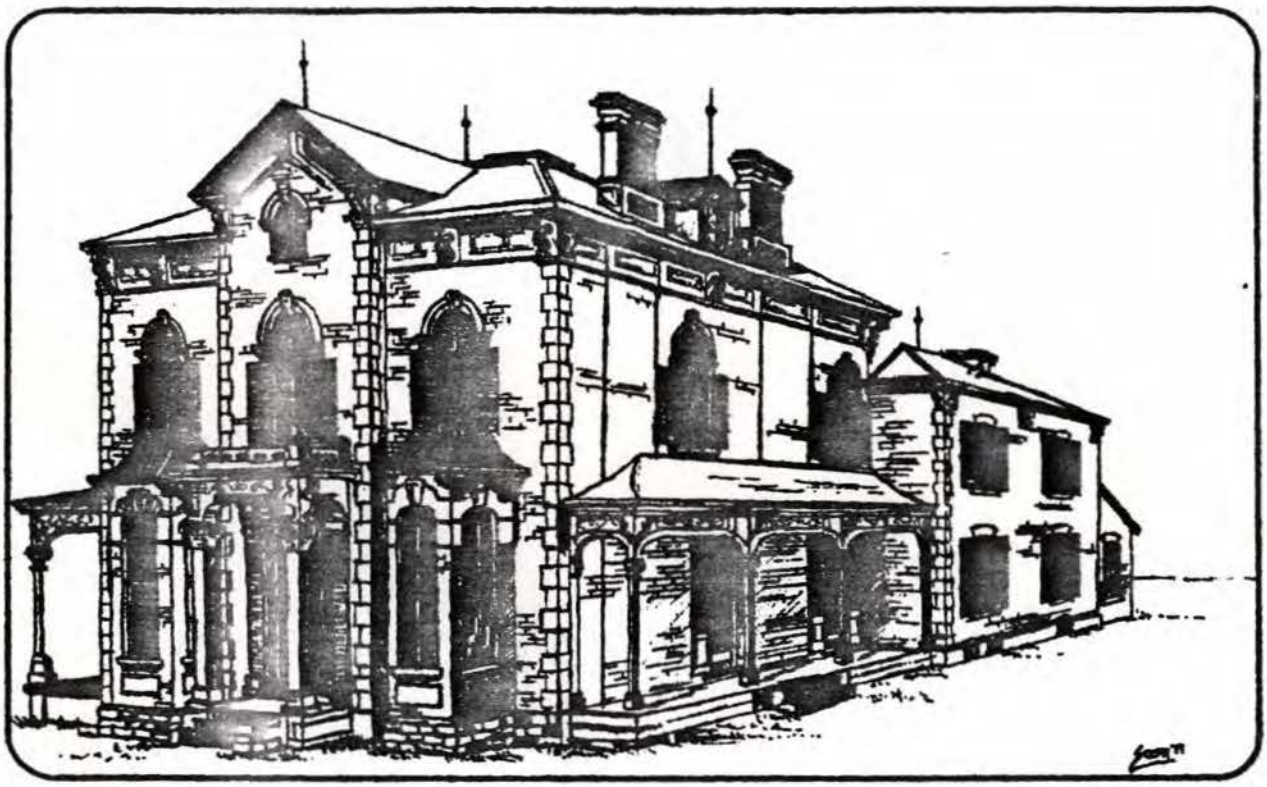
INDEPENDENCE & PLENTY



AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF SHEDDEN, FINGAL AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

BY
ALISON VICARY AND MICHAEL CLARK

INDEPENDENCE AND PLENTY:
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PUBLISHED IN COOPERATION WITH:

THE ELGIN COUNTY LIBRARY
ST. THOMAS, ONT.

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1979

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researching and writing of this book has been greatly facilitated through the encouragement, support, and aid given us by a large group of individuals and institutions. While we are gratefully indebted to these people, they should be in no way held responsible for any of the material contained herein.

