

# *The Role of the Spectator in Shaping Attitudes toward Land in Hamilton, Ontario, 1847-1881\**

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Interest in Canadian urban history has grown measurably over the past decade. The purpose of this research note is to show that a traditional historical source, the local press, can be employed to shed light upon some important questions in this expanding field. Victorian cities were the product of a complex series of interrelated processes such as infrastructure development and commercial expansion, migration, industrialization, and property development. Our interest here, will focus upon the information that newspapers can provide with respect to property development and attitudes towards urban land. To illustrate this point, in this note, the part played by the editors of the *Hamilton Spectator* in influencing attitudes towards land and land development in that city between 1847 and 1881 will be explored.<sup>1</sup> Through three distinct but interconnected functions — advertising, boosterism, and hype — the nineteenth-century urban Ontario press kept alive and fostered the myth that everyone could and should own land in the cities, towns, and villages of the Province.

Although dealing with a somewhat earlier period, and with the American press, Pred's recent study of the importance of newspapers in what he terms the "pretelegraphic era" has significance for this study.<sup>2</sup> He has shown that the newspapers of that period had several important characteristics in common. First of all, advertising occupied the majority of the available space in the papers he studied. While most of the advertisements were local in origin the news items that were carried usually came from foreign sources. Compared to the coverage given to national and international stories only a tiny fraction of newspaper space was devoted to local news. Finally, all papers practiced mutual journalistic

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<sup>1</sup> The research reported in this note stems from a much broader study of the process of land development in Victorian Hamilton. See Michael J. DOUCET, "Building the Victorian City: The Process of Land Development in Hamilton, Ontario, 1847-1881" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Allan R. PRED, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities 1790-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). On late nineteenth-century Canadian newspapers see P.F.W. RUTHERFORD, "The People's Press: The Emergence of the New Journalism in Canada, 1869-99," *Canadian Historical Review*, 66 (June 1975): 169-91.

plagiarism. This was obviously true for non-local news; but, in many cases, reports of local events also originated in the columns of other papers.<sup>3</sup>

The newspaper selected for analysis in this study, the *Hamilton Spectator*, did not deviate in the slightest from the characteristics enumerated by Pred. The very fact that this held true over the entire period of study, 1847 to 1881, during which time the paper had four different editors, supports his contention that there was a high degree of consistency in the nineteenth-century North American press.<sup>4</sup> Papers may have taken differing political stances, but most had similar layouts, stories, and news sources, and they all boosted the places in which they were printed.

Throughout most of the period under investigation the *Spectator* appeared as a four-page daily. Its new columns contained detailed accounts of happenings in Britain, the United States, and Europe; long discussions of the progress of the latest war; and shipping and market information. Transcripts of the Dominion Parliament and the Provincial Legislature were religiously printed, providing most of the fodder for editorial cannons, and, to round things out, a smattering of local news was included in most issues. This latter was devoted primarily to reports of crimes and court proceedings, the workings of City Council, entertainment events, commerce, and the general health and progress of the city. On most days, the majority of the *Spectator's* columns were given over to advertising. Only on rare occasions was less than one-half of the paper composed of paid insertions.

Unfortunately little scholarly attention has been paid to the newspaper advertisements of this period. Standard histories of advertising have been far more concerned with such things as changes in type face and modes of display than they have in the nature of the ads being carried, although mention is usually made of the large number of messages from patent medicine makers.<sup>5</sup> The *Spectator* carried its share of these notices, as well as those for local merchants and artisans, transportation companies, entertainment events, articles for sale, and land. Though it is difficult to estimate the relative importance of these various categories without the benefit of some comparative studies, there is no reason to suspect that the mix of advertisements carried by the *Spectator* was in any way atypical.

An analysis of the advertisements pertaining to land that were carried in the local press can shed light upon several important aspects of the land

<sup>3</sup> PRED, *Urban Growth*, pp. 20-77.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, only one of these editors or groups of editors had been working in Hamilton prior to their periods with the *Spectator*. The other three had been working on papers in Montreal, Peterborough, and London. Editors, obviously, were as interchangeable as the type they set. For the early history of the *Spectator* see Charles BRUCE, *News and the Southams* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 10-12.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Frank L. MOTT, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690-1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941); Frank PRESBREY, *The History and Development of Advertising* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1929); and Cedric LARSON, "Patent-Medicine Advertising and the Early American Press", *Journalism Quarterly*, 14 (1937): 333-41.

