
Fighting It Out in Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada/Canada West: Masculinities and Physical Challenges in the Tavern

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Games, sports, and informal leisure practices of mid-nineteenth century Canada were as much framed by gender as they were expressions of distinct social classes in their occurrence. The public articulation of confrontative masculinities by men of different social classes, although often disparate in form and venue, held common significations and social meanings within the emerging gender orders of the Victorian era. The tavern, a site significant for its patrons as well as its adversaries, endured commonplace and even expected confrontations such as arguments, physical contests, fighting, and violent assaults. Indeed, there was no other public place of social gathering and entertainment more numerous in the region. Once an early nineteenth-century rest stop for traveler and colonist, both gentleman and gentlewoman and labourer alike, the urban tavern became a public house for liquor and entertainment, a much less expensive alternative to the “finer” town hotels built after mid-century.

Contrary to the sermons of temperance advocates and social reformers,¹ violent physical confrontations were not a phenomenon unique to the drunken underclasses and the impoverished. Smitten by implicit and explicit codes of appropriate behavior, landed gentlemen meted out social justice within their peer groups;² later, professionals, businessmen, and military officers rationalized the importance of rough play in organized sport to manliness and physical exuberance;³ and labourers regularly contested for status in contests of strength and skill.⁴ For most men of mid-nineteenth-century Canada, notions about social or physical honour and prowess represented an integral part of public and economic life and of maleness. These ideas, bound by class- and ethnic-based values and identities,

defined male honour—in part by pride of occupation, and often manifested through the physical challenge. Many women, too, drank liquor at the taverns, operated drinking establishments, sometimes fought as patrons or owners, bore the brunt of domestic assaults by men; but rarely did these women engage in public displays of physical challenge or competition for fun, fight, or honour.⁵ The leisure culture of the nineteenth century tavern was a contested physical and ideological terrain for men, in which they confronted one another over social, economic, ethnic, and personal matters, and where the violent, competitive performance of the male body was valorized by meanings about gender, class, and ethnicity. The tavern was the most common place of leisure in nineteenth-century Canada where masculinity and manliness were publically expressed.

Class-based expressions of symbolic masculinity remained fundamental to the establishment of social order in the colonies, and sociologist Robert W. Connell has argued that violence and intimidation were more prevalent historically in unstable hierarchies.⁶ Broader hegemonic formations of the early century were stabilized in part by the marked distinctions in appropriate maleness emphasized through labour, politics, and the law, to be challenged later by the emergent forms of rationalized masculinity cultivated by white, middle class, professional men. The competitive tests of masculinity celebrated by the bachelor subcultures of the fur trade, military garrisons, loggers, and colonial farmers stood quite distinct from the gentrified activities of Canada's elite and from the organized club sports of the middle classes later in the century. While the violence of conquest, the somewhat arbitrary enforcement of law, and the presence of the British garrisons assured a certain tendential colonial stability, symbolic expressions of manhood proliferated more subtle footings to levels of social processes, often coming to bear on relationships with other men. Celebrations of strength at rural work bees (commonly logging, barn-raising, and harvesting), for example, provided powerful signifiers that reinforced personal identifications with the labour process and the relationship of working men, who logged, raised buildings, and worked on farming crews, to the broader colonial economy. The class-based gender ordering within this historic bloc, manifested through land-holding, law, politics, and wealth distribution, served to create a logic of divergence between men and women.⁷ Emerging patterns of leisure and entertainment in Upper Canada/Canada West integrated and reinforced this divergence, delimiting the "appropriate" social options of women, while creating new venues of public life for men.

Trade Honour

Expressions of symbolic masculinity have been a part of Canadian folklore since the earliest voyages of the independent, fur trading *coureurs de bois* and the first colonists who followed them to New France in the 1600s. Wrestling, fighting, the performance of feats of strength, and competitive challenges formed an integral part of the bachelor subcultures of the fur trader. The "bush" masculinity of the fur trader was fundamentally related to the labour process, and the rather harsh realities of working in an unfamiliar, sometimes hostile environment added to the daunting reputation of these men. Their sustenance through employment, and the inherent risks and physical demands of the fur trade economy, required that they be rugged, tough, and physically competent—characteristics which became the stuff of French Canadian legend. In their moments of rest between travels,

they often challenged one another to various physical contests, equating manly stature and personal honour with skills of trade and survival. Their propensity for alcohol and fighting struck fear in some but admiration among others, such as the young men of New France who struggled to survive in geographical and economic environments quite unlike those of their homeland.⁸ Colonial administrators and missionaries viewed them as unruly, “lawless,” and maintaining lifestyles of “uncivilized” manhood. Social behaviors and reputation aside, the physically unskilled and untrained had little chance for success or survival in the fur trade. Fur traders assimilated the skills of Aboriginal hunters and travelers, and became dependent upon the use of snowshoes and canoes for trade. These skills, too, became markers of masculine honour as traders raced one another.⁹ However, the success of the fur trade, later logging, and colonial settlement, came at the expense of Aboriginal cultures whose own regimes of gender, social life, and trade were destroyed by the French and English.¹⁰

The voyageurs—eighteenth and nineteenth-century fur traders who worked for the North West Company and Hudson’s Bay Company—engaged in physical challenges in every-day work habits and during periods of rest. Like the *couriers de bois*, the voyageurs celebrated physical strength and stamina as indices of manly stature. Overloading themselves with enormous packs during long and difficult portages was not only commonplace, but expected. Competitive paddling contests extending beyond forty hours were not uncommon. During long portages, some voyageurs worked themselves to death, succumbing to physical exhaustion and hernias resulting from their obsessive association of physical endurance to manhood.¹¹ The average load was 180 pounds, with some men taking on more for portages in excess of a mile without stopping.¹² Every task was a test of character. Every possession, sexual encounter, and even singing vocabulary embodied matters of identity and pride. Such competitive passions are rendered in the remembrances of retired voyageur Alexander Ross in 1825:

No portage was too long for me; all portages were alike. My end of the canoe never touched the ground... Fifty songs a day were nothing to me, I could carry, paddle, walk and sing with any man I ever saw... No water, no weather. ever stopped the paddle or the song.¹³

Traders valued such forms of rugged competitive masculinity, as did other men, even though they were oppositional to the social values promoted by the church and the family organization encouraged by the French and later English colonial administrations. Jesuit priest Jean de Brebeuf resented the kinds of masculinity celebrated by the voyageur:

All the fine qualities which might make you loved and respected in France are like pearls trampled under the feet of swine, or rather mules, which utterly despise you when they see that you are not as good pack animals as they are. If you could go naked and carry the load of a horse upon your back, as they do, then you would be wise according to their doctrine, and would be recognized as a great man, otherwise not.¹⁴

Nonetheless, a man’s physical stamina, strength, and endurance, even if feats were at times more legend than fact, were valued and romanticized in local lore through the nineteenth century. Although one might expect that some of these men, and probably many of them, genuinely feared the life that awaited them when they arrived in the “new” land

and, indeed, dreaded the dangers of their new occupations, these types of anti-heroic recollections have not been included in the records of the life experiences of the fur traders and colonial mercenaries. Men engaged in more settled and less rugged occupations such as farming greatly revered the romantic sense of manhood embodied in notions of bush masculinity. Yet, as settlement continued, and agricultural subsistence and small commodity trade became more economically feasible, fewer men lived the experiences of these early traders. The significantly different lives of traders, missionaries, soldiers, mercenaries, and settlers, moreover, each had different, sometimes contrasting markers of gender identity.¹⁵

Gentry Masculinity and the Challenge

Colonial rule, although challenged periodically, remained relatively unstable until well into the nineteenth century, even though an oligarchy of local and provincial male elites directed the economic and political affairs of Upper Canada until the rebellions of the late 1830s.¹⁶ Landed or gentry gender regimes, both violent and intimidating, handed down formal judicial administration through such “events” as public hangings or whippings and incarceration in an open stockade in Upper Canada during this period. The early historical records of Middlesex County note the application of cats-o’-nine tails before large crowds near Ridout Street in London, Ontario. As late as 1870, John Radford, strapped to the whipping post, endured 20 lashes for indecent assault. Two men suffered public ridicule in an open stockade for two days for stealing turkeys.¹⁷ The *History of County Middlesex, Canada* reported that people traveled as far as 25 and even 150 miles to London to witness the public hangings of Cornelius Burleigh in 1831 and Jonathan Sovereign in 1832.¹⁸ Following the rebellions of 1837-38, Cornelius Cunningham, Joshua Gillelan Doane, Amos Pearly, and Albert Clark, charged with treason, were hanged in London. The hanging of Samuel Lount and Peter Mathews ensued in Toronto.¹⁹