This book was made possible by a Young Canada Works Grant, and was sponsored by the Shedden Women's Institute. Without their assistance this book would not have been possible. Special thanks goes to Mrs. Beth Vicary, Mrs. Madeline Parks, and Mrs. Margaret Turner for creating and guiding our project. They not only provided us with much technical assistance and advice, but also with some much appreciated moral support and encouragement.

The St. Thomas and Elgin County Librairies cheerfully assisted us in every regard, and made their entire local collection available to us at every request. The printing of this book was accomplished in cooperation with the Elgin County Library. Mr. Elgin Wells made available the necessary space and equipment, while Mr. Tom Bonanno spent many hours assisting us in the reproduction of old photos as well as instructing us in the finer points of putting a book together. To these generous and wonderful people we are truly indebted.

The Regional Collection staff at the D. B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario were extremely helpful in providing us with useful information. As well, we are indebted to Mr. Alex Ross of the Provincial Archives, Toronto, for assisting us in our research.

Furthermore, we would like to express our appreciation to those inhabitants of Southwold Township and Elgin County who aided our research in any way. This includes Mr. Alex Pow and the Southwold Township Office, as well as those seemingly countless individuals who agreed to be interviewed by us in our attempt to more fully understand the character of Southwold Township. We are expecially indebted to those who loaned or contributed materials from their private collections for our use:

Mr. B. Leeson, St. Thomas
Mrs. W. Jackson, Fingal
Mrs. C. Daugherty, Fingal
Mrs. L. Best, Fingal
Mrs. L. Sutherland, Fingal
Mrs. A. Vicary, Shedden
Mr. C. Jackson, Fingal
Mrs. A. McLean, Boxall
Mr. Don Martyn, Ingersoll

This book was written for the people of the Shedden-Fingal area. Hopefully, they will read it, enjoy it, learn from it, and come to some fuller understanding of the rich quality of their fascinating heritage.

M. C.
A. V.

London, Canada
July, 1979

CHAPTER 5

SHEDDEN:

WHAT HATH THE RAILROAD WROUGHT ?

While Fingal enjoyed both prosperity and growth in the years following the establishment of Macpherson's Foundry in 1848, other Southwold Township settlement clusters remained relatively undeveloped. Although, by the middle of the century, Southwold's farmers were prospering as never before, it was not necessary to establish a major village every three or four miles to serve the farmers' needs: Fingal and St. Thomas provided most of the essentials.

Many of these settlement clusters seemed to develop in a similar manner. Just before the War of 1812, Colonel Talbot, without authorization, had ordered Burwell to survey a road -- running parallel to the Talbot Road -- several miles north of Fingal. Records indicate that Ira Gilbert immigrated to "Back Street" (also known as the North Branch of the Talbot Road) from Lower Canada in 1812, settling on lot 11, south of the road. As with most of the Talbot Settlement, this area did not see many settlers until the War of 1812 had passed. By 1814, Peter Sutton -- a United Empire Loyalist -- had settled on lot 15, bringing the first horse into the area, as legend has it. And shortly thereafter, Thomas Orchard arrived from Devonshire, England and William Waugh from Scotland.[1] Evidently, the area which was soon to be known as "Wilkie's Corners " was initially settled by quite a diverse group of settlers, arriving from both Great Britain and the United States, as well as from other parts of British North America. Within a generation of this area's initial settlement, it too was exhibiting many signs of prosperity --

an increasing population, higher birth rates, and the beginnings of a merchant class.[2] Indeed, the prosperity of those in the Wilkie's Corners area helped fuel the development of Fingal. And although Wilkie's Corners remained relatively small in comparison to Fingal, it really differed little from the plethora of small, Upper Canadian, rural villages. In many ways, Fingal's early, somewhat spectacular, growth may be seen as exceptional; surely theirs was not a representative experience. Many of the names about to be mentioned, in connection with the transformation of Wilkie's Corners to Shedden, remain familiar ones in this area today.