development process in a mid-nineteenth-century city. In the first place, something can be learned about both the extent of and fluctuations in the land market through an examination of trends in the advertisements. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 1, which is based upon a tabulation of all such advertisements for city or town lots, both inside and outside Hamilton, that appeared in the *Spectator* on three selected days during each of the years sampled for this study.<sup>6</sup> Notice that a good deal of urban land was offered for sale through the pages of this newspaper, at least 3,944 parcels on the forty-five days examined. Though the majority (60 percent) of the notices placed related to land within Hamilton, most of the actual lots offered for sale (57 percent) were located beyond Hamilton's city limits, primarily in other Ontario towns and cities, most of which lay within fifty miles of Hamilton. Clearly the land market was not merely a local affair, since Hamiltonians were being encouraged to purchase property in other places. At the very least the land market at this time was intra-provincial in scope, and there is some evidence that it was inter-provincial and even international in its extent. The *Spectator* was but one link in the advertising mechanism of this farreaching market. For example, an 1867 ad for land near Madoc, Ontario carried this appended note:

The following papers will please copy till date of sale, and send account to the Department of Crown Lands, Ottawa: *Gazette, News, and Minerva, Montreal; Times, Citizen, and Canada Gazette, Ottawa; News and Whig, Kingston; Chronicle, Belleville; Standard and Express, Napanee; Star, World, Sun, and Sentinel, Cobourg; Guide, Port Hope; Review, Peterborough; Leader, Telegraph, Christian Guardian, and Freeman, Toronto; Spectator, Times, and Christian Advocate, Hamilton.*<sup>7</sup>

Through their advertisements, promoters made land accessible to Hamiltonians who were interested in speculating in land in remote areas.

The placement of advertisements announcing land for sale in this period clearly fluctuated in many places. This was also common for other aspects of the land market. For example, Dyos has suggested that, in Britain

the profitability of house-building, and therefore the supply of new houses, depended among other things on the alternative earnings of the capital used in it. This meant that the provision of suburban houses could either be retarded for lack of capital which had been put to more profitable employment elsewhere; or it could be expanded far beyond current needs when idle capital was put to what was considered safe us.<sup>8</sup>

The same conditions also applied in nineteenth-century North America; on this side of the Atlantic speculation tended to be in land rather than in

<sup>6</sup> Generally, the same ad was inserted daily for a long period of time, often more than two months and seldom less than two weeks. To avoid excessive overlapping of material, my selected days were spaced four months apart. Nevertheless, some duplication did occur, especially in periods of relative inactivity in the land market, and in such cases the ads were tabulated a second time on the assumption that the land was not sold after the first advertisement.

<sup>7</sup> *Spectator*, Wednesday, 15 May 1867. Such a notice was not unusual. See also the ad announcing the formation of the partnership of Best and Green, Hamilton auctioneers, that also appeared in the *Spectator*, Wednesday, 15 September 1852.

<sup>8</sup> H.J. Dyos, *Victorian Suburb: A Study of the Growth of Camberwell* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1961), p. 80.

dwellings.<sup>9</sup> There is little doubt that activity in the North American land market can be related to broader economic trends. This can be seen in the timing of the land advertisements. Notice the great activity during the boom years that preceded the Panic of 1857. The large number of lots offered for sale during this heady period, especially in places outside of Hamilton, gives us some clue with respect to the intensity of the speculative fever that struck North America at that time. A period of relative inactivity in the land market, coinciding with the depression that followed this international Panic, followed the boom. By 1867 the pace of activity had once again quickened, only to be reversed by the effects of the arrival of yet another international depression in 1873. This depression lasted until 1879, so that by the end of the study period, Hamilton was again on the verge of a boom period.<sup>10</sup> The fluctuations in land advertisements were mirrored by similar trends in land prices and land sales during these years.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1. — NEWSPAPER LAND ADVERTISEMENT ANALYSIS OF THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR 1847-1881<sup>a</sup>