In addition to local magistrates and the courts, British soldiers provided control through the threat of violence and restraint to rebels, strikers, and “election rowdies” before the establishment of formal police forces.²⁰ But, when it came to professional and personal disputes between men of status and distinction, some members of the Anglican Tory gentry preferred to settle scores in a more exclusive and intimate fashion. Just as the voyageur was obsessed by the honour of physical performance, some gentlemen were preoccupied by notions of honour embodied by status and rank. Robert Nye has argued that the notion of honour was somewhat of a paradox for the gentry.²¹ Gentlemanly honour and ethnic identity was related to the preservation of family name, wealth and influence based in land-holding, and political position by appointment, providing a distinct solidarity among British men of influence in Upper Canada. At the same time, however, maintaining personal honour remained a source of great anxiety for these men, since they perceived any slight or questioning of integrity as a direct threat to rank and position. And, as Cecilia Morgan has argued, without heredity and family longevity to clarify the status of gentry in British North America, such distinctions led to greater concern for the demonstration of code and conduct.²² Personal or professional insults were sometimes resolved violently through the physical contest of a duel between the two parties. Unlike the fist fights between garrison soldiers or the fur traders, achieving a violent outcome and physical

victory did not represent the most important aspect of the duel. Indeed, if the process of the challenge adhered to convention and both men followed all of the implicitly understood rules, then the parties viewed the confrontation as satisfactorily concluded.²³ Adhering to the proper code of the duel was viewed as a private, rational expression of gentry masculinity. Killing “fairly” sometimes led to acquittals and lesser charges in the courts; tavern brawlers who challenged, fought, and killed, however, did not enjoy the same lenience.²⁴

Not all members of the Tory elite were complicit in the ritual of the duel, and social and political reformers criticized these expressions of gentry masculinity and suggested that such acts of public violence were barbaric. White bourgeois professionals—men who sought political office and influence in the 1840s and 50s—preferred to find manly honour in earned professional reputation and the economic and social preservation of family. Reformers implicitly argued that the loss of fathers and husbands was antithetical to the value of “family,”²⁵ or at least such middle class critics opposed the duel on these grounds and had it outlawed in 1847.²⁶ The widespread emergence of exclusive men’s clubs, benevolent societies, educational, ethnic, and political organizations,²⁷ and other activities which attracted men away from their families, and the increasing limitations on public life for urban, married, middle class women, abetted by middle class men, belied any such rationalizing about loss, separation, and dueling. The ideal of the Victorian home, marriage, and the relationship to a stable family arrangement, popularized in sermons, magazines, newspapers, and guidebooks, comprised important aspects of middle class ideology;²⁸ nonetheless, such values contradicted the increasing significance attributed to the public, working, political man and the sportsman who spent leisure hours at the club with his peers.²⁹ These class- and ethnic-based exclusive social and sporting clubs established early in the century by “like-minded” gentlemen provided a venue for socializing and competition with one another in such sports as curling, hunting, and horse-racing.³⁰ Until clubs began to play against others, such as in the case of curling, rules of exclusion by class, race, and gender and regulations for the sports themselves, members of the club juried. Such exclusionary rules served to distance these clubs from the “unsavory” culture of the tavern.

Strength, Violence, and the Masculinities of the Working Man

The physical challenge was also an important signifier in the social lives of labourers. Wrestling, boxing, lifting contests, and arm-wrestling, appeared commonly at raisings, work, harvest, logging, and stumping bees. Participants at these work gatherings included locally known neighbors or traveling men such as the “American choppers,” Native men, and Irish immigrants, for example, all enticed by the promise of work and the provision of liquor, Edwin Guillet has argued that supplying large amounts of whiskey was necessary to attract labourers for any work project in the early nineteenth century.³¹ The social accompaniment to the hard labour of the day included food, alcohol, music, sometimes dancing, and physical competitions between men. Strength and endurance were important qualities of reputation for transient labourers who relied upon work parties and seasonal employment for their livelihoods. However, like the experience of the voyageurs, physical skill expressed personal pride, and sometimes ethnic identity, which could operate seamlessly

at levels of the economic and social. For the later (mid-nineteenth-century) middle class professional, the physical skill demonstrated in organized sport operated purely within levels of the social—a public expression of masculinity during non-work hours for men with the time, means, and inclination. Bodily strength, as with the earlier fur traders, served as an economic asset for labouring men, however, and through the fun and revelry of activities at the end of the day, or through more spontaneous violent altercations, notions about body and masculinity gravitated into the social process.³² According to Guillet's work, based on extensive reviews of traveler's literature, personal papers, and the reminiscences of settlers, these affairs were always entertaining but sometimes violent. Friendly wrestling contests at bees sometimes turned violent, resulting in the wounding or death of one of the combatants, as in the case of the accidental death of Joseph St. German, a Native, at the hands of fellow worker Ronald McDonald in Simcoe County. The two men had been testing one another for fun during a work break, and McDonald did not mean to harm his opponent.³³ Arguments and physical contests escalated at times into confrontations with more serious consequences. The "grog" bosses who doled out the whiskey at such bees attested that some men came primarily for alcohol and did little work. This was the case at a logging bee in Biddulph township, near Lucan. Some time before the bee, Irish immigrant James Donnelly had fired a shot in anger over the head of neighbor Patrick Farrell. Both men came to work at the bee and were drinking heavily. After the noon meal, the two men decided to settle their dispute by fighting. The confrontation lasted twenty minutes before the other workers intervened. After the other men separated them, Donnelly picked up a logging handspike and struck Farrell in the head, killing him.³⁴

Transient lumbermen en route to Quebec frequently created problems of violence and confrontation in the Ottawa region when they provoked fights with local shoreline settlers.³⁵ Guillet argues, "the lumbermen... were probably in large measure to blame for the quarrels which were the usual result of their arrival in any settled district. All along their route to Quebec they were a disturbing element, and fights and brawls with the inhabitants on the shores were a common occurrence."³⁶ Local complaints about the arrivals of lumbermen, whose camps had restricted policies on whiskey consumption, seemed similar to those received about similar bachelor groups of fur traders and soldiers who drank to excess and brawled frequently during their excursions to the town taverns. By many accounts, limited in descriptive details, it is evident that for these men, fighting was a source of aggressive entertainment—demonstrations of masculine bravado to peer and stranger alike, fed by liquor and encouraged by forms of solidarity rooted in the economic commonalities of the particular bachelor group. In general, the social formations resultant from their isolation from women, economic uncertainties, physically extreme work conditions, and some social and economic fragments of male solidarity comprised common facets of daily existence for these men.

Addressing Connell's³⁷ argument about the relationship of the historical complex of hierarchy to men's violence, many aspects of life in general were very unstable in the colonies. Violent expressions of solidarity provided a tendential stability among working men, elicited a reputation that was valued, if not feared, and sometimes practical among men who engaged in regular confrontations, and a sense of immediate control at more visceral levels for men whose economic and social livelihoods remained uncertain. At this

time in the colonies, particularly in the wilderness, physical strength and bodily practice in work and play, while also lived processes, operated as contiguous assets that were not regulated by the imminent threat of law and the pressures of institutionalized social values which decried demonstrations of public violence. For many men, across ethnic groups, violence was an immanent part of daily economic and social relationships and was fundamental to addressing most problems that they encountered with other men. Norman Feltes argues that violence and competitiveness among the farmers and merchants of Biddulph township were direct symptoms of the emergent contradictions in the local economy.³⁸ Local violence, he suggests, was a symptom of the social and economic disruption created by outside control of the grain market and by the shift from small commodities farming to forms of capitalist agriculture.

Tales about feats of heavy lifting, village giants, and strongmen from this era underscored the importance of strength as a signifier of cultural value, masculinity, and ethnic identity. Physical strength and heavy lifting were unavoidable realities of colonial life for men and women, French and English, and went hand in hand with the processes of land clearing, stumping, shelter and home building, rock clearing, and even carrying grain to the mill. However, the bodily vigor of women, although a reality in daily rural experiences, does not hold a place of prominence in the historical lore of physical strength. Similar to Linda Borish's depiction of mid-nineteenth century women at New England agricultural fairs, physical strength and athleticism were considered to be appropriate characteristics of men only.³⁹ Tales of such men as Modeste Mailhout, the "Canadian Giant," and Angus McCaskill, the "Cape Breton Giant," celebrated both size and strength, and the pride of local accomplishment at tasks that expressed both practical and meaningful attributes in everyday life.⁴⁰ Even during the era of extensive temperance lobbying, local accounts celebrated the feats of large men, tavern owners and barmen, who used physical appearance and strength to quell the disturbances of local toughs and gangs. The "Goderich boys," inveterate drinkers and fighters who traveled to local taverns in search of excitement, would not go near "Big Anthony" Allen's tavern in Dunlop, for fear of having their heads cracked together by the six foot six, 300 pound man.⁴¹ The *Newmarket Era* published an article from the Quebec *Mercury* in 1864 about the biggest man in the United Kingdom. Mr. Gamson, reportedly seven foot four and 322 pounds, tended bar at William Tapha's tavern.⁴² The location of the tavern did not seem to matter, only that readers would find interest in these kinds of stories, emphasizing the social significance of size and strength. The symbolic value of strength for men became even more pivotal during the latter part of the century, as the emergent gender ordering of the Victorian era distinguished between appropriate physical attributes for men and women.