By 1819, Calvin Sutton had succeeded in building a saw mill -- the only one in the immediate area -- on his fathers farm near Wilkie's Corners, while his brother was busy establishing a small pottery in the same location. It is not known precisely when Wilkie's Corners was named. We know that Wilkie was a blacksmith near the intersection of Back Street and Union Road; however, no evidence exists which might indicate exactly when he arrived on the scene. We do know that Back Street and Union Road became more effective means of transportation when, in 1820, they were partially converted into "corduroy roads." This was apparently a great boon to those early farmers , who could now ship their surplus produce -- if indeed, they had any surplus at this time -- to a distant market. As well, outside influences were quick to effect the agrarian economy of the time: by

1835, several spike threshing machines, essentially an American innovation, were being used throughout the area.

Most of the businesses which sprang up around Mr. Wilkie's blacksmith shop may be considered as "cottage" industries, which usually involved home-made essentials sold in barns and log huts. And while this system does not appear to have been very sophisticated or efficient, those early efforts succeeded in serving a farm community which was becoming increasingly prosperous. In 1820, a Mr. Schultz began a tannery on his farm near Wilkie's Corners, while in 1825, a Mr. Moore erected the area's first brick house. Obviously, this was a dynamic community in many respects; as Talbot's power diminished, the settlers seemed to take more initiative in the development of their rural community; by 1840, Wilkie's Corners could boast the presence of a school on the Waugh farm, as well as two blacksmiths shops and a general store. Jonathan Orchard became known for his English cider mill, and Samuel Stafford had begun a planing mill operation by 1833. Many of these establishments were operated on a part-time basis, their proprietors having farm responsibilities as well.

As was seen in our study of Fingal, prosperity in the Wilkie's Corners area brought about the establishment of more permanent educational and religious institutions. William Waugh's farm, on the southeast corner of the Back Street - Union Road intersection, was the location of Wilkie's Corners first school. By 1849, the school had been re-located, several hundred yards to the west, and a new building was erected on that site. (lot 16, North Branch

of Talbot Road). An existing School Trustee's Record Book relates the school's activities in its early years, as well as offers some details about the school itself: the original structure was 30' x 24', made of logs, and cost approximately £ 50. The first teacher, David Wallace, was hired for a trial period of three months at a salary of £4 per month. Initially, the school was supported only by those directly involved: "it was resolved that every individual sending to the school to pay at the rate of two shillings, six pence each per quarter and the residue by taxation on all rateable property in this section."[3] But by 1856, the expense of education also involved some physical labour: "...every scholar shall be taxed half a cord of wood a year, and at a proper length for the stove and to be delivered at the schoolhouse within one month from this date or pay the price of such wood."[4]

By 1856, it became apparent that a brick schoolhouse was necessary, and by 1870 the new building was declared a "Free School" -- "all expenses provided by taxation on on rateable property."[5] This fledgling community evidently recognized its role in the area of education, although not all agreed with the new taxation system. An old newspaper article reveals the expenses involved in the building of a one room schoolhouse in 1865:

½ acre lot		$90.00
brick		$196.50
builders fee		$800.00
	Total	$1086.50[6]

The old frame school house was sold for the paltry sum of $14.50; however, the brick replacement served for 104 years, and still stands in Shedden today. With the new school came contracted teachers; Archibald McTavish was paid $264.00 per annum to teach all grades. Apparently, women teachers did not become the rule until the end of the century.

In 1868, Jack Beetle constructed the Corseley Hotel; sometime during the 1860's "Wilkie's Corners" had been dropped in favour of the name "Corseley", and a post office began operations there. Although the small village was growing at a slow, yet steady, pace throughout the 1860's, the inhabitants lacked the capital necessary to expand their commercial base. Indeed, with Fingal and St. Thomas only a few miles down the road, there seemed to be little need for expansion. But the construction of the Canadian Southern Railway throughCorseley in 1871 quickly changed that attitude.