Year	No. of Lands Ads	Lots within Hamilton <sup>b</sup>		Lots outside Hamilton <sup>b</sup>	
		Ads	Lots	Ads	Lots
1847	5	3	110 +	2	230
1850	7	4	130	3	4 +
1852	8	6	39 +	2	2 +
1854	19	9	377 +	10	708 +
1857	21	11	58 +	10	850 +
1859 <sup>c</sup>	6	3	155	3	23 +
1861	7	6	35	1	1
1864	2	1	3	1	1
1867 <sup>c</sup>	8	5	393	3	13 +
1870	1	1	5	0	0
1872	6	4	98 +	2	1 +
1874	5	2	279	3	202 +
1876 <sup>d</sup>	2	2	1 +	0	0
1878	4	3	19	1	200
1881	3	2	1 +	1	6
TOTALS	104	62	1703 +	42	2241 +

a based upon advertisements appearing on 15 January, 15 May and 15 September for the respective years.

b in the lot totals' columns, a "+" indicates some degree of imprecision in the wording of the ads, for example, "several lots", "eight acres" or "land suitable for subdivision into city lots."

c years in which tax sale advertisements appeared on the sample days.

d due to incomplete records, 30 June substituted for 15 September.

<sup>9</sup> This seems to have been due to differences in the tenure of land in the two areas. In Britain, land tended to be leased from the gentry for long periods, such as 99 years, and developed by the lease holder, who, in turn rented houses to tenants. On the other hand, in North America, lots were bought and sold outright.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the 1880s was a period of considerable growth throughout Ontario. Hamilton's population increased by more than 11,250 and the number of occupied dwellings in the city climbed by 2,266. In both instances, these figures represented the largest registered decennial gains in the city's history. For a discussion of Toronto's growth during this decade, see Peter G. GOHEEN, *Victorian Toronto 1850 to 1900: Pattern and Process of Growth*, Research Paper No. 127 (Chicago: Department of Geography, University of Chicago, 1970), p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> DOUCET, "Building the Victorian City", Chapter 6.

At a different scale the advertisements for land carried by the *Spectator* reveal something about the ways in which this commodity was sold. Most land, especially when several parcels were involved, was sold at an appointed time and place by public auction. For out of town property, free transportation and meals were often offered as inducements to get prospective buyers to attend the sales.<sup>12</sup> Land auction advertisements were usually placed by auctioneers or by agents acting for the property owners, though the owners of large new subdivisions sometimes inserted their own notices. Over 63 percent of all notices examined involving at least five lots specifically stated that the property was to be sold at public auction. Even land ordered sold to settle a litigation by the Court of Chancery, or by the City because taxes were in arrears, was auctioned to the public.<sup>13</sup> With auctions so commonplace, the advertisements obviously reveal very little about land prices in the city. This information can usually be obtained by examining the deeds and abstracts recorded in the local Land Registry Office.<sup>14</sup> They do indicate that the terms of sale were such that, regardless of price, an individual had to have some cash to participate in the land market. For tax and Chancery sales the terms were strictly cash. At other auction sales anywhere from one-tenth to one-half of the purchase price was asked as a down payment, with the balance due in two to ten years, and with an interest rate of from six to seven percent payable yearly or half-yearly on the unpaid balance.

Besides details relating to the time, place, method of sale, location, number of lots and terms of sale, the land advertisements often included ebullient copy enticing people to buy. We can learn something about past attitudes towards land from this material. Opportunities were seldom missed, for example, for touting the qualities of the property in question, especially if it was newly laid out or otherwise unfamiliar. An 1847 notice for land in the small village of Elora, Ontario was quite typical:

thus may Elora be considered as destined shortly to become a place of the highest importance, and therefore a most favourable opportunity is now presented, not only to tradesmen (who are much required) but to capitalists and

<sup>12</sup> This sort of practice goes on to this day, especially with land in places like Florida and Arizona. Another inducement employed in the nineteenth century was the lottery, in which the seller would guarantee that one or more of the lots would be given away free. To gain access to the lottery one had to purchase a lot. For a discussion of other schemes of this type see H. Morton BODFISH, "The 'Free-Lot' Subdivider: His Method of Operation and the Available Methods of Control," *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, 5 (May and August 1929): pp. 187-98 and 285-92.