The Garrison Men

Like the early club members, the garrison officers found pleasure and value in sport and in organizing athletic competitions for soldiers and, later, townspeople. For garrison soldiers, often beset by boredom and restlessness—as apparent in the photograph—sports and games such as cricket were encouraged to improve morale.⁴³ At the same time they provided venues for expressing physical competence and organized competitive exercise, while presenting opportunities to showcase the good British character of the men (positioned in

opposition to the French, Irish, or Natives, for example) in the communities in which they were stationed.⁴⁴ Public demonstrations of physical competence enhanced the stabilizing presence of soldiers in the garrison towns, such as London and Kingston. Regiments could be called arbitrarily, by law, to quell public disturbances, and the threat of violence ostensibly lent support to the notion of stable settlements in the Canadas. Further, exhibitions of orderly behavior and “upright” character through organized sports, including cricket and games days, served to divert attention from the frequent episodes when the soldiers visited local taverns to spend their pay. Public complaints about drunken, brawling soldiers creating disturbances and soliciting prostitution were common in the garrison towns of this period.⁴⁵ Male solidarity in the case of the garrison men was valorized by the common experiences of training, isolation, a hierarchy of rank and order, but also the oppositional designation of “free” leave without order for entertainment. The British government provided stability to the colonies through the establishment of strategically situated garrisons, to encourage economic development and further settlement. However, this management of stability through professionally organized violence sometimes created social ambiguities. The garrisons provided protection and security on one hand, but on the other, the potential violence of trained, physically competent, but off duty, men added a certain instability to tavern life in the town. And it was common, moreover, for local men to look particularly for fights with garrison soldiers in drinking establishments.⁴⁶

The Liquor Trade and Taverns in Early Canada

Upper Canadian taverns of the early nineteenth century, for the most part, initially served as rest stops for travelers of all kinds and sometimes venues for town meetings, coroner’s inquests, and for the political meetings of the Protestant Orangemen. Although the sale or provision of alcohol was one of the main services to passers-by, food and lodging held



Barracks at London, 1867. *Courtesy J.J. Talman Regional Collection, University of Western Ontario*

particular importance. Nineteenth-century travelers' comments on the services and facilities provided by taverns in Upper Canada fairly consistently reported on food, lodging, and alcohol. Various authors ranging from the "refined" traveler, labourer, the hungry, the cold, to the temperance advocate or social reformer of later years estimated the utility of these early inns. One such traveler, James Cochrane, was pleased to find so many taverns on his trip and found the owners to be "the most generous and good-hearted men that I have ever met. As to numbers, after one hour's drive, on a cold winter's day, you did not think that one every 3 or 4 miles was too many."⁴⁷ Another traveler rated the taverns of southern Ontario far below his expectations for lodging. Writing to the *Free Press* of London in 1862 about the counties of Huron and Bruce, he said, "In all my travels through Canada, I have not met such filthy, comfortless taverns as there are in this country."⁴⁸ A common criticism, along with the general squalor of these establishments, travelers directed towards public drunkenness in general, perpetrated by gentlemen, magistrates, and labourers.⁴⁹ Recollections about greasy food, crowded and dirty sleeping arrangements, and complaints about noise and drunken guests recurred in the traveler literature of the period.⁵⁰ Some of the earliest structures, such as MacGregor's log tavern in the London District, had minimal space and could not accommodate many guests.⁵¹ Others featured one to three bedrooms, which could host as many people as were willing to share the sometimes flea-infested mattresses.⁵²

Edwin Guillet provides the most extensive historical review of Taverns in the region, noting that at least one tavern existed at every crossroads, while Garland and Talman have estimated up to one per mile.⁵³ On the issue of the proportional number and quality of facilities in rural areas, one citizen wrote to the *Woodstock Herald* in 1845:

Instead of having a whole line of road dotted every mile or two with whiskey shops into which a traveler cannot enter with comfort hardly with safety why are licenses not confined to respectable houses at convenient distances? ...and thus it is that the way side public houses are generally such miserable hovels as they are, having nothing to sell but bad whiskey half drowned in dirty water, crackers as hard as bricks, and cheese as dry as chips. Let the licenses be raised and we shall soon have better taverns and fewer of them.⁵⁴

The few short miles of road between London and Elginfield at one point were bounded by 12 taverns, inspiring pioneer poet W.W. Revington of Biddulph township to write:

The taverns then lined each side of the way,
As thick as the milestones in Ireland today;
And then the farmers all thought it was fine,
If they got as far as the London Proof Line.⁵⁵

According to the census of 1844, there were 1,051 licensed taverns in Upper Canada. That figure almost doubled within two years.⁵⁶ In Toronto alone, with a population of 13,092 in 1840, 140 licensed establishments sold alcohol.⁵⁷ A citizen of Kingston complained that year that there were 65 licensed houses, nine in a row on one street, and as many operating without licenses, for a town with a population of only 4,000.⁵⁸ Guillet reports that there were 100 taverns and 45 liquor stores in the London District by 1843.⁵⁹

The urban nuisances of drunkenness and rowdy behavior had always been issues in the growing towns of Upper Canada. The fact remained that the average colonist con-

sumed alcohol in quantities of two to six glasses per day.⁶⁰ Managing the widespread consumption of alcohol, in part ensured the administrative legitimacy of the ruling elite. Revenues legitimized the moral hierarchy, as state formation advanced at levels of the economic, political, and social. Tariffs and distillery fees provided boundaries of economic trade, while a rather arbitrary but politicized system of granting tavern licenses, based ostensibly on character references, meshed liquor entrepreneurs to local political currents which served the interests of the broader provincial administrative network. And to satisfy local “respectable” citizens, period legislation was aimed at curtailing public nuisances. At the same time the liquor trade, including mandatory tavern licenses and import duties, provided considerable government revenues. Indeed, the 1793 *Act to establish a fund for the payment of salaries of the officers of the Legislative Council*, sanctioned the legitimate appropriation of “sin” taxes in Upper Canada towards salaries, supplies, the construction of roads, bridges, buildings, and other public works.⁶¹ The management of social vices such as drinking, gambling, and billiard playing and public nuisances represented but a fragment of policy within the hierarchy of social order, which sanctioned the landed rights of gentry men to political and economic influence. Local justices of the peace could inquire into the “life, character, and behaviour”⁶² of tavern license applicants; provisions were made to prevent “unlawful gaming”;⁶³ and legislators empowered municipalities to pass bylaws in defense of public morals.⁶⁴ The township of London *By Laws* stipulated the owners “shall at all times keep such a house in a quiet, proper, and orderly manner, suffering no species of gambling, drunkenness, tipling, profane swearing....”⁶⁵

In the London District, proprietors were required to obtain a certificate of character signed by at least six different resident landowners and countersigned by a Councillor from the Ward in which the tavern was situated, as in the illustrated license (*facing page*). Even with these stringent controls, the issuing of tavern licenses continued to generate public debate, particularly from temperance advocates. For example, an 1876 proposal before the London City Council to raise license fees met strong support from Rev. R. W. Wallace, Rev. Mr. Murray, Rev. James Graham, Dr. Oronhyatekha, and Rev. J. Rice. The measure passed 11 to 10, despite strong opposition led by local brewery owner and city leader John Carling.⁶⁶

The substantial liquor trade in the Canadas cultivated a direct government dependence on revenues from public houses. Tavern licenses comprised 8.5 percent of total provincial revenues for Upper Canada (1823-1840) and approximately 11 percent in Lower Canada (1792-1840).⁶⁷ Evident in the prospering and expanding liquor trade, government officials remained reluctant to forgo these lucrative revenues. Advocates for temperance criticized the Inspector General of Canada West in the *British American* for his languid remarks on whiskey tariffs and consumption:

His argument is reducible to this single assertion that the drinking of distilled liquors cannot be prevented, and from thence he drew this inference, that since it is a point of wisdom to turn misfortunes to advantage, we ought to contrive methods by which the vices of the people may enrich the government.⁶⁸

Interestingly, the temperance movement of the 1830s and 40s provided reformers with a political vehicle to confront the controlling interests of the old elite. Lockwood refers to temperance as “ethnic subterfuge,” or a cover to organize against Irish Protestants

London District, } Be it Remembered, That on the *fifth* day
 To W^{it} } of *January* in the *third* year of the Reign
 of *William the Fourth*, Personally appeared before me, JOHN B. ASKIN, Esq.
 Clerk of the Peace for the London District, *Bruce Poley*
 of the Township of *London* in the said District, Yeoman, *John P. Hall*
of Westminster and *Thomas*
Putnam of Westchester and severally acknowledged themselves to owe to our
 Sovereign Lord the King, that is to say, the said *Bruce Poley*
 the Sum of Ten Pounds, and the said *John P. Hall*
 and *Thomas Putnam*
 each the Sum of Five Pounds, of good and lawful money of Upper Canada, to be made and
 levied of their respective Goods and Chattels, Lands and Tenements, separately, to the use of
 our said Lord the King, his Heirs and Successors, if Default shall be made in the Condition
 hereunder written.