II

As Wayne Paddon has suggested, the railroad was responsible for irrevocably changing rural life in Southwestern Ontario. When it became evident that a railroad was to pass through the quiet rural village of Corseley, several people turned up to exploit the prosperity which would certainly result there. John Shedden, a man about whom little is known, appeared in 1871 during the construction of the Southern line, and purchased all the land south of the railroad tracks, bound on the west by Union Road, and on the south by Back Street. He thensubdivided this land into town lots -- the village of "Shedden" was thus created. Soon

after this development, the area M.P., George Casey, decided to take advantage of the situation as well, by building a grain elevator in Shedden next to the train tracks. Inevitably, perhaps, Shedden became a bustling grain depot almost immediately. Businesses sprang up throughout the village: John Sells established a cheese factory; William Wallis and Waugh erected the Wallis-Waugh Mill; Samuel Stafford began a window and sash factory, Robert Livingston a flax mill; Andrew and Charles Schultz became carriage makers on the east side of the Union Road, while William Orchard opened a wagon shop. The list goes on; there seemed to be no end to the businesses which might prosper in this new boom rail town. Many of the industries which had appeared in Fingal twenty or thirty years earlier now appeared in Shedden.[7] The village's population swelled from under 50 inhabitants in 1865 to over 200 in 1875. Obviously, the railroad can be credited for this increase; however , it is interesting to note that Shedden's population, after the establishment of the Southern line, continued to grow at a modest rate until the end of the century, when it stabilized for a period before declining. It would seem that railroad building in the years immediately following Confederation spurred the development of a few small centres in Elgin County, while discouraging growth in those through which the railroad failed to pass. Ultimately, however, the building of a railway itself was not enough to forever ensure the village's prosperity.

Shedden prospered as a grain depot in the latter half of the 19th century, but its economy never became diversified

enough to permit the unprecedented growth which occurred in such centres as St. Thomas and London. This failure to maintain a certain growth rate, however, should not be construed as 'failure.' These small villages served their purpose well : to act as links in the network which area farmers depended upon for their livlihood was all these centres wre ever really intended to be. And in reality, they never became anything more than that.

III

While we are certain that the appearance of a railroad in the late nineteenth century profoundly affected the economy of Southwold Township, it is difficult to measure precisely the effect which railways had upon the lives of those who lived in that rural world. Rural Upper Canada, before the coming of the railroad, tended to be an insular, provincial society; agricultural innovations were permitted, but these did not seriously threaten the mode of life familiar to most in rural areas. The concept of 'family', needless to say, had become extremely important in rural areas -- indeed, before villages were established, the family was <u>the</u> basic unit of social interaction. People expected to grow up on the farm and, if they were males, to participate in the operation of that farm someday, in a decision-making role. Women also had their place and role to fulfill on the 'typical' farm, as did children. For most, staying together as a family was a necessity; survival depended on cooperation . With the establishment of villages, however, the opportunities for young men increased dramatically, although most who went to the nearest village to

work still lived at home, and remained very much part of the family. Indeed, many of the first commercial operations in Southwold Township were initiated by families, rather than individuals. Curiously enough, it was usually the individuals who left the area upon becoming prosperous: family businesses seemed to survive as such for several generations.[8]

Traditionally, historians have viewed the coming of the railroad in rural Canada to be somewhat of a cataclysmic experience. In their view, the railroads changed everything: families disintegrated, farms were sold, and people flocked to the cities. To a certain extent this is true, but all sources seem to indicate that -- although peoples' expectations changed and many people did leave the country for the city -- the family was still the primary organic force in peoples' lives. The population of Southwold Township after the building of the railroad certainly declined, but this decline was slow and steady; if the coming of the railroad had been such a cataclysmic event, one might expect that the population would have reacted swiftly, and with a certain amount of trauma. But this does not seem to have been the case. Instead, peoples' expectations changed as the century progressed -- this is evident in their building of larger, more durable homes -- but in reality, society changed little.