<sup>13</sup> The Assessment Act of 1850 (13 & 14 Vic., c. 67) empowered municipalities to sell land upon which taxes had not been paid. Such land was to be duly advertised in the local press and then auctioned to the highest bidder. The auction, of course, was a quick and easy-to-organize sales method. For a discussion of the psychology behind the use of the auction to sell land, see Joseph P. DAY, "Merchandising Real Estate by Public Sales Methods," *Annals of Real Estate Practice*, 2 (1926): pp. 323-35; Roger B. MAY, "Going, Going, Gone! More Americans Sell Real Estate at Auction," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 September 1965, pp. 1 and 10; and Ralph CASSADY, Jr., *Auctions and Auctioneering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 100-08.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the information contained in the Registry Office documents see DOUCET, "Building the Victorian City," pp. 111-29.

others, who may be desirous of settling in a quiet and most eligible section of the Country.<sup>15</sup>

Promises of the opportunity to live a peaceful and convenient life were not restricted to the notices for out of town property. In 1850 developer H.B. Willson placed an advertisement in the *Spectator* which contained the following remarks about the unsold lots in his east-end subdivision:

The Subscriber offers for sale the remainder of his BUILDING LOTS on King and Wellington Streets and East, West, and Victoria Avenues, North of King Street. About thirty of the Lots are situated on that part of Victoria Avenue which has been planted in Ornamental Trees. East Avenue is likewise under contract for grading and planting.

These Lots are all within from five to ten minutes walk of the centre of business, and are laid out so as to render them desirable for private residences. Persons wishing to purchase for this purpose are invited to inspect the property and plan of survey.<sup>16</sup>

The themes expressed in this notice were quite typical. Considerations of aesthetics and accessibility were clearly of some importance to certain classes of property buyers. Though most of the notices were directed towards "capitalists" and "speculators" or at least towards members of the better classes, copy was pitched at other members of society as well, with advantages of situation being phrased in terms of the supposed needs and financial resources of the intended audience. No matter what the audience the sentiment that investment in land was sound because land values would continually increase was a common thread in many of the land advertisements of this period. The following serves as an example of the way in which all such factors could be easily packaged together:

These valuable lots are situated within about 100 yards of the Depot Works of the Great Western Rail Road Company, and each will have a frontage of 25 feet by 80 feet in depth, with an alley to the rear. *To mechanics and others*, no lots so valuable are in the market for sale. The terms being so easy, will place them within the reach of every industrious person; and from *the rapidly increasing value of property*, no safer investment without risk can possibly be found. The terms, to meet the views of purchasers, will be as follows — one-fifth down, balance in five yearly installments, with interest on the amount unpaid.<sup>17</sup>

Taxation rates were also stressed by some advertisers. This was especially true whenever the property in question lay just beyond the city limits. The following advertisement emphasized both economics and accessibility, along with the survey's aesthetic qualities:

The property is at the Eastern Limits of the City of Hamilton extending from the Great Western Railway to Burlington Bay, is most beautifully situated, excellent soil, portions of it well timbered, has also ornamental and fruit trees.... The lands being on the margin of the City of Hamilton are therefore *exempt from City Taxes*, while it is only a quarter of a mile from Victoria Avenue, and close to what will be the terminus of the Hamilton and Port Dover Railway.<sup>18</sup>

A final type of advertisement relating to the land market was that placed by those who were directly involved in the land business. These

<sup>15</sup> *Spectator*, Wednesday, 2 July 1847.

<sup>16</sup> *Spectator*, Wednesday, 15 May 1850. This ad pertains to land in one of the selected surveys (No. 7) analyzed in DOUCET, "Building the Victorian City," Chapter 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Spectator*, Wednesday, 14 May 1857. Italics added.

<sup>18</sup> *Spectator*, Thursday, 13 April 1854. For a similar ad see Saturday, 20 July 1867. Italics added.

ads tended to be rather generally worded; yet they do help us to understand a little more about the extent and interconnected nature of the North American land market. For example, one prominent land agent and Hamilton entrepreneur, Jasper T. Gilkison, placed a notice in the *Spectator* in which he claimed:

the Subscriber continues to act as Agent for the Sale or Lease of all kinds of Real Estate, the Sale of Bank and other Stock, Collection of Rents, &c. Land Scrip bought and sold. Real Property valued, Petitions or Memorials prepared.... For Sale, many Thousands of Acres of Land, Farms, and Town Property.<sup>19</sup>

Land agents must have found it necessary to maintain extensive lists of property for sale throughout North America. W.F. Findlay, for example, claimed that he had "lots in Hamilton, Dundas, Galt, Stratford, Brantford, Elora, Fergus, etc., etc.," and there must have been a group of ready buyers for one agent boasted that: "a purchaser for any Real Estate within the City of Hamilton, or its neighbourhood, can be obtained on application to J.T. Gilkison."<sup>20</sup>

The role of the land agent in this period is rather difficult to assess, for their exact role in the land market remains vague, but it is clear that they made extensive use of the local press to advertise their services.