The Condition of the above written Recognizance is such, that if the above bounden
Bruce Poley shall keep a good House of Public Entertainment
 where he now lives, in *London* and shall suffer no *unlawful* Games
 to be used therein, or in any part or place thereunto belonging, but shall follow and truly ob-
 serve such Rules, Regulations, and Orders as shall from time to time be made by the Magis-
 trates in General Quarter Sessions of the Peace for his observance, then this Obligation to
 be null and void, otherwise to be and remain in full force and effect.

Taken and acknowledged before me at *London* *the 5th day of January 1833*
J. B. Askin
C. P. *Bruce Poley*
John P. Hall
Thomas Putnam

Tavern License, January 1833. Courtesy J.J. Talman Collection

and the Tory Orangemen.⁶⁹ In spite of the increased lobbying efforts of temperance advocates, the management of the liquor trade remained as politically significant for the moderate Tories who displaced the old Tory elite, or Family Compact, and directed the administrative policies of Canada West in the pre- and immediate post-Confederation period. Tavern, shop, inn, ale and beer house, brewery, and billiard table licenses provided £335,121 in revenue to the Province of Canada between 1840 and 1857, and from 1858 to 1866, almost C\$2 million.⁷⁰

Collecting license fees was a significant part of the administrative process of state formation in early Canada. An addition to the expanding role of the local inspector was the increasing obligation to police public houses of entertainment, particularly since taverns and shops were the most common businesses in rapidly growing settlements. In the towns of Canada West during the pre-Confederation period, such as Kingston, Hamilton, London, Toronto, in smaller villages such as Goderich and Woodstock, and in counties such as York, Peel, Simcoe, and others, officials charged thousands of men and women of many ethnic groups with various alcohol-related offences including drunkenness, disorderly conduct, selling liquor without a license, keeping disorderly houses, and uttering profanities.⁷¹ Tavern owners in the townships of the Home District received stern warnings in 1840 that the newly appointed Deputy Inspector James Bell would be paying them a visit to ensure their premises operated in accordance with the law.⁷² Town taverns in

general, once primarily inns which provided lodging for travelers, increasingly shifted services toward alcohol sales and entertainment, as these towns became permanent settlements with rising numbers of inhabitants. Inns and taverns with accommodations and stables remained, as required by law, but larger, more elaborate hotels such as the Tecumseh Hotel in London, built in the mid-1850s and the British American House in Kingston served the male and female travelers with the financial means and the inclination towards cleaner, more reputable establishments. Local citizens and travelers who sought inexpensive whiskey, conversation, news, or games such as cards and billiards, represented the majority of mid-century clientele for the tavern owners. Although illegal, gambling at cards and billiards was generally tolerated, and owners occasionally contrived other means of entertaining patrons through minstrel shows, singing, staged boxing matches, and animal baiting.⁷³ For example, a boxing ring was constructed outside of the One Horse Tavern in London in 1858 to accommodate a match between fighters from Buffalo and Detroit that lasted thirteen rounds.⁷⁴

Treating, Testing, Challenging

Taverns and public houses became viewed as supplements to everyday work and home routines, what Warsh has referred to as “anti-shop” or “anti-home.”⁷⁵ Men and women of all classes drank at home, but the emergent prohibitionist rhetoric of the white middle class reformers proclaimed that public drinking was indecent for women.⁷⁶ Liquor consumption was an important marker within the gendered, behavioural polarities invoked in the broader construction of separate spheres for men and women. Even women of wealth and status were not exempt from the suspicions of temperance scouts, as reported by the Long Point *Advocate*:



The Tecumseh Hotel, London, date unknown. *Courtesy J.J. Talman Collection*

there are secret places in the city furnished in the most gorgeous style, and patronized almost exclusively by women of wealth and fashion, who go there first for ice creams, fruits and then for charet, champagne, brandy, mint juleps, sherry clobbers and brandy slings. This is no fancy sketch; there are at this moment scores of women of the first rank in society who have become inveterate tipplers at these places.⁷⁷

Women visited and owned taverns and sold liquor from back kitchens throughout the nineteenth century, but the Canadian press and temperance literature increasingly situated taverns as disreputable establishments and, by association, male domains.⁷⁸ Thus, the actual construction and the social construction of the tavern in Victorian Canada by patrons, opponents, and the judiciary more broadly tended to reinforce gender privilege for men.⁷⁹ Women who entertained men in the taverns and prostitutes who worked the street corners outside were generally accused of leading men astray and “spoiling” their morals.⁸⁰ Character references provided by previous employers or “respectable” citizens often established a basis for employment for working women who lived outside of the house of their fathers, or for those without husbands. A woman’s social reputation, and therefore her employment opportunities, could easily have been tarnished by connections to unsavory public houses or by accusations of “lewd” behaviour. The tavern, and the deeply gendered, arbitrarily enforced laws that governed them, provided men with more “legitimate” social options for public entertainment. Even if reformers, temperance advocates, liquor inspectors, and law enforcers associated drinking establishments with crime, poverty, and social evils, these critics did not label them as “unmanly.” Evidently a certain gendered, cross-class solidarity existed on the rights of a man to a drink or two, which lends support to the argument that institutions of leisure and entertainment, such as the tavern and sporting club, were important in the construction of separate spheres for men and women. The white, middle-class-based Montreal SnowShoe Club, for example, celebrated the manly virtues of physical, outdoor exercise-for men only. Of course that meant the “right sort” of man. Although admired for their skill in racing, as Don Morrow argues, the Natives were viewed as social inferiors, ridiculed and derided.⁸¹ These constellations of meaning in Morrow’s analysis demonstrate the intimate relations between the forces of class, gender, and “race” manifested through the nineteenth century sport club.

Commensurate with early tavern culture was the practice of treating or the buying of rounds of liquor for all men present. Those on the receiving end were obliged to drink and to reciprocate at a later date, and those treating others were obligated by expenditure. Such obligatory expressions of manhood and economic exchange exhibited character and reputation that invoked a certain fraternity among drinking men. Brennan refers to these practices as a “culture of reciprocity” which acted to “fortify the fellowship of drinking groups.”⁸² Critics of treating argued that it contributed to general poverty and the economic dislocation of the indigent, or essentially that the exchange values represented in these kinds of relationships ran counter to responsible business and the kinds of economic development promoted in British North America.⁸³ Increasingly, social reform advocates viewed most taverns as labouring class and underclass establishments, where working class and ethnic solidarity and political unrest might be encouraged.⁸⁴ By law, any tavern keeper who was found “persuading servant or labourer to confederate for higher wages” had to

forfeit his license. Government policy implicated taverns, in part, in the prevalence of poverty in Upper Canada. *Statutes* of 1837, for example, aimed at establishing Houses of Industry for the poor claimed that such people “spend their time and property in public houses, to the neglect of their lawful calling.”⁸⁵ From Henry Ward Beecher’s *Lectures to Young Men*, Marsh identifies advice to young males to avoid prostitutes, gambling dens, and the “questionable pleasures of urban life,” which of course included the tavern.⁸⁶ Unlike the gentry who preceded them in positions of social and political influence and their codes of honour, middle class reformers in Canada West organized notions of masculinity around “rationality” and the idea that professional respect and status needed to be earned through appropriate behavior and business practices. The Victorian middle classes, argues D. Walker Howe, moved away from “sanctioning the use of violence in human relationships.”⁸⁷ Such forms of masculinity, alternative to those celebrated by the gentry, with emphasis on education, social betterment, temperance, and responsibility to the workplace were promoted in opposition to the codes of behavior understood and practiced by the tavern goer. Part of the social solution entailed the advancement of more “appropriate” kinds of male values and honour in line with those accepted by middle-class reformers. The local courts, notes Robert Griswald, reaffirmed the importance of sobriety to notions of appropriate manhood.⁸⁸ And temperance advocates and social reformers stated quite different attitudes about men’s courage, as evident in the following excerpt from the *Norfolk Reformer* in 1863:

