Literacy and Social Structure in Elgin County, Canada West: 1861

by Harvey J. GRAFF *

APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM

Until recently, little was known about the quantitative dimensions of literacy in either the pre-industrial era or the Age of Industrialization, and, in fact, even less is known about what it meant to be literate or illiterate. [1] However, a new interest has been shown in the problem, through the works of Lawrence Stone, Carlo Cipolla, and Roger Schofield, [2] and the ongoing studies of Kenneth Lockridge, Egil Johansson, and Sune Ackerman, while critical questions are being asked by others. Gillian Sutherland, reviewing Schofield's work with the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, asks: "Apart from the immediate and enormous question why, there is also the question, crudely, so what? Does this mean they [illiterates] behaved differently? If so, how? . . . In general, how much does it matter that some people, more people, can read, go to school, go to university . . . ? These may sound banal and familiar questions, but for most societies at most periods they have yet to be adequately answered . . ." [3]

The study of literacy can become a first step for the historian in transcending statements which maintain that the relationships between education and social structure are "various, [and] involve structural discontinuities," as Sutherland states. Research in this area must indeed revolve around questions of how much it mattered that some people could read or write or go to school, for literacy may not have held all the advantages that one might have assumed, and life for an illiterate may not have been as poor and simple as past writers have portrayed. One can clarify these social

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1 This is part of a larger and continuing study of "Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City". See H. J. GRAFF, "Towards a Meaning of Literacy: Literacy and Social Structure in Hamilton, Ontario 1861" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1971); "Towards a Meaning of Literacy," *History of Education Quarterly*, 12 (Fall, 1972); "Notes on Methods for Studying Literacy from the Manuscript Census", *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 5, (December, 1971); and "Approaches in the Historical Study of Literacy," *Urban History Review*, No. 3 (November, 1972). Studies of Kingston, Russell County, and London, Ontario are planned, as well as a continuation of those of Hamilton and Elgin, to include the 1871 and as well as the 1861 Census schedules.

2 See Lawrence STONE, "Literacy and Education in England, 1640-1900", *Past and Present*, 42 (February, 1969), 61-139; Carlo CIPOLLA, *Literacy and Development in the West* (Hammondsworth, 1969); and Roger SCHOFIELD, "The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England," *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack GOODY (Cambridge, 1969), 311-325.

3 Gillian SUTHERLAND, "The Study of the History of Education," *History*, 54 (February, 1969), 59.

relationships, and illuminate such problems as the ways in which educational systems functionally discriminate individuals and groups along lines of nationality, class, religion, and race. In this way literacy's sociological relations may be discovered and understood by isolating those who were illiterate, as shown by various sources, discerning their place in the social order, and then assessing the effects of illiteracy on their behavior as it contrasted with those who were literate.

There is a significant body of literature which bears on the problem of literacy. This writing may be divided into three principal areas: the measurement of literacy,[4] its relationship with the social structure,[5] and its social-psychological meaning.[6] In addition, contemporary writings, particularly those on education, crime, and the working classes, are essential in giving a fuller picture of the place of literacy in society.[7] In this essay we are primarily concerned with two aspects of this material: the methodological points that it raises and the interpretative insights that are suggested. Robert K. Webb, in his studies of literacy and the working classes in nineteenth-century England and Scotland, provides several suggestions. He introduces the concept of differential rates among various occupational groups, a notion fruitfully utilized by E. J. Hobsbawm in his work on the "labour aristocracy". Webb states that this situation "must mean as well that the illiterate groups were those most affected by immigration and by

[4] R. K. WEBB, "Working Class Readers in Early Victorian England," *English Historical Review*, 65 (July, 1950), 333-351, and "Literacy among the Working Classes in Nineteenth Century Scotland," *Scottish Historical Review*, 33 (February, 1954), 100-114; Carlo CIPOLLA, *op. cit.*; Roger SCHOFIELD, *op. cit.*; Lawrence STONE, *op. cit.*

