal education at some level when the public schools were usually dominated by Protestant administrators and instructors. However, in the Township of Hibbert, the large number of Irish Catholics clustered together in the northwest corner created the demographic conditions that allowed them to influence and indeed manage the administration of the public schools in their neighbourhood. An indication of their comfort and confidence in the public school system under

¹⁶1851 & 1861 Census. Perth Gazetteer 1863.

these conditions was the relatively late establishment of a Catholic separate school in the township. That no members of the community took the initiative to form a separate school for their children until 1887 is a confirmation of the social security Irish Catholics experienced during this period in the history of the Township of Hibbert. Especially in the context of nineteenth century relations between Catholics and Protestants in Canada. Given the fact that the establishment of separate schools was not only an educational issue to Canadian Catholics, but also an act of political and social survival, the Irish Catholic community's decision not to establish a separate school until 1887 illustrates clearly that they believed their interests were respected within the local public school system. An explicit example of their confidence in the public institutions of the township and their confidence in their ability to protect their interests within those institutions.

This confidence in the public institutions of the township easily influenced their impressions of Canada. The Irish Catholic settlers in the Township of Hibbert attributed their economic success and security in part to the opportunities that Canada afforded them. For this reason, their attachment to the Irish nationalist movement began to moderate during this period. The clearest example of this was the St. Patrick's day celebrations in the township. Despite being a large community, the Irish Catholics in the Township of Hibbert never organized a large scale parade for St. Patrick's Day. Instead, the community

usually gathered in one of the local halls for a ‘dignified’ public supper and dance.¹⁷ And though there were speeches to commemorate their Irish Catholic heritage and the struggles in the Homeland, the speakers always praised Canada and its institutions for providing them with the opportunity to accomplish their goals.¹⁸ Therefore, the battles and grievances that defined the nationalist movement for many other Irish Catholic Canadians during this period became more and more abstract in relation to the experience of the majority of Irish Catholic settlers in the Township of Hibbert.

For similar reasons, the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was less dependent upon the clergy for social and political leadership. The Irish Catholic community’s access to mainstream political institutions combined with an impressive number of successful Irish Catholic proprietors and farmers in the township to establish a large pool of secular leaders. Individuals such as Arthur McCann, Joseph Kidd, John Carroll, and Thomas King were important leaders to the community. They represented the community in the township council, supervised their children’s education as school trustees, organized civic celebrations, and were employers. The economic and political elite of the Irish Catholic community was overwhelmingly secular in the

¹⁷ A point that was noted and congratulated regularly by the Protestant weekly the *Mitchell Advocate* on a regular basis. A survey of the papers found no records of a St. Patrick’s Day parade in the Township of Hibbert.

¹⁸ *Mitchell Advocate*, March 23, 1866. March 19, 1875.

Township of Hibbert.

Community members were providing leadership before the Church was in the position to do so itself adequately. The most obvious indication of this was the fact that there was no full-time clergy at the local parish, St. Columban, until 1865.¹⁹ Since the majority of the Irish Catholic families had arrived in the 1850s, they initially would not have had regular contact with the clergy. These settlers would have relied upon the advice and support of the earlier arriving families more than the Catholic Church in the 1850s and early 1860s. Together these circumstances explain why the township did not have a separate school until 1887. The Irish Catholic community had already built and developed public schools for their children by the time the Church had the personnel to supply the township with a full-time priest.²⁰ In the case of education, it was not the Church that provided the leadership for this community during its pioneer stage.

That is what makes the year 1887 so significant in understanding the nature of the influence that the Church had on the Irish Catholic settlers of the Township of Hibbert. Despite building and developing public schools for their children for more than thirty years, many individuals believed it was best for their children and their community to establish a separate school in 1887. Why? The reasons must have been different than those for creating separate schools in 1850s

¹⁹*Mitchell Advocate*, March 22, 1865.

²⁰S. S. No. 3 in 1854 and S. S. in 1860.

Toronto, Hamilton or London. For the Irish Catholics community in the Township of Hibbert was not an embattled minority, nor did it perceive itself to be so, as the communities of Toronto, Hamilton and London were in the 1850s. Therefore, in this context, their main motivation was not fear and insecurity, but rather devotion to a religion that defined them as a people and a culture. The establishment of a separate school in 1887 indicates that the Irish Catholic community recognized the Church as an important element of its identity and culture. In this respect, the Irish Catholic community in the Township of Hibbert was not unique.

The community's devotion to its church may not have been unique, but the Township of Hibbert in the period from 1845 to 1887 did create a socioeconomic environment for Irish Catholic settlers which was unique in comparison to the descriptions in most Canadian Irish studies. Their time of arrival, large numbers, and the high quality of the farm land afforded the Irish Catholic pioneers in the Township of Hibbert the opportunity to become successful Canadian settlers; an opportunity they capitalized upon with enthusiasm. For this reason, this Irish Catholic community's actions were not as influenced by fear and insecurity as most others were during this period. In fact this was a community that developed in a secure socioeconomic environment affording them many opportunities. The Irish Catholic settlers of the Township of Hibbert, Ontario, from 1845 to 1887 were certainly successful pioneers.

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Appendix B

Head of Household Occupation by Ethnic Origin Hibbert Township, Ontario

Occupations	I R C*	I P**	Scottish	English	Total
Farmer	119	71	117	107	414
Labourer	15	9	15	11	40
Merchant	6	3	0	2	11
Tradesmen	8	8	15	10	31
Professional	8	0	10	0	18
Servant	3	0	1	2	6
None Listed	34	19	29	21	103
Total	193	110	187	153	643

* I R C refers to Irish Roman Catholics

** I P refers to Irish Protestants

Percentages

Occupations	I R C*	I P**	Scottish	English
Farmer	61.65%	64.55%	62.55%	70.00%
Labourer	7.80%	8.20%	8.00%	7.20%
Merchant	3.10%	2.70%	0	1.30%
Tradesmen	4.15%	7.30%	8.00%	6.50%
Professional	4.15%	0	5.35%	0
Servant	1.55%	0	0.50%	1.30%
None Listed	17.60%	17.30%	15.50%	13.70%

Appendix C

Irish Catholic Land Tenure in 1871
Hibbert Township, in Acres