Newspapers did much more than merely run advertisements for either land agents or for upcoming property auctions. They were active in the land-development process during the nineteenth century. The press had a vested interest in growth — more people meant greater circulation — and the active promotion of the land market was seen as one way to stimulate growth. If Hamilton could be made to appear both successful and full of opportunity, its future greatness could be assured. The editors of the *Spectator* did everything in their power to promote Hamilton. They defended it against all outside criticism, a phenomenon that we can associate with boosterism. For example, when a Toronto paper uncharitably spoke of Hamilton as "The Ambitious Little City," the editor of the *Spectator* replied:

such is the appellation which the *Globe*, in a very patronizing manner, bestows upon the good place from which we write. We hope our neighbor is not becoming jealous of the manner in which we are going ahead in these environs and of the spirit displayed by our public men, contrasting as it does with the pride, pomp, affectation, and supineness of his own citizens.... To be sure, we cannot display the paraphernalia of colleges or universities, nor are our streets enlivened by the sight of red coats and dashing equipages, but in all that betokens enterprise, public spirit, and future greatness, Hamilton will hold its own with any City in the Province. The "ambitious little City" threatens speedily to become a prosperous large one; let us hope that as we walk ahead of our rivals, we shall not imitate their example, and look down with contempt on all who have the misfortune to exist beyond the prescribed limits of Canadian Cockney "gentility."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Spectator*, Saturday, 21 August 1847.

<sup>20</sup> *Spectator*, Tuesday, 15 January 1867 and Saturday, 21 January 1854. On Gilkison see DOUCET, "Building the Victorian City," pp. 191-95.

<sup>21</sup> *Spectator*, Wednesday, 29 September 1847. For some useful comments on the role of the "Booster Press" see Daniel J. BOORSTIN, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), pp. 124-34.

Statements of this type were hardly unexpected, given the role of the press as local promoter and defender.

The *Spectator's* involvement in the land market was much more intensive than one might have expected. Land sales were frequently treated as news events, and in many cases, the local editors took a very active role in their promotion. Press promotion of land sales took a number of forms in the nineteenth century, ranging from what we might term soft to hard-sell. In the former the editor merely attempted to get the reader to examine a specific advertisement. He might also take time to point out some of the advantages of the property in question:

Attention is directed to the advertisement of an extensive sale of city property, located in various quarters, embracing residences and building lots, which occurs to-day, at the sale room of T.N. Best, Market Square, at 12 p.m. An excellent opportunity is presented for parties desirous of obtaining a homestead, and the terms offered are exceedingly liberal.<sup>22</sup>

Characteristically, Mr. Best was a frequent advertiser in the *Spectator*.

Examples of the harder-sell approach were more detailed and more insistent concerning the opportunities afforded by participation in the sale. An 1874 piece entitled "Who'll Buy?" noted:

Young men about to marry and older ones about to build, will not forget that tomorrow at 2 p.m. a chance — such as is seldom offered to the citizens of Hamilton — of buying city lots, will be had at the grounds of the old race course in the southwest party of the city. On this occasion 140 city lots will be sold from the course and 36 from the William New survey, situated not far from there, on the west side of Garth street. There is no mistake in saying that some magnificent bargains will be had there, and all who have any intention of purchasing lots should not fail to take advantage of the opportunity. As will be seen by advertisement, this property was only laid out into lots last May, and up to the present time 210 lots have been sold, 30 houses have been built, 2 miles of sidewalk have been laid down and 4 miles of trees planted, and an easy and direct approach has been made from King and Main streets up Locke street. When the street railway is opened, which will be by the 1st of July, residents will be able to reach the market and post office in about 10 minutes Alanson and Hilton are the auctioneers.<sup>23</sup>

A more effective statement could not have been penned by the property owner himself! More and more the sale of real estate came to be viewed as a very real component of the local news scene. Not only was the sale of land an important indicator of the overall health of the community; the auctions themselves came to be seen as social events. As time passed the editors of the *Spectator* paid more attention to activities in the local and regional land markets. In the process the coverage given to land and land-development became both more regular and more sophisticated.