[5] STONE, *op. cit.*; Philippe ARIES, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York, 1962); R. P. DORE, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (London, 1967); Michael SANDERSON, "Social Change and Elementary Education in Industrial Lancashire," *Northern History*, 3 (April, 1968), 131-153; Stephan THERNSTROM, *Poverty and Progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964); E. P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963); E. J. HOBSBAWM and George RUDÉ, *Captain Swing* (New York, 1969); D. C. MCCLELLAND, "Does Education Accelerate Economic Growth ?" *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 14 (April, 1966), 257-278; C. A. ANDERSON, "Literacy and Schooling on the Development Threshold", *Education and Economic Development*, ed. C. A. ANDERSON and M. J. BOWMAN (Chicago, 1965), 347-362; and Michael SANDERSON, "Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England," *Past and Present*, 56 (August, 1972), 75-104.

[6] Jack GOODY and Ian WATT, "The Consequences of Literacy", *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack GOODY (Cambridge, 1969), and G. H. BANTOCK, *The Implications of Literacy* (Leicester, 1966). For one recent attempt to examine literacy in the context of modernizing attitudes in the mid-twentieth century, see Howard SCHUMAN, Alex INKELES and David H. SMITH, "Some Social Psychological Effects and Non-Effects of Literacy in a New Nation," *Economic Developmental Cultural Change*, 16 (1967), 1-14, and other publications of the Harvard Project on Social and Cultural Aspects of Development (directed by Inkeles). Kenneth Lockridge, of the University of Michigan, is testing these findings for eighteenth-century England and the Thirteen Colonies.

[7] For example, such sources as the *Papers* of the Central Society of Education, contemporary English volumes, Mary CARPENTER *Reformatory Schools*, Edward BAINES *The Social, Educational, and Religious State of Manufacturing Districts*, Thomas POLES *A History of the Origin and Progress of Adult Schools* (all reprinted: New York, 1969), the *Journal of Education for Ontario*, and the *Annual Reports* of the Chief Superintendant of Education for Upper Canada.

the depression of the lower levels of the working classes." [8] Webb indicates the importance of regional variations as another consideration. Additionally, he points to the gap between male and female literacy, finding males slightly more literate. Finally, in an important caveat, Webb reminds us that reading could be learned in many situations, removing the discussion from solely a concern with formal educational institutions, a point well developed by Edward Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson adds that the ability to read is only the elementary technique; the ability to handle abstract and consecutive argument is by no means inborn. [9] Lawrence Stone has offered a framework for interpreting relationships between literacy and elementary education and society. [10] These factors, social stratification, employment opportunities, religion, theories of social control, demographic and family patterns, economic organization and resources, and political theory and institutions serve well as a check-list for approaching the question on a local scale and as a history of the growth of literacy.

There is also the question of the meaning of literacy. This must be considered in larger, more abstract socio-psychological terms, and this area is perhaps more barren than the others surveyed. However, Jack Goody, Ian Watt, and G. H. Bantock have made significant suggestions which are as thought-provoking as they are frightening. They have pointed to the great changes wrought by the rise of literate society, with the creation of a new means of communication between men.

The effects of the rise of literacy upon man have been profound. Goody and Watt suggest that writing provides an alternative source for cultural transmission which favors an awareness of inconsistencies. This has brought a sense of change and of cultural-lag and a split between fact and fiction, for the activities of writing and reading are infinitely more abstract than those of speaking and hearing. The wide use of printed material has fostered a new reliance on sight and an increasing dependence on visualization, creating greater social distances between individuals. This has resulted in a narrowing of experience, as the individual has little chance of participating in the cultural traditions in any kind of patterned whole. Thus literate societies are characterized by a high level of cultural conflict which may produce anomie. As well, Bantock maintains that high levels of literacy contribute to states of psychic rootlessness. The data presented below do not bear directly on these questions, but the larger meaning of literacy must not be lost in early research.