The Decoy that makes young men drunkards. Go with us to a public house, where a number of young men are assembled. All is life and gayety [sic]. A few of them may be young and timid. They approach the counter, and wine, rum, and brandy are called for. One or two may stand back and say “No gentlemen, we do not drink any, please excuse us.” Immediately the rest turn, and begin to taunt their friends who refuse to drink, saying they are afraid of getting “tight” of the old man’, and some whisper audibly, “Well they are mean fellows—they are afraid they will have to spend a cent!” Here you see two very sensitive nerves touched, Courage and Cleverness. Their bosoms swell with pride, and rather than bear these flings of their companions, they set up to the counter and soon join in the revelry. The ice is now broken and the first great act in the drama performed. Others follow in natural order, until the individual who refused to drink at first, reels along the public street without shame. Such is the manner in which thousands more will follow in their path, unless they learn the meaning of courage.⁸⁹

In the tavern, however, “measuring up” as a man was not always confined to drinking ability and treating hospitality. Personal honour was often challenged in the taverns of Upper Canada and Canada West through arguments or tests of strength, but most often by fist fights and violent brawls. Small-scale scuffles and fisticuffs without weapons were only of minor concern to tavern owners, police, and the newspapers. The proprietor of McGuinness’s tavern at the corner of Grey and Wellington streets in London, Mr. Foster, testified in court that fighting was not outside of the normal parameters of what he considered to be proper behavior in most taverns.⁹⁰ Some owners refused to intervene in fights and even joined the revelers in cheering on the combatants when a brawl spilled outside to the street. Witnesses reported that the proprietor of Carty’s Saloon cheered the men on

outside his tavern and laughed when blood gushed from a 63-year-old man's face and several of his teeth were knocked out as he was being pummeled by a younger man.⁹¹

Part of the business of selling liquor included the difficult and often dangerous task of refusing service to drunken patrons. Provincial law placed the impetus of control over drunken behaviour in the hands of tavern owners in 1849, when they were made liable for the safety of their patrons and any accidents caused by intoxication.⁹² A drunken James Regan entered Thomas Haight's Bowling Saloon on Wellington Street in Kingston and was refused entry to the alley. Regan became violent and repeatedly struck the tavern owner in the nose and face and tore his clothing to shreds. A boarder at a Johnston Street inn in Kingston, after being expelled from the premises, returned to exact revenge upon the innkeeper, J.G. Clark. Clark was struck and severely injured by a stone.

Many men regarded fighting as an acceptable and even preferable method of settling scores and the implications of outcomes generally carried the title of the "better man," which extended beyond the tavern to the street. The frequent, violent challenges between men sometimes resulted in serious injuries or death.⁹³ Graham Glass, a barkeep at the City Hotel in London, challenged a patron, Mr. Lodge, to a feat of strength, an arm wrestling contest, or what was referred to as "trying arms." The press described Lodge as the "better man" for beating Glass several times. Glass continued to insult Lodge, using profane language, which ultimately led to a fistfight between the men with both punches and flying glass.⁹⁴ The newspapers often cited public insults, slander, and blasphemy as the impetus for brawls. A melee between at least six men, for example, began at Irvin's Saloon in London when an ex-military officer shouted "to hell with the Queen." When Police Constable Fletcher arrived, four men were pummeling two opponents on the floor of the tavern.⁹⁵ A fight at the London garrison canteen was instigated by a member of the Royal Artillery who called his own company a "damned set of bullfrogs."⁹⁶ Outside of Webb's tavern, Charles Taylor was successful in convincing Duncan Dulmage to fight him. After several challenges, Taylor yelled, "Dulmage, you're no man!" and the two men fought fiercely until Dulmage was stabbed and unable to continue.⁹⁷

Newspapers in Upper Canada and Canada West such as the London *Free Press*, St. Thomas *Weekly Dispatch*, and Kingston *Daily News*, for example, augmented the valorization of masculinities through the physical challenge and the fistfight. Newspaper rhetoric on the notion of public demonstrations of appropriate masculinity was by no means universal; the papers were at best fragmented in their representations of violence. Indeed, at a time when middle class preferences about public violence leaned towards control and good conduct, reports still endorsed the idea of the "fair" fight and a challenge between men as a valid confrontation. Even when reports lamented the physical violence of the tavern as uncivilized, at the same time they celebrated the instances when local "rowdies" and known fighters were beaten and sent "sprawling out the door."⁹⁸

James Brown of Kingston entreated a "second" from McConnell's tavern, Peter McNamara, to go with him to John Ring's tavern to find Henry Ferguson who, in a previous fight, had blackened Brown's eyes and bitten his finger. The Kingston *Daily News* reported that after the second confrontation, and Ferguson's death, McNamara testified that Brown was not motivated by malice or revenge and had only wanted a fair fight to determine who was the best man. On an evening out, James Pitchen and Patrick Hurley of

Kingston looked to challenge any soldiers from the garrison to a fight. They found two at Regan's tavern, wrestled them outside, and began fighting on the street.⁹⁹

Some men carried reputations for their fighting skills and, according to the local newspapers, were best avoided unless their opponents enjoyed the aid of friends. Joseph Berryhill was one such fighter, known as a local bully in London township. He was drinking at the Revere House in Lucan and challenged James Keefe Jr.: "I will lick you," he said, "I'll meet you to fight." Later that night, Keefe found Berryhill drinking at Walker House in Lucan. He confronted Berryhill with his friend James Donnelly Jr. and Donnelly's brother, Thomas. During the ensuing fight Berryhill was struck in the head with a hand held stone by Keefe, and James Donnelly implored: "Give it to him, the son of a bitch." After Berryhill was left bleeding with one arm dangling limp at his side, James Donnelly and Keefe were called away by another brother, Michael Donnelly, while Thomas sat drinking at the bar, watching a doctor tend to Berryhill's wounds.¹⁰⁰ The Donnelly brothers, and their local adversaries, had long histories of violence toward one another and well publicized "pugilistic fame" in the Lucan and London area taverns.¹⁰¹

Physical altercations in the tavern occurred between friends, neighbors, and fellow townspeople, but also served to demonstrate a local solidarity against the intrusion of strangers. A group of men drinking in Fish's tavern in Walsingham, for example, took exception to the arrival of a stranger, Walter Rockyfellow. A fight ensued and Rockyfellow went home; when he returned with his son, looking to challenge the men he had fought previously, he engaged in a fight, was battled to the ground by his opponent, and then kicked repeatedly in the head by one of the onlookers. He died eight days later.¹⁰² In Guelph, at Brockton's Saloon, two men joined two strangers for drinks and conversation. Michael Phelan, a baker, had "words" and a brief scuffle with the "tall Englishman" in the group. After being separated, Phelan challenged the Englishman to a fistfight, outside. When the fight ended, Phelan had almost lost an eye and the Englishman was missing part of a finger.¹⁰³

Men of all classes insulted one another, engaged in simple arguments that resulted in violence, settled personal and professional scores, fought over issues of gambling and politics, and sometimes initiated fights for no apparent reason other than the excitement of the assault. After a horse race in St. Thomas, a group of male spectators returned to Ridell's tavern to drink and discuss the affair. St. Thomas builder George Brown argued with ex-alderman Riddell over the outcome of the race. The two men decided upon fisticuff to resolve their dispute over the merits of the two horses. The brawl ended with the death of Brown, who was kicked to death.¹⁰⁴ W. McKerlie and Edward Talbot fought at Balkwill's Hotel on the northwest corner of King street in London after McKerlie accused Talbot of winning the "Queen's Plate" horse race using unfair means. Henry Robert Smith, son of Sir Henry Smith entered Cicolari's Saloon in Kingston and challenged Maxwell Strange, accusing him of being a "poltroon" for insulting Smith's father during the previous election. Smith then punched Strange in the face.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, assault, disorderly conduct, and drunkenness consistently represented the most commonly tried offenses in Kingston, Hamilton, London, and Toronto.¹⁰⁶ Police enforced the public nuisance laws indiscriminately and local magistrates invoked sentences rather arbitrarily, depending upon the defendant's station, appearance, and the

whim of the official.¹⁰⁷ The London *Free Press* even refused to name a gentleman who operated a business on Dundas street when police charged him with assaulting a drunken man.¹⁰⁸ Magistrates sometimes released with minimal fines the well dressed revelers and travelers who promised to leave the city. Others, often repeat offenders, routinely were sentenced to 30 days in jail. One young woman, arrested by Constable Fletcher in London, was placed in jail for vagrancy, left unattended, and forgotten for two days.¹⁰⁹

One of the most notorious men of London politics, Frank E. Cornish, served as mayor from 1861 to 1864 and, as city magistrate, routinely judged offenders for drunkenness, assault, and disorderly conduct. However, Cornish himself viciously attacked Major Bowles following a celebration to commemorate the marriage of the Prince of Wales hosted by the Tecumseh House, considered to be the principal hotel of the city. Rumored to have been involved with the mayor's wife, Bowles had his Crimean War medals torn from his chest. Cornish and Bowles exchanged blows outside the hotel, as Cornish implored him to engage in a fistfight. During another episode, Cornish was charged with drunkenness and driving his carriage in a careless fashion; he sat on the magistrate's bench, reportedly gave himself a tongue lashing, and fined himself two dollars for the infraction.¹¹⁰ After his term as mayor, Cornish was charged with assaulting J.T. Boniface in Bulver's Saloon. When Alderman McBride issued a summons for his arrest, Cornish struck him in the face, and the two men fought in the street. Following Cornish's arrest, he broke several windows at the station, yelling "there's not enough policemen in London to put me in the lock-up."¹¹¹

Fistfights may have been the common method of settling disputes and disagreements, but sometimes the combatants drew weapons that inflicted immediate and serious harm.