By the middle of the 1860s the format of the *Spectator* was starting to change, with a series of headings emerging to describe and structure the various sections in each issue. One of these sections was called "City News" and the comings and goings of the land market were dutifully

<sup>22</sup> *Spectator*, Friday, 2 August 1867.

<sup>23</sup> *Spectator*, Friday, 1 May 1874. Notice the moderate pace of development described in this ad.



reported here. Not only were forthcoming land sales now being advertised, frequently in more elaborate and eye-catching ways that often included the publication of the plan of the subdivision, but detailed stories describing the auctions themselves began to appear almost automatically in the issue following the sale. These stories often included information relating to such matters as public interest in the sale and the range of prices paid for vacant lots. The following is quite typical of the reports of this period:

Yesterday afternoon the extensive sale of city lots in the Kerr-McLaren-Street survey took place at the rooms of Messrs. Alanson and Hilton. There was a very large audience present, the competition keen, bidding spirited, and good prices were realized. Out of the 71 lots offered for sale 53 were sold at prices ranging from \$390 to \$125. The interest manifested in this sale by the public, as shown by the large attendance and the character of the bidding, is clear evidence of the steady growth of the city, particularly of this part of it, and also of the soundness of the real estate market. We understand that with one or two exceptions the purchasers of the different lots will build upon them at once.

Unfortunately, these stories rarely identified the names of the purchasers or the actual distribution of the lots among them. Thus the "one or two" who did not intend to build immediately could have purchased most of the lots. The editor was decidedly optimistic concerning the probable timing of development in the above mentioned survey.<sup>24</sup> Yet there is little reason to doubt the validity of the prices quoted in these stories. It seems reasonable to conclude that something between one hundred and five hundred dollars was paid for each vacant lot auctioned in Hamilton during the 1870s. To put this figure in perspective, it is worth noting that on average ordinary labourers were paid about one dollar per day and skilled workers about fifty to seventy-five cents more during this period. Thus many of the lots offered at public auction sold at prices that were in excess of the annual wages of a very sizable group of Hamiltonians. To achieve the dream of land ownership was often a costly move.<sup>25</sup> Yet the press continued to support the idea that with luck and hard work anyone could become a property owner.

In the reports of land sales the editors of the *Spectator* usually took the opportunity to comment upon the soundness of the Hamilton real estate market. This, along with mandatory remarks concerning the "spirited bidding," was all part of the hype. One type of land sale was generally downplayed in the press; namely, the sale of lands for taxes. Such events represented the failure of individuals to develop their land and to make a profit. The bidding was never quite as spirited or the interest quite so keen in the eyes of the editor at this annual auction. Of the 1873 sale, for example, it was reported that:

<sup>24</sup> *Spectator*, Tuesday, 28 July 1857. See DOUCET, "Building the Victorian City," pp. 300-302.

<sup>25</sup> On wage rates in the nineteenth century see Edith ABBOTT, "Wages of Unskilled Laborers in the United States, 1850-1900", *Journal of Political Economy*, 13 (1905): pp. 321-67 and Bruce LAURIE, Theodore HERSHBERG, and George ALTER, "Immigrants and Industry: The Philadelphia Experience, 1850-1880," *Journal of Social History*, 9 (Winter, 1975): pp. 219-48. The latter suggest that in 1880 workers in fourteen selected industries received average annual wages of only \$464.

the annual sale of city lots for default of taxes took place in the Police Court rooms this afternoon. Two years neglect to pay taxes forfeits a lot. There were very few to be sold, and those small vacant lots mostly at the confines of the city.<sup>26</sup>

The "few" sold numbered sixty-six, a figure considerably in excess of the number of lots auctioned at many of the sales hyped by the editor, though it was small in comparison to the almost thirteen hundred lots placed on the block for the tax sale of 1865!<sup>27</sup>

Boosterism does not make it easy to assess accurately variations in the health of the land market over time. Yet the earlier analysis of land advertisements pointed to a considerable fluctuation in the number of lots offered each year. Undoubtedly, interest in land sales also varied, most probably in tune with the overall economic climate. Land speculation was obviously more attractive at some times than at others. In some years it must have been difficult to give vacant lots away. The local press continued its attempts to boost the land market. In good times the press could provide the nudge so necessary to maintain the boom mentality; but when times were tough or the auction season seemed slow to begin, it could do little else than give itself and its readers hope that better times were just around the corner. The following items, published in the *Spectator* between 1867 and 1872, are illustrative of this theme:

It is a long time without a turn, but that turn, as regards the sale of Real Estate, has taken place and property now finds buyers at satisfactory prices.<sup>28</sup>

Since the opening of the Spring, a fair amount of real estate has changed hands and prices have gradually advanced, but by no means to a speculative figure. Purchasers of nearly all desirable city lots that have been sold are either now building upon them or intend doing so as early as possible. The steady demand for this class of property and the total absence of excitement in prices is the best evidence that the advance is healthy and sound, and is owing to the urgent want for more house accommodation caused by an ever increasing population.<sup>29</sup> Attention is directed to Mr. Alanson's advertisement, which will be found in another column, offering at private sale a number of building lots. These are very desirably situated, and are offered on very reasonable terms. Real estate is bound to go up in Hamilton very rapidly, and must prove a very valuable investment. Those, therefore, who wish to secure any of these lots should lose no time in calling Mr. Alanson, who will be happy to give full information respecting them.<sup>30</sup>

Underlying all of these messages, indeed all items in the press relating to the sale of land, was the notion that good prices for real estate would be of benefit to the city. The editors were sometimes conservative enough to warn against speculation and its attendant spiralling of prices, but they fully expected property to appreciate in value nonetheless. As has been observed in the low profile given to reports of the annual tax sales, rarely, if ever, were people warned of the dangers and costs involved in excessive activity in the land market. In spite of exhortations to "mechanics and others," rarely was it admitted that only a tiny fraction of the population

<sup>26</sup> *Spectator*, Monday, 10 November 1873.

<sup>27</sup> See the advertisement for this sale in the *Canada Gazette*, Saturday, 12 August 1865, 2693-709.

<sup>28</sup> *Spectator*, Thursday, 11 July 1867.

<sup>29</sup> *Spectator*, Thursday, 12 June 1872.

<sup>30</sup> *Spectator*, Thursday, 9 May 1872.

would or could ever buy land. With regard to this commodity the role of the press was merely to promote the land developers and their schemes, not to criticize the fairness of the land allocation process. Under such circumstances the line between news reports and advertisements was indeed very fine.

Thus far I have examined only the most blatant and direct forms of newspaper activity as it applied to the nineteenth-century land market. The press also went about its promotional duties in other, more subtle, ways. In back of all of this activity lay the notion that growth would be good for everyone, and nowhere did the ideas concerning the value of growth and the merits of property ownership mesh more closely than in the promotion of railways. An article appearing in the *Spectator* in 1872, entitled "Effects of Railways," provides an example of just how forcefully this point could be made.

Within the last ten days Lot No. 3, west range of the plank road, township of Oneida, about three miles from Caledonia, and containing 75 acres, was sold for \$3,600. Before the construction of the Hamilton and Lake Erie Railway became a fixed fact the same lot would not have sold for \$2,500. At the Bain sale in Seneca, a lot in Caledonia (one-fourth of an acre) we sold for \$207.50, and a lot of the same size belonging to the same estate, in Cayuga, was sold for \$50.<sup>31</sup>

Each and every step in the progress of such ventures was duly reported and applauded in the press, for these schemes, it was believed, would ensure the future of Hamilton and, not inconsequentially, increase the value of local real estate.<sup>32</sup> Very often others could be persuaded to foot the bill for projects that, in the final analysis, would only benefit a few railways promoters and land owners.<sup>33</sup> The editors of the *Spectator* encouraged all such ventures. Witness the paper's response to one Hamilton-backed railway, the Wellington, Grey and Bruce.

Three Cheers for Peel! The ratepayers of Peel have passed the By-law granting \$40,000 to this enterprise. This speaks volumes for the intelligence of the farmers of that fine district. Garafraxa has yet to vote, and we have no fears for "Old Garra," it will do its duty.<sup>34</sup>

Three Cheers for Old Garra! The Railway By-Law Passed. We are glad to hear that the Township of Garafraxa passed the by-law guaranteeing \$20,000 to the

<sup>31</sup> *Spectator*, Monday, 12 February 1872.