Past means of discussing literacy, it is apparent, offer little to an understanding of literacy's relationships with the social structure. Literary sources at best reveal little more than how literate or illiterate those on the upper rungs of society were, and perhaps what was available for them to read. Traditional social histories and histories of education largely ignore

[8] R. K. WEBB, "Literacy Among the Working Classes", 114.
[9] E. P. THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, 394, see also 350-400.
[10] STONE, *op. cit.*, 71 and *passim*.

the issue. Quantitative methods, however, may be successfully utilized for a systematic study of literacy and its correlates.

At present, historians in Europe and North America are engaged in such systematic quantitative studies. Their work illustrates the wide range of materials available to the student of literacy: manuscript census schedules, marriage registers, wills, deeds, depositions, criminal records, petitions, military recruits records, and parish catechetical examination records. The availability of records varies from area to area as does their extent; making some more useful for systematic exploitation than others. A few examples of the kind of research underway may prove helpful. Roger Schofield is involved in the preparation of a national sample of literacy for eighteenth and nineteenth-century England, using the signatures on marriage registers as a basis. These records are available to him from 1754 through the first third of the nineteenth century. Kenneth Lockridge is using wills in order to analyze the literacy levels of the colonial United States. As well, he is attempting to compare the attitudes of literates and illiterates who in their wills left charitable bequests. His sample will compare attitudes in England with those found in the colonies. Finally, the Swedish scholars, Egil Johansson and Sune Ackerman, are studying parish catechetical examination records which exist for the whole country from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth. These records differentiate between levels of reading comprehension and thus allow the researchers to establish the correlates of the various levels of literacy as well as relating the levels to the ability to sign one's name. This research should provide guidelines for others in the field, whose sources do not allow for such precision. The use of all these sources will be required for a complete understanding of literacy in the past.

However, it is important to note the advantages of the manuscript census for literacy studies. It seems that studying literacy from the census schedules is in many cases, an easier yet far more accurate method, if usable materials are available. One is dealing with the entire adult population of an area, be it rural or urban, not with a sample. Parish materials are available for a large number of villages, but some, though not insurmountable, problems arise in coding and analyzing the returns. The census enables the researcher to conduct his study of selected groups, ethnic, religious, occupational, etc., with a control body of the rest of the group and population. This has the limitation of one geographical place, but records exist for all areas in the United States and Canada, so one is free to make selections of geographical areas. Thirdly, the census gives a far greater amount of direct information on occupation, sex, age, marital status, religion, place of birth, number of children, their school attendance, type of dwelling, amounts of property owned, and place of residence, reducing the amount of record linkage needed.[11] However, it is valuable to link other records to the

[11] One is thus dependant upon the existence of an accurate census which inquired about the possession of literacy skills.

census — both as a check and to supplement the information. The Canadian censuses are useful only from 1861 onwards and those of the United States from 1841, while parish registers and wills allow research for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

On each manuscript page of the 1861 Canadian Census, questions 25-M and 26-F directed the enumerator to indicate, "persons over 20 who cannot read or write." This information forms the basis for this essay and the wording of the question act as a definition of literacy, while the standardized format provides us with a basis for comparative study. This definition helpfully limits us to a study of adult literacy by virtue of the cut-off point at twenty years of age. We are operating within the framework of those "who cannot read or write." There is certain ambiguity in this phrase, as to whether it defines an either/or situation or would only include an inability to carry out both operations. But, it does serve to give a measure of a minimum standard of literacy, and Stone, Webb, and Schofield, among others, have put well the case that one would, throughout English history, learn to read before learning to write.

The data meets Roger Schofield's two conditions for systematic literacy research. It is "applicable throughout the country to people of a wide range of ages and economic and social conditions and over a long period of time" and is also "standard as a measure from one person to the next". He also maintains that a measure of literacy should "therefore not only be universal and standard, it should also be direct," that is, by signature.