Although it is difficult to measure peoples' expectations, we know that , in the latter half of the 19th century, rural populations became more mobile. It was now possible for people to travel greater distances with greater comfort, and to experience life in a large urban centre. It is important

to note, however, that many of Southwold's inhabitants travelled afar only to return to their rural birth place: certainly, those who left are far outnumbered by those who stayed.

IV

The activities of Southwold's McDiarmid clan, while not necessarily representative, illustrates the nature of this new mobility. Among the township's first settlers, the McDiarmids were situated about one mile southeast of Shedden. Around the middle of the century, Andrew McDiarmid had begun farming there on a 100 acre lot. As with most of his neighbours, this country gentleman also engaged in the raising of a large family: five boys and four girls were born there. By 1875 his position must have been relatively secure; he had earlier erected a brick house near the front of his lot, and turned most of the actual farming over to his second oldest son -- Alexander. And while this family appears to have been moderately prosperous, it was never extravagant. True to Scottish principles, Andrew -- the old patriarch -- encouraged excellence in every endeavor. It is not surprising, then, to discover that two of his sons, John and Andrew Jr., both attended Trinity College Medical School in Toronto during the 1870's.

Judging from the correspondence between Andrew, John, and their brother Alexander, school fees were paid largely from farm revenue, although Andrew also spent several summers in the country selling books and portraits in order to finance his education. Eventually, John and Andrew found themselves practicing medicine in Manitoba; Andrew was to

become well known for his work in establishing the Medical College in Brandon, Manitoba.

As well, James, the fourth son, contracted tuberculosis and died at the age of 21, while Albert, the youngest son, left the farm to become a photographer in nearby Dutton; only Alexander, of the males, remained on the farm. It would appear, then, that this farm family had all but disintegrated as a result of the many new opportunities available during the closing years of the 19th century. But this was not the case.

In the collection of Mrs. Alice Vicary -- daughter of Alexander McDiarmid -- we find much information to suggest that this family was extremely close, emotionally if not always physically. In the correspondence between brothers Andrew and Alexander -- conducted throughout the 1870's and '80's -- we find constant references to 'family' and rural life in the Shedden area. In praising his younger brother James' efforts at school, Andrew writes:

> He has good pluck to try the second class exams next summer. You must try and let him stay at school all the time until then.

Always referring to Alexander as "my dear brother," Andrew's letters reflect the concerns of any young man attending school away from home: grades, money, clothing, friends, and religion all rank high on his list of concerns. Most notable, however, is his concern for the well-being of his brothers, sisters, and parents:

> I would like splendidly to go down home and spend a week or two but money is scarce and time precious and I must defer it... I'm greatly looking forward to coming home and seeing the family.[9]

Evidently, Andrew felt much concern for his family; although the railroad brought new possibilities and expectations to rural Ontario, it did not necessarily tear asunder that most basic of institutions -- the family -- as it has, at times, been accused.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century rural society seemed to be stabilizing; birth rates once again decreased, and the population slowly decreased. Although rural Southwestern Ontario was probably not as Conservative and Victorian as many have suggested, it certainly was not the the discontented frontier of the 1820's and '30's. If prosperity had brought much change to Southwold Township, it also brought a certain amount of stability; this much is evident from the fine brick houses and churches erected throughout the township during the final decades of the century. Undoubtedly, Southwold Township's institutions -- imitated from British models in earlier years -- had succeeded in attaining durability. Even the railroads could not change that.

V

By 1900, Southwold Township found itself in a state strangely similar to that of its earliest pioneer days. While much had transpired during that first century of mans' presence, this was still very much a society in flux. Earlier in the century, as we have previously suggested, society underwent a fundamental transformation when an essentially agricultural society was infused with the beginnings of bourgeois capitalism. This not only changed the area's economic structure, but also succeeded in making Southwold Township vulnerable to more extensive technological change.