Frank Cornish, date unknown. *Courtesy J.J. Talman Collection*

In Mortimer's tavern on John Street in Hamilton, John Power was engaged by plasterer Edward Dalton in a "slight squabble" which escalated into a fight. Power drew a knife and stabbed Dalton, leaving a portion of the weapon embedded in his side.¹¹² An argument between Robert Murray and Robert Glassford at a tavern located at the North corner of Dundas and Wellington streets in London, escalated into a wrestling match. The bigger man, Glassford, released Murray from his grasp; Murray threw stones at him in the street, and when Glassford turned to evade the stones, he was stabbed in the back at the door of the tavern. The original impetus for fighting was a dispute between Glassford and Murray's brother.¹¹³

Middle class reformers ridiculed this method of settling scores and proving manliness through uncontrolled violence as representing the deeds of uncivilized men. Following a fight at McLean's tavern at Dorchester Station, for which the combatants had mutually agreed to settle their differences by fighting, the *Free Press* satirized fighting between men as a legitimate method of solving disputes, encapsulating some of the issues of public confrontations and framing men's options as either "fighting it out" or "going to the law." The men in this article, who were given fictional names, sought to settle a disagreement and brought "seconds" with them to a location on the edge of town to ensure a fair fight (a similar practice to the gentry duel of an earlier era). The tale satirized the sentiment of fighting men who may have considered physical combat to be efficient and economical; yet, these men suffered severe injuries, the seconds became involved in the fight, and at the conclusion of the melee, no parties felt satisfied that the dispute had been resolved.¹¹⁴ The paper obviously endorsed the more "respectable" method of solving disputes in court, as opposed to imposing "tavern justice."

Liquor and Violence: Race, Ethnicity, Religion

Race and ethnicity figured prominently in tavern fighting and, more significantly, formed a focal point for government legislation and the application of law. Tavern-owners and barkeeps arbitrarily refused liquor service to rowdy or suspect patrons but the law prohibited the sale of alcohol to Natives. The earliest Act (1801) prohibited the sale of alcohol to Moravian Indians on the banks of the Thames River in Oxford County.¹¹⁵ This restriction was expanded to all "Indians" and was province-wide by 1840.¹¹⁶ The rhetoric of this legislation ostensibly laid claim to assuring the "comfort" of Natives, but in the context of assimilation and the obliteration of Native culture, these acts further removed rights of citizenship, and cemented the social polarity of Natives and non-Natives. Citizens in Kingston lobbied for increased police surveillance of tavern owners who violated the liquor statutes and provided "fire water" to Natives who visited the town.¹¹⁷ In the following year a group of Natives was ridiculed in the same paper, charged for being drunk, and referred to as "tawny sons and daughters of the wood."¹¹⁸ Similarly in London, Kate Jacques, "a squaw from Delaware," charged with drunkenness and vagrancy, was ridiculed by the press.¹¹⁹ John Chapman, "a red man of the forest," was given five days at hard labour for being drunk and a nuisance, a sentence more severe than what was usually handed down for such offenses.¹²⁰ Since the earlier era of abusive trade relations between Europeans and Natives, liquor had always been a convenient excuse for the displacement and poverty of Natives, and prohibition established further social boundaries of appropri-

ate public behaviour, based explicitly upon commonly held notions about race and race management as conceived by white Canadians.

Ethnic rivalries, tensions, and racism also factored into tavern fighting. Ethnic divisions had always been part of the Canadian cultural landscape and, in Upper Canada, the tavern provided a forum in which these tensions manifested themselves. To challenge a man's religious affiliation, particularly at a time when ethnic solidarity remained an important part of community and individual identity, represented a direct challenge to his sense of masculinity. On the receiving end, denying the ethnic- or religiously-based challenge affronted—or diverted attention from—commonly understood norms of public manhood. Political and religious arguments between Protestants and Catholics sometimes led to violence both inside and outside drinking establishments. Half a dozen men were charged with attempted murder in Hamilton after they assaulted a Mr. Burns at the Peacock Tavern on Dundas Street. The *Hamilton Gazette* in 1853 reported that an altercation arose between the parties, who were Orangemen and Catholics.¹²¹ Catholic Michael Carrel and Orangeman William McConnell drank together at a tavern in Acton. The two men eventually began to argue and then parted company. The next day Carrel met McConnell on the street with an axe and struck him in the face.¹²² In Boyle's tavern in London, a drunken man named Finn, complaining that he had been assaulted previously, began shouting "to hell with the Orangemen" and whirled a chair around his head, striking one of the bar patrons.¹²³ A Mr. Buttler, an employee of Pishon's Tavern on John Street in Hamilton was confronted on the steps of the building by two patrons, who insinuated that a black man had no right to sit there. Those men plus another accosted Buttler again and when he rose in his defense, he was immediately stabbed in the thigh by one of the three men, O'Brien, a labourer on the Great Western Railroad.¹²⁴

"Manly" Fun

Tavern challenges and fights were not always spontaneous escalations of simple matters or a question of settling previous scores between individuals. Gangs of men, traveling from tavern to tavern, sought out both known enemies and complete strangers and gained notoriety for their fighting and drinking habits. Gangs of fugitives roamed from place to place to escape the law,¹²⁵ but others actively challenged local men to fights and routinely destroyed the interiors of the public houses they visited. G.H. Green recounts that, "[o]ne of the pastimes of the bad boys from town (Goderich) was to swoop down on country taverns and take possession of the bar when they got liquored up."¹²⁶ Such was the case with a gang of twenty men from Clinton who met at Whitehead's tavern in Tuckersmith with a gang from Seaforth for the purpose of "raising a row and whipping the country boys."¹²⁷ Two constables prevented the 25 to 30 "desperadoes" from creating problems during the first evening, but during the next day the men entered a local school, drove the children out, assaulted the teacher, and then fled. In another such incident, according to the *Free Press*, approximately 100 men boarded the 3 o'clock train from London bound for Port Stanley. The group demolished a tavern and assaulted the patrons with stones and fists.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Throughout the early nineteenth century in Upper Canada, to the immediate post-confederation period in Canada West and Ontario, relationships between men were frequently violent. Physical challenges went hand in hand with everyday life—in the fields, in the bush, in the streets, and in the taverns—for economic, political, racial, ethnic, and social reasons. Men asserted themselves violently over issues of land, business, patriotism, slander, race, and manly reputation. The fistfight provided an immediate and spontaneous, albeit dangerous, resolution to personal and professional differences. Men wrestled and punched one another for fun, lifted heavy objects, and ran races as tests of skill and masculinity; but sometimes they wielded fists and weapons to maim and kill. Acts of symbolic masculinity such as the duel, the working bee wrestling contest, and the lacrosse match provided meanings and significance according to class- and gender-based notions of appropriate manliness, but all invoked the physical challenge as the medium for such representations. As the most popular public venue for men to convene, the tavern was a cultural site of camaraderie, conflict, confrontation, and settling scores. Soldiers, farmers, labourers, and politicians gathered, drank, and sorted out their differences. Selective land-granting policies, massive immigration, economic and political upheaval, limited and arbitrary law enforcement, religious and ethnic rivalries, and generally harsh living conditions provided for a very unstable existence for most families and individuals of limited means. Some men turned to confrontation and violence to resolve both the most simple and the most complex of issues. However, for all classes of men, body and honour were enmeshed in the gender-class nexus, often expressed in public life and leisure. Meanings about gender, social class, race, and ethnicity intersected in the social construction of masculinity at the most fundamental levels, and the physical challenge defined for men their self identity and their self-perception of manliness.