It may be argued that the census for Elgin County, and all of rural Canada for 1861, does not meet this stricture, for it was collected totally through enumeration. This differed significantly from the urban form of the census used in that year; for in Hamilton (which has been studied previously) and other large centres a separate schedule was left with each head of household. The urban manuscripts give the researcher opportunity to compare the head of household's reported literacy status with the signature or mark on the form. In Elgin and other rural areas, this check does not remain. Thus, we must expect some under-enumeration of illiterates to have occurred. The use of sources such as wills does indicate that an individual who made his mark on a will was sometimes recorded as literate on the census. However, wills do not exist in sufficient number to be utilized as a systematic check on census returns. Moreover, there is no inherent reason to doubt the accuracy of these returns in the overwhelming majority of cases. As with all historical data, the numbers used in the following discussion and the rates derived must be considered as approximate.

It has been contended that social stigma might effectively counteract the accuracy of such census returns. Two points argue against this possibility. R. K. Webb, previously cited, stated that "a good many people [in early-Victorian England] would admit to illiteracy." Research has shown that there

were well-to-do and, indeed, rich residents of Elgin County who would admit to illiteracy. This brings the putative role of social stigma into question.

As an additional check, the literacy rates derived for Elgin in 1861 were compared with figures from the aggregate census for Elgin and other rural areas for the same year. The Registrar-General's tabulation produces a literacy rate of 97.3 per cent. My figures, however, indicate 325 illiterates or a rate of 97.8 per cent. Among other counties in Canada West, this rate is not surprising. Thirteen others show a literacy rate above ninety-five per cent, based on computations from the aggregate census. It is unlikely that the same problems would be met in all areas, so this correspondence is indicative of a meaningful level of accuracy. It must be reiterated that, in any case, the argument for accuracy is not as firm as the one possible for urban areas in 1861. The chances for incomplete returns are greater with enumeration, since an illiterate head of household, in completing his own schedule, is forced to gain another's aid. Thus, the data presented in this essay must be regarded as an analysis of a minimum level of illiteracy. However, the use of the manuscript census for studying literacy seems to be applicable for enumeration.

Elgin County, 1861

Elgin County began as the area surrounding the settlement of Thomas Talbot, granted in 1803, as an attempt to build a British colony on the fertile Lake Erie soil, diverting immigration from the United States as well as attracting other settlers to Canada West. It has been reported that immigration increased rapidly from 1817, when Gourlay found a population of 3,000. Many of the settlers were Scots, drawn to the area from reports of kinsmen who had come to Elgin from New York state, to settle in Aldborough Township. Scottish migration continued in large numbers to 1835, with some Highlanders purchasing Canada Company land in Yarmouth.[12] In early immigration, the Scots seem to have predominated, settling in Dunwich, Aldborough, Dorchester South, and the northern portion of Yarmouth.

By 1835, we can see how the geographical distribution of migration had set its course. The areas of Scottish concentration have been surveyed above; Nova Scotians settled in Malahide and Bayham and immigrants from the United States arrived in the north of Southwold. The south of Yarmouth was distributed to Quakers and Friends from New York and Pennsylvania, while Malahide included settlers from New York and Upper Canada. Bayham was a mixed area; Irish predominated in Dunwich and were found in other townships. The English immigrants were scattered, while French Canadians were to be found in the west of the settlement and some Germans were scattered throughout the Aldborough region.[13] Excluding the majority of

[12] Elgin Historical and Scientific Institute, "Reminiscences of Early Settlers and Other Records," ed. C. O. Ermatinger, Publication No. 3 (St. Thomas, 1911), 31-32.

[13] J. H. Coyne, Introduction to "The Talbot Papers," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada,* Part I (1907), *passim;* E. C. Guillet, *Early Life in Upper Canada*

native Upper Canadians, the balance established by this process of settlement continued at least to 1861. Without attempting a judgment of Talbot as a man or an administrator, due credit must be extended to him for the large, orderly, rapid, and successful settlement of Elgin County.

By the 1840's, general farm prosperity reigned in the Elgin area with wheat as a staple crop, although agriculture was rudimentarily diversified. From the late forties to 1857 crops were good and prices were favorable, with a large export business being conducted with the United States. By the mid-fifties, however, the effect of the Western Ontario land boom must have been felt in the Elgin area. The boom and subsequent bust of 1857 probably were not as heavily felt as they were in the London and Middlesex areas, but 1861 must be seen as a period of economic recovery. Elgin, too, was by-passed by the Great Western Railway on its route to London, and remained generally unaffected by its benefits until the completion of the Canada Southern Railway in 1872.