We have also suggested that when those technological innovations were manifested in their most extreme form -- such as in the coming of the railroad -- society was again changed, somehow in a more subtle way. In making these suggestions, we submit that Southwold Township was, and is, -- in many ways -- a microcosm of rural Canadian life. We have attempted to illustrate that the people and villages of Southwold Township were subject to the same general trends and influences as the rest of the Western world. In doing this, we have, by necessity, concentrated on certain aspects of Southwold's growth, while neglecting many others. Rather than present an exhaustive portrait of 19th century rural life in Ontario, we have attempted to provide a few glimpses into the fascinating experience of one township. Hopefully, then, these vignettes will spark others' interest; hopefully, the interpretations presented here will be discussed and questioned. Only in this way, can history -- as a dynamic dialectic -- move forward.

VI

As you are by now no doubt aware, this work is titled Independence and Plenty, a pretentious name for such a little book. But there is a reason for this. The pioneer experience of Canada's early farmers and merchants has often been perceived by historians as a struggle for independence -- in public as well as private life. This interpretation also involves the notion that real independence meant financial-material success, or plenty. Inherent in this, then, is a paradox.

We assume that most people came to the Canadian wild-

erness in the early 19th century because of the prospect of large quantities of free, or inexpensive, land. As well, they were presumably attracted by those things brought about as a result of being your own master -- prosperity, security, and independence. Prosperity is easily measured; Southwold's inhabitants seemed to acquire it quickly enough. But 'independence' is a more difficult concept to define. The Talbot Settlement's early settlers must have wondered if they possessed any independence at all, in light of Talbot's autocratic personality and rigorous settlement duties. For a time, those early pioneers were little more than slaves to the land which would someday, hopefully, become benevolent and free them. And when Talbot's hegemony finally floundered, many of these farmers found themselves under the thumb of an increasingly powerful merchant class -- an element which soon came to control all important aspects of the market. However, many perceived this transformation as an advancement -- and so it probably was. But now 'independence' had become inextricably bound up with the concept of "success" in a material world. In effect, people had become slaves to an ideology, the ideology of financial success and social mobility. And the rural community, in many ways, was just as vulnerable to these forces as was the urban community.

When we speak, then, of Canada's development during the 19th century as a progression toward independence and plenty, we must be aware that such a concept does not always describe reality; more often, it describes the way historians would like to see Canada's development, than the way it really was. For those who lived it, life in this

country's early years was never easy, sometimes discouraging, yet always dynamic. Let us not forget that -- if independence and plenty have ever really existed -- it is only because of the efforts of those often forgotten, yet somehow 'famous', ordinary men.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 5

[1]Brierley, op.cit.,106.

[2]See Appendix I.

[3]Historical Sketches of Southwold Township School Sections, Marion Orchard and Douglas Orchard, "Shedden,S.S.#9".

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]St. Thomas Weekly Dispatch, date unknown.

[7]Paddon, op. cit., passim.

[8]Dunn and Bradstreet, Miscellaneous Business Directories, late 19th century.

[9]Andrew McDiarmid to Alexander McDiarmid, Letter of April 29, 1878 , A. Vicary - Private Collection.