<sup>32</sup> A number of scholars have commented upon the relationship between railways and land values. See, for example, M.L. FORAN, "Urban Calgary 1884-1895," *Histoire sociale — Social History*, 5 (April 1972): 67; HOMER HOYT, *One Hundred Years of Land Values in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 45-78; and JOHN W. REPS, *The Making of Urban America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 382-413. For a more specific discussion of land promotion by railway companies see Siegfried MICKELSON, "Promotion Activities of the Northern Pacific's Land Department," *Journalism Quarterly*, 17 (1940): 324-34, and Sidney HALMA, "Railroad Promotion and Economic Expansion at Council Bluffs, Iowa, 1857-1869," *Annals of Iowa*, 42 (Summer 1974): 371-89. On occasion, railways placed ads for their lands in the *Spectator*, lending further support to our contention that the land market was vast in scope. See, for example, the Union Pacific Rail Road's ad respecting the disposal of its 12 million acre land grant, Wednesday, 15 May 1872.

<sup>33</sup> On this issue see the fine discussion in Leo A. JOHNSON, *History of the County of Ontario*, (Whitby: Corporation of the County of Ontario, 1973), pp. 227-43 and 282-316.

<sup>34</sup> *Spectator*, Thursday, 5 December 1867.

Wellington, Grey, and Bruce Railway. We felt sure that "Old Garra" would do her duty.<sup>35</sup>

The nineteenth-century urban press was thus the purveyor of a good deal of information about the nature and operation of the land market. It played an integral role in the functioning of this mechanism. Newspapers were by no means the only sources of land market information — broadsides, handbills, and word-of-mouth must also have been important (though how important is difficult to measure since so few of the former two survive) — but they were the most consistent and reliable sources of information about events relating to the subdivision and sale of land, which were the first two general components in the land-development process at this time. The third component was property development.<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, newspaper editors took an active part in the promotion of all such events. Growth, speculation, and increasing land values were often viewed as inter-related elements in the progress and success of the city, and the virtues of all three were frequently extolled. So important was an apparently active land market to the growth of the city that most events related to the operation of this market were transformed into important local news stories.

An examination of the items relating to property that were carried by the press during the study period tells us not only about the ways in which land was bought and sold, but also about the ways in which people thought about urban land. What clearly emerges from our reading of the *Spectator* is the fact that land was emphasized over most other investment opportunities as something that could be bought and later re-sold for a profit. The city was viewed as an arena for the enrichment of its bourgeoisie — what was good for the land owners was good for the entire city. Obviously any distinction between private profit and the public good becomes blurred under such a philosophy.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, there is no easy way to measure the direct impact of the nineteenth-century urban press on its readers. It cannot be said with any precision that the ideas concerning land expressed in journals such as the *Spectator* influenced the thoughts and actions of individual readers. They must have been representative of some element of public thought in these matters. There is little extant literary evidence to the contrary. Furthermore, many of the nineteenth-century notions about urban land that were expressed so clearly and so consistently in papers like the *Spectator* have persisted down to the present day.<sup>38</sup> It is only within the last decade or so that an alternative press has emerged to challenge the ideas expressed in the big city dailies about the ways in

<sup>35</sup> *Spectator*, Thursday, 24 December 1867.

<sup>36</sup> On the various components of the land-development process in the Victorian city see DOUCET, "Building the Victorian City," pp. 84-91 and 346-60.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of this theme see Michael H. FRISCH, *Town Into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.)

<sup>38</sup> See the real estate section of any Saturday issue of the *Toronto Star*. This will reveal all sorts of hype about the land market and the latest housing projects, and will often be found to contain advice to the would-be speculator. On the benefits of home ownership see, for example, Tom STEVEN, "Home Ownership Still Seen as a Good Investment," *Toronto Star*, Saturday, 14 January 1978. E1.

which the land market should and does work.<sup>39</sup> Quite obviously, the roots of many of our current attitudes toward land — the desirability of ownership, our expectations of rising land values, the importance of accessibility, and so on — were first enunciated in the pages of journals such as the *Hamilton Spectator*. It is important to study both the origin and the context of such attitudes before we begin any analysis of the manner in which the process of land-development has operated in urban Ontario. Newspapers it should be stressed, do not tell us the entire story of the process of land development in the Victorian city, but they do provide an invaluable adjunct to such sources as the records of the Land Registry Office.

<sup>39</sup> A list of such publications would include the *Toronto News*, the *Toronto Citizen*, *City Hall*, and *City Magazine*. Such periodicals take the attitude that individuals do not have an inalienable right to speculate in land. This is not an entirely new attitude towards urban land, for similar sentiments were already surfacing in the labour press by the end of the nineteenth century. For a fuller discussion see DOUCET, "Building the Victorian City," pp. 348-50.