Population grew steadily in Elgin from 1817 to 1861. In 1817 Gourlay found 3,000; the Censuses of 1841, 1851, 1861 reported growth from 12,500, 25,400 to 32,000.[14] Little rural depopulation would be expected by 1861, according to Watson's survey.[15] Thus, it may be suggested that Elgin had been completely settled and experienced expected growth and prosperity by 1861.

What now may be said of Elgin County in 1861, the year upon which this study is based? The county consisted of seven townships ranging in population from 2,200 to 6,100. The population for the entire county was 32,050 with a male-female sex ratio of 1.06. The population was young, though, as over one-half (53%) were under the age of twenty years. Demographically, it would seem to be a "mature" rural settlement, given the sex ratio and the age structure the foregoing would indicate. As well, the figures for births (1,096), deaths under one year of age (62), and total deaths (254) give added weight to this conclusion. Moreover, it should also be noted that approximately two-thirds of the population were considered to be members of families.

In terms of ethnic origins, the vast majority of Elgin residents had been born in Upper Canada (70%), with significant numbers born in England and Wales (8%), Scotland (8%), Ireland (5.2%), and the United States (5%). Religiously, there was more of a mix. Baptists ranked highest in adherents (18.4%), followed by the Wesleyan Methodists (18%), Free Church Presbyterians (16.2%), Church of England (16%), Episcopal Meth-

(Toronto, 1933) 120; C. O. ERMATINGER, *The Talbot Settlement* (St. Thomas, 1904), 256; Edward ERMATINGER, *Life of Colonel Talbot and the Talbot Settlement* (St. Thomas, 1859), 192; ELGIN HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTE, "Historical Sketches of the County of Elgin" (St. Thomas, 1895), 16.

[14] Appendix to Elgin Historical and Scientific Institute, Publication No. 2 (St. Thomas, 1901).

[15] J. W. WATSON, "Rural Depopulation in Southern Ontario," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 37 (September, 1947), 146-154.

odists (6.4%), Catholics (5%), and a smattering of at least six other religious groups.

The area is known for the production of a great many crops, a list of grains, vegetables, fruits too long to be repeated. The result was the development of a mixed agrarian economy, which may be seen in the returns of agricultural produce in 1861. This form of economy supported only two types of industry, flour and grist mills, and sawmills. Fifteen grain mills were in operation in 1860-61, thirty-nine sawmills, and only two foundries. [16]

Arguments surrounding primary education, or instruction in literacy, are complex, but it seems possible to isolate the place of literacy skills. [17] Overwhelmingly, the emphasis of education in the nineteenth century was to be, first, moral, and second, instruction in skills. Indeed, arguments were raised against the teaching of reading and writing. In Canada West as in Great Britain, official writings stress the moral side of education. Such attitudes were expressed in Elgin county. In his reminiscent history of Elgin, John Kenneth Galbraith refers to a recurrent conflict over the role of education in agrarian society. Some valued education as useful in itself or as useful as preparation for the future, while others held it to be an unavoidable burden, and even, perhaps a potential danger to the social order. [18]

The debate pivoted on the financial axis. In 1850, for example, Thomas McCall of Dunwich reported with regard to the establishment of free schools, "whatever system is adopted or recommended by men of experience, many will object to it . . . for there are several school sections in this township, both last year and the present, where schools cannot be kept, because the majority are opposed . . . ." [19] In 1854, McCall complained of apathy and want of interest on the part of parents and guardians. He stated, "it is true that some are poor, but none so poor as to be unable to afford the pittance required to educate their children . . . ." [20]

The next problem of the county's educational system was that of teachers. Local trustees' reports throughout the decade of the fifties are filled with remarks on teacher scarcity, problems of teacher quality, and problems of retaining the same teacher. [21] A third problem was the size of school sections; success came with a centralizing of facilities effected by an enlargement of sectional boundaries. In 1861, Rev. Sheppard reported: "The increase in the average time the schools were kept open . . . I attribute mainly to the increased size of the sections . . . Parents realize the fact that the advantages of a constant school, kept by a good teacher, outweigh the convenience of a small 'baby school' near home . . . ." [22]