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1. See J.M. Beattie, "Attitudes Towards Crime and Punishment in Upper Canada, 1830-1850: A Documentary Study," (Toronto: Working Paper of the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto, 1977). 1-8; more specifically see the "Report of the Commission to Inquire as to the Best Means of Suppressing the Vice of Drunkenness," Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada, 1856, Appendix 62; F.S. Spence, *The Facts of the Case: A Summary of the Most Important Evidence and Argument Presented in the Report of the Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic* (Toronto: 1896).
 2. C. Morgan, "In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour: Duelling in Upper Canada," *The Canadian Historical Review* 76 (1995): 529-62.
 3. See Colin D. Howell, *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport 1807-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987); Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
 4. Edwin C. Guillet, *Early Life in Upper Canada* (Toronto: Ontario Publishing Co., 1933); Kevin B. Wamsley, "The Public Importance of Men and the Importance of Public Men: Sport and Masculinity in 19th Century Canada," in *Sport and Gender in Canada*, ed. Philip White and Kevin Young (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999), 24-39.
 5. On the leisure habits and social practices of men and women in nineteenth century see Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

6. R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
7. Veronica J. Strong-Boag and A. Clair Fellman, *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997).
8. Samuel D. Clark, *The Developing Canadian Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).
9. Michael A. Salter, "L'Ordre de Bon Temps: A Functional Analysis," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, 3 (2): 111-19.
10. R.W. Connell, "The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World Histories," *Theory and Society* 22(5): 597-623 (1993). See also Carol Devens, "Separate Confrontations: Gender as a Factor in Indian Adaptation to European Colonization in New France," in Strong-Boag and Fellman, *Rethinking Canada*, 11-32.
11. Ronald S. Lappage, "The Physical Feats of the Voyageur," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* 15 (1984): 30-37.
12. *Ibid.*, 33-34.
13. *Ibid.*, 35.
14. *Ibid.*, 34.
15. For a further discussion of these professions and gender identities see Wamsley, "Public Importance of Men."
16. On the Tory elite, or the Family Compact as they were known, see Hugh G.J. Aitken, "The Family Compact and the Welland Canal Company," in James K. Johnson, ed., *Historical Essays on Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 153-70; Frederick H. Armstrong, "The Oligarchy of the Western District of Upper Canada, 1788-1841," in James K. Johnson and Bruce G. Wilson, eds., *Historical Essays on Upper Canada: New Perspectives* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), 513-35; M. Cross, "The Age of Gentility: The Formation of the Aristocracy in the Ottawa Valley," *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* (1967): 105-17; S.F. Wise, "The Family Compact: A Negative Oligarchy," in David W.L. Earl, ed., *The Family Compact: Aristocracy or Oligarchy* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1967), 142-45; S.F. Wise, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition," in R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Readings in Canadian History*, (Toronto: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1986), 281-94. The Tory elite sustained their political power in Upper Canada through a patronage network which, simply stated, rewarded like-minded individuals with similar socioeconomic backgrounds with government positions, economic advantages, favorable loans, and contracts to build provincial infrastructure. Following the rebellions, Upper Canada and Lower Canada were administered under a government of the Province of Canada, and known as Canada West and Canada East, respectively. Some of the material for this paper extends into the immediate post-Confederation period (after 1867).
17. *History of the County of Middlesex, Canada* (Toronto: Goodspeed Publishers, 1889), 123-24. According to Daniel Brock, this first history of Middlesex County, Ontario, was a project undertaken by brothers Weston Arthur Goodspeed and Charles L. Goodspeed, who owned a publishing company in Chicago. As with similar histories published in the United States, this volume was team-written over a relatively short period of time—in this case between 1888 and 1889—for prepaid subscribers who lived in the county and whose family history was included therein. See Daniel Brock, "Introduction and Correction to the New Addition," in *History of the County of Middlesex, Canada*, repr. ed. (Belleville, Ontario: Mika Studio, 1972).
18. *Ibid.*, 120-22.
19. *Ibid.*, 106-07.
20. Allan Greer, "The Birth of the Police in Canada," in Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 17-49.
21. R. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

22. Morgan, "Phantom Misnamed Honour," 552.
23. *Ibid.*, 545-46 (account of the duel between lawyer William Baldwin and Attorney General John Macdonnell).
24. *Ibid.*, 546-47.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Statutes of the Province of Canada, 10, 11 Vic.cap. VI (1847).
27. See Kevin Wamsley, "Legislation and Leisure in 19th Century Canada" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1992).
28. On middle class values and masculinity, see Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), and Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood, Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
29. John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 53-78. For a particularly perceptive case analysis of a men's sporting club, see Don Morrow, "The Knights of the Snowshoe: A Study of the Evolution of Sport in Nineteenth Century Montreal," *Journal of Sport History* 15 (1): 5-40 (Spring 1988).
30. See Alan Metcalfe's discussion of class-based sport in Canada; for the sport of curling, see Gerald Redmond, *The Sporting Scots of Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: Associated Press, 1982).
31. Edwin C. Guillet, *Pioneer Days in Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 119-40.
32. See discussion in Connell, *Masculinities*, 5655; on the issue of bodily capacities as economic assets, see Mike Donaldson, *Time of Our Lives: Labour and Love in the Working Class*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991).
33. Guillet, *Pioneer Days*, see especially 119-40.
34. William D. Butt, "The Donnellys: History, Legend, Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1977), 48-50. James Donnelly Sr. eventually served time in prison for this murder. His sons, discussed below, operated a stage coach line and waged a continuous battle for business with their competitors. The drivers engaged in fistfights on an almost daily basis, literally fighting for customers and control of the stage coach route to London. The massacre of the Donnelly family remains one of the more storied affairs in Ontario history.
35. Guillet, *Pioneer Days*, 89.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Connell, *Masculinities*, 189-91.
38. Norman Feltes, *This Side of Heaven: Determining the Donnelly Murders, 1880*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 126-47.
39. Linda Borish, "A Fair, Without the Fair is No Fair at All: Women at the New England Agricultural Fair in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Sport History* 24 (2): 155-76 (Summer 1997).
40. Both men, remembered for astonishing feats of strength, are recorded as being over seven feet tall and weighing between 600 and 700 pounds. Canadian strongman Louis Cyr, whose feats were witnessed in urban Canada, the United States, and overseas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reportedly had a grandfather with a reputation in Quebec as the "village strongman." *Iron Game History* 1 (1): 5 (Feb. 1990); Don Morrow, et. al., *A Concise History of Sport in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press), 41; Ben Weider. *The Strongest Man in History: Louis Cyr* (Toronto: Mitchell Press, 1976).
41. See Edwin C. Guillet, *Pioneer Inns and Taverns*, vol. I (Toronto: 1954), 51; *ibid.*, vol. IV (1958), 80.
42. *Newmarket Era* (5 Feb. 1864), 4.
43. See the *London Free Press* (20 May 1862) for a listing of sporting events organized by the London garrison.

44. See Robert D. Day, "The British Garrison at Halifax: Its Contribution to the Development of Sport in the Community", in Morris K. Mott, ed., *Sports in Canada: Historical Readings* (Mississauga, Ontario: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989), 28-36. Along with various sporting events and holiday parades, the garrison men were also involved in theatrical productions and the organization of balls and dances.
45. Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Nova Scotia: Pottersfield, 1989). See Greer on this issue as well. Complaints about fights and violence related to alcohol consumption were common in London, Canada West.
46. This material, from surveys of the Kingston Gazette and *Daily News* and London *Free Press*, will be discussed later in the paper.
47. Margaret McBurney and Mary Byers, *Tavern in the Town: Early Inns and Taverns of Ontario*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 146.
48. London *Free Press* (7 Aug. 1862).
49. Merwin A. Garland, "The Religious and Moral Conditions in Upper Canada 1815-1840" (master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1927), 53-59.
50. See Guillet, *Pioneer Inns*, vol. IV; McBurney and Byers, *Tavern in the Town*.
51. The historical sketches of Peter McGregor's tavern are limited. An unpublished biography notes that McGregor kept a jug of whisky on a tree stump with a tumbler for passers by and guests to serve themselves. See Edwin C. Guillet, *Pioneer Inns and Taverns*, vol. III (Toronto: Toronto Ontario Publishing Co., 1957), 207; and Daniel Brock, "Peter McGregor: A Pioneer Tavern Keeper in Middlesex County," unpublished paper (1986), J.J. Talman Regional Collection, University of Western Ontario, 3.
52. McBurney and Byers, *Tavern in the Town*, 219.
53. Guillet, *Pioneer Days*, 144-45; and Garland, "Religious and Moral Conditions," 172.
54. *Woodstock Herald* (24 Oct. 1845), 3.
55. Newspaper article, source unknown, J.J. Talman Regional Collections, University of Western Ontario.
56. *Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada* (1846), Appendix H; *Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada* (1847), Appendix A, No. 30. Calculations are ours.
57. *Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada* (1841), Appendix S.
58. Letter to the editor of the Kingston *Chronicle and Gazette* (12 Dec. 1840).
59. Guillet, *Pioneer Inns*, vol. IV, 208.
60. Jan. Noel, "Dry Patriotism: The Chiniquy Crusade," in Cheryl L. Warsh, ed., *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1933), 30. Noel's argument is based on evidence from Lower Canada. For Upper Canada, see Guillet, *Pioneer Days*, 144.
61. Wamsley, "Legislation and Leisure," 60-68.
62. Statutes of Upper Canada, 58 Geo. III Cap. II.
63. 4 Geo.III. Cap.XV.
64. Consolidated Statutes of Upper Canada (1859), 594-95.
65. Township of London By Laws (1850).
66. *History of the County of Middlesex*, 255. Sir John Carling was among the most influential citizens in London during the second half of the nineteenth century representing London in the city council, provincial legislature, and national parliament during his life-time.
67. Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada (1847), Appendix KKK (our calculations).
68. *British American* (12 May 1849), 1.
69. Glenn J. Lockwood, "Temperance in Upper Canada as Ethnic Subterfuge," in Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 43-69.