APPENDIX I

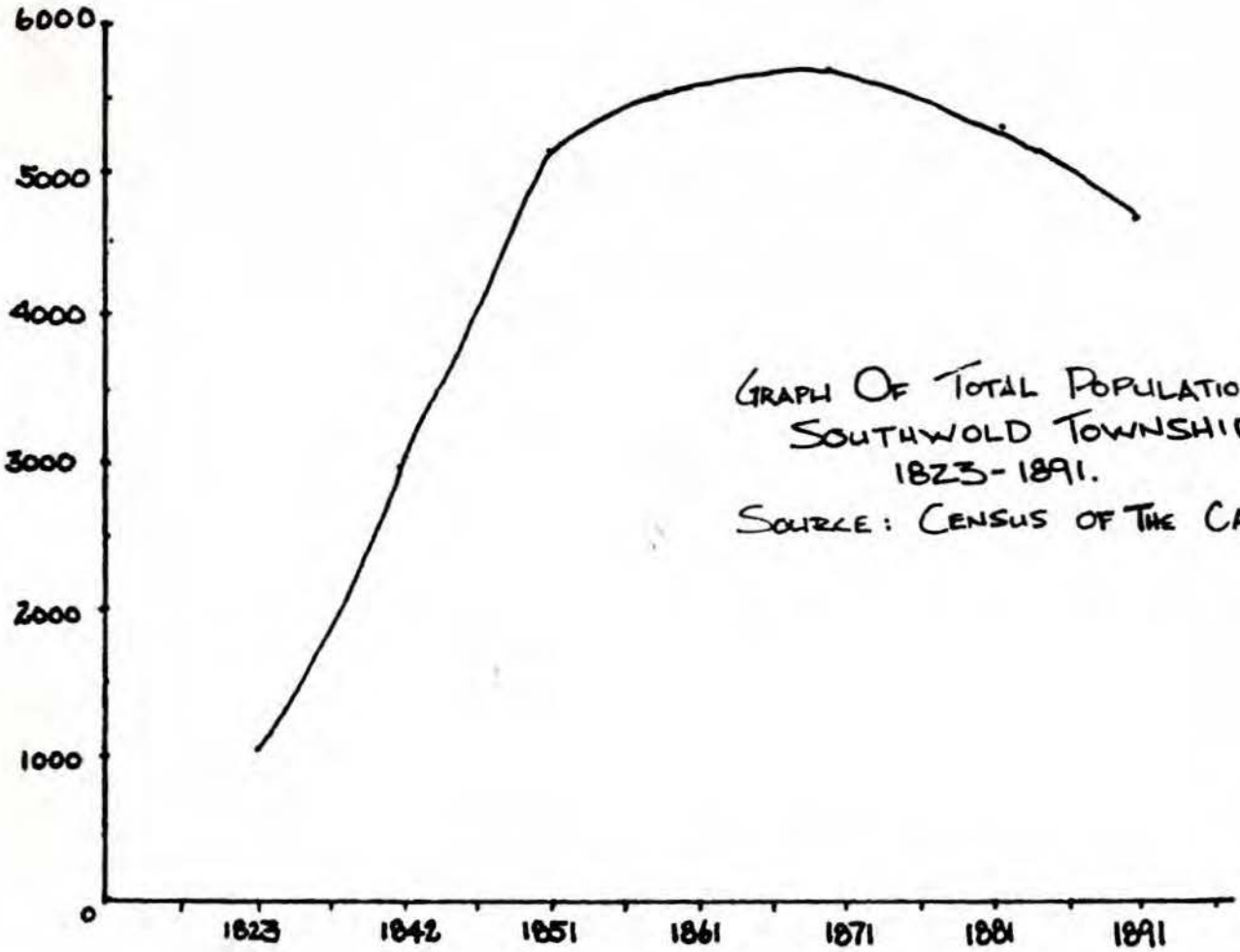
TABLES, GRAPHS, & MAPS

TABLE I

POPULATIONS

(All Totals are for Southwold Township unless otherwise stated)

	1823	1842	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
Total Population	1011	2946	5063	5467	5559	5206	4766
Males	176	1579	2594	2791	2869	2682	2445
Females	201	1367	2469	2676	2690	2524	2321
Married Total	250	864	1507	1649	1700	1682	1616
Males	105	462	750	826	852	842	808
Females	145	402	757	823	848	840	808
Widowed Total	?	?	119	165	207	208	216
Males	?	?	34	67	75	64	69
Females	?	?	85	98	132	144	147
Children and Unmarried	638	2082	3437	3653	3652	3316	2934
Males	314	1117	1810	1898	1942	1776	1568
Females	324	905	1627	1755	1710	1540	1366
Number of Families	?	?	806	?	993	998	989
Birth Rate	?	?	3.9	4.2	3.6	3.1	?



GRAPH OF TOTAL POPULATION
SOUTHWOLD TOWNSHIP
1823-1891.
SOURCE: CENSUS OF THE CANADAS.