70. The Province of Canada before Confederation consisted of Canada West, later Ontario and Canada East, later Quebec. These figures do not include 1841. The calculations, which must be considered estimates, were made from data found in the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada, 1840-66*, and from the *Sessional Papers, Province of Canada, 1860-66*. See Table 7 in Wamsley, "Legislation and Leisure," 121. The Canadian dollar was new in 1858, and determining its equivalent value in 1840 is not possible from these records.
71. See especially *Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada* (1855) Appendix AAA. From our extensive surveys of newspapers from London, Toronto, Ottawa, Oshawa, Kingston, Hamilton, Goderich, Sarnia, Owen Sound, Tillsonburg, Windsor, Chatham, Woodstock, Simcoe, Barrie, St. Thomas, Niagara, Brockville, Milton, and Long Point, we conclude that these estimations are not exaggerated in the least.
72. *The Mirror* (3 Jul. 1840).
73. Such activities were not practiced in the majority of taverns in part because they attracted unwanted attention from constables and inspectors. But there were exceptions, such as the bull-baiting affair at Sullivan's tavern in Toronto on New Year's Day in 1862. A bull was tethered to a heavy weight by its nose and set upon by bull dogs, four in turn. The crowd was large, fiercely excited, and gambled on the outcome. Eventually the bull sank to the ground from exhaustion. *The Daily Leader* (3 Jan. 1862), 2. A letter to the editor of the *Leader* in 1854 criticized Vine's tavern for its frequent dog and cock fighting entertainments. See Charles A. Joyce, "From Left Field: Sport and Class in Toronto, 1845-1886" (Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1997), 118, citing *The Daily Leader* (14 Apr. 1854). See also H. Christie, "The Function of the Tavern in Toronto, 1834-1875. With Special Reference to Sport," (master's thesis, University of Windsor, 1973). For an exemplary study of the tavern cultures of Montreal, see Peter de Lottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal: Working-Class Culture and the Tavern, 1869-1889," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 8-9: 9-40 (1981-82).
74. *London Free Press* (1 Nov. 1858).
75. Cheryl L. Warsh, "'John Barleycorn Must Die': An Introduction to the Social History of Alcohol," in Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 3-26.
76. Cheryl L. Warsh, "'Oh, Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart': The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada," in Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 70-91. On the social construction of drinking as a masculine activity, see Cecilia A. Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 163-69.
77. *Long Point Advocate* (4 Aug. 1851), 1. Newspapers often printed reports from other cities in Canada, the United States, England, and Ireland, so it is not immediately apparent to which city this article refers.
78. Anti-tavern sentiment was evident in all of the Ontario newspapers that were surveyed. In some exceptions, taverns were praised as viable and important local businesses and the abuse of alcohol was more the target. See for example the *British American* (30 Dec. 1848), 3: "we look upon the business of a Tavern keeper as a perfectly legal occupation of which he should not be deprived to satisfy the whims of a few fanatical meddlers."
79. See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 4-6.
80. See the *London Free Press* (1 Sep. 1864). Mary Campbell and Mary Flannery were sent back to jail for 30 days for working "before the gates" of Murphy's tavern. John Valk, a tavern keeper on James Street in Hamilton was charged with "allowing a number of females of abandoned character and keepers of houses of ill-fame co assemble and dance." *The Hamilton Gazette* (3 Dec. 1855) indicates Martha Alexander was charged with drunkenness and vagrancy, but let off on the condition that she leave town. This, in spite of her claims that when drinking with some soldiers in a tavern, they stripped her of her clothing and robbed her of four dollars. *Kingston Daily News* (10 Nov. 1863).
81. Don Morrow, "The Knights of the Snowshoe: A Study of the Evolution of Sport in Nineteenth Century Montreal," *Journal of Sport History* 15 (1): 21 (Spring 1988).
82. Thomas E. Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in 18th Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton

- University Press, 1988), 14-15, cited by Warsh, "John Barleycorn," 7.
83. See W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
 84. See the treatment of the issue of workingmen's solidarity and the role of Charles McKiernan, proprietor of Joe Beef's Canteen, in promoting the rights of labourers in de Lottinville, *Joe Beef*.
 85. Revised Statutes of Upper Canada, Vol. 1 (1837), 828.
 86. Margaret Marsh, "Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity 1870-1915," in Carnes and Griffen, 114.
 87. D. Walker Howe, ed., introduction to *Victorian Culture in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 20.
 88. Robert L. Griswold, "Divorce and the Legal Redefinition of Victorian Manhood," in Carnes and Griffen, 102.
 89. *Norfolk Reformer* (23 Apr. 1863), 1.
 90. London *Free Press* (19 Sep. 1857).
 91. London *Free Press* (2 May 1856).
 92. Statutes of the Province of Canada, 13, 14Vic.cap.XXXVII.
 93. We found many examples in all of the town and city newspapers that we examined, and also in the variety of secondary source literature on town and rural life in the province. These few represent a limited selection of instructive examples only.
 94. London *Free Press*, (1 Oct. 1857).
 95. London *Free Press* (28 Feb. 1856).
 96. London *Free Press* (20 Jan. 1863).
 97. London *Free Press* (24 Jan. 1866).
 98. London *Free Press*, (7 Dec. 1875).
 99. *Kingston Daily News* (3 Mar. 1863).
 100. Butt, "The Donnellys," 83-84.
 101. "Chastising a Rowdy," London *Free Press* (7 Dec. 1875). Feltes analyzes the economic determinants of Donnelly violence, in relation to their stage coach and farming businesses.
 102. The Elora *Backwoodsman* (21 Apr. 1853), 2.
 103. London *Free Press* (23 Aug. 1864).
 104. St. Thomas *Weekly Dispatch* (21 Mar. 1872).
 105. *Kingston Daily News* (4 Jul. 1863).
 106. Statistics and qualitative reports surveyed from the Kingston, London, and Toronto newspapers, and the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada*. For example, in York and Peel Counties, between 1844 and 1853, the following charges were laid: drunk and disorderly conduct—830 men, 974 women; drunk in the streets—482 men, 167 women; drunk and fighting—31 men, 2 women. In London in 1869, 167 people were charged with being drunk, 120 were charged with assault. In Kingston in 1866, 514 people were charged with being drunk, 74 for assault, 113 for disorderly conduct, 61 for being drunk and disorderly.
 107. See examples of sentences and circumstances in the London *Free Press*, 30 Oct. 1858, 1 Nov. 1858, and 9 Jul. 1859.
 108. London *Free Press* (17 Mar. 1860).
 109. London *Free Press* (12 Oct. 1858).
 110. Orlo Miller, *London 200: An Illustrated History* (London: London Chamber of Commerce, 1992), 83-85.
 111. London *Free Press* (29 Apr. 1866).
 112. *Hamilton Gazette* (27 Jun. 1853).

113. London *Free Press* (1 Oct. 1857).
114. London *Free Press* (22 Mar. 1866).
115. Statutes of Upper Canada, 41 Geo.III, cap.VIII.
116. Statutes of Upper Canada, 3Vic.cap.XIII.
117. *Kingston Daily News* (29 Jun. 1866).
118. *Kingston Daily, News* (27 May 1867).
119. London *Free Press* (9 Jan. 1866). Another article in the *Free Press* lamented that once or twice a week, a gang of Indians from outside of town traveled to London to trade goods and then spent the money at taverns. It stated, "It is a crying shame that tavern keepers will persist in disregarding the law and common decency by dealing out liquor to this class of people and cheating them of their hard earned money" (29 Aug. 1865).
120. London *Free Press* (31 May 1864).
121. *Hamilton Gazette* (11 Apr. 1853).
122. *Hamilton Gazette* (5 Apr. 1855).
123. London *Free Press* (20 Mar. 1863).
124. *Hamilton Gazette* (24 Oct. 1853).
125. Police in Sarnia arrested a group of heavily armed men in Mitchell's tavern who had robbed the Hamilton Post Office; *Lambton Observer* (8 Feb. 1855). See also the *Kingston Chronicle* (9 Jul. 1831); with help, the constable arrested five gang members and shot two others at Stafford's Inn in Landsdowne.
126. Guillet, *Pioneer Inns*, vol. I, 51, citing Gavin H. Green, *The Old Log School and Huron Old Boys in Pioneer Days*.
127. London *Free Press* (3 Sep. 1875).
128. London *Free Press* (21 Jun. 1869).