16 See *Census of the Canadas,* Vol. 2 (Quebec, 1863), 226-253.
17 See GRAFF, "Towards a Meaning of Literacy", thesis, *op. cit.,* 27-33, for an extended discussion.
18 J. K. GALBRAITH, *Made to Last* (London, 1964), *passim.*
19 *Report of the Chief Superintendant of . . . Schools,* 1850 (Toronto, 1850), 177.
20 *Ibid.,* 1854, 125-126.
21 *Ibid.,* 1850, 177; 1854, 125; 1855, 269-270; etc.
22 *Ibid.,* 1855, 269; 1861, 197.

The conclusion suggested by the various reports is that several trends were prevalent and increasing by 1861: more schools, teachers, interest, and a longer school year. Indeed, it would seem that the high level of literacy in Elgin county may well be related to a consistent increase in the provision of primary education from the early years of settlement. In fact, the pioneers who settled in the area displayed an interest in establishing schools.[23] Gourlay reported eleven schools in 1817, with at least one in every township but Dorchester South, and Frank Eames gives vignettes of the founding of schools in Dunwich (1822 and 1824) and in St. Thomas (1825).[24] These were rudimentary schools, in homes and kitchens, as well as shanties and log houses, but can it be held that they were any less successful in teaching children to read and write than their more recent counterparts?

By 1850, there were 108 schools in the seven townships, with 60 per cent of school-age children in attendance, if the Superintendent of education's report may be trusted — though this would be a rather high percentage for the period — which includes claims that the schools were kept open for an average of 7 2/3 months. This may be a distortion, but is probably indicative of a high level of school-going. Comparative figures for 1861 give an attendance rate of 88 per cent.[25] Research on Hamilton has shown that local trustees over-estimated school-attendance rates by approximately twenty per cent. If, then, one may assume that about 65-70 per cent of Elgin county's 5-16-year olds were in school, it must still be considered a very high rate. These schools were of varying forms — in number and quality of teachers, physical facilities, number of pupils, amount of financial support. But it does seem clear that they were successfully imparting literacy skills to an overwhelming number of the county's residents. Fine facilities and lengthy periods were not so essential to this activity. However, some individuals remained untouched by them.

Literacy and Social Structure in Elgin County, 1861[26]

Analysis of the 1861 manuscript census has shown that there were 325 illiterate adults in Elgin County. A study of the characteristics and behavior of these individuals, as far as available materials allow, may shed much light on the question of literacy and its relationship to the social structure. Moreover, it is very suggestive for the overall study of that structure.

[23] "Highland Pioneers of the County of Middlesex," *Ontario Historical Society Records and Papers,* 9 (1910), 30.

[24] Elgin Historical and Scientific Institute, Publication No. 2 (St. Thomas, 1901), Appendix, and Frank Eames, "Pioneer Schools of Upper Canada," *Ontario Historical Society Records and Papers,* 18 (1920), 100-101.

[25] See *Report of the Chief Superintendant,* 1850; 1861.

[26] In this section, comparison is made with the place of the illiterate in Hamilton society in 1861, offering an urban contrast to the rural data. For complete information on that study, see the literature cited in Note 1. That analysis was based upon 895 adult illiterates found on the manuscript urban census of 1861 and those heads of household linked to the City Assessment Roll of the same year. Note as well, the differences between enumeration procedures from urban to rural areas in Canada described above.

The most important question is, who were the illiterates? Let us begin with their place of birth.

TABLE I. PLACE OF BIRTH OF ILLITERATES

(n=325)

Place	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of Birthplace in Total Population*
England and Wales	46	14.2	8.0
Scotland	28	8.6	7.9
Ireland	47	14.5	5.2
Canada (French)	21	6.5	0.1
Canada	132	40.6	69.7
United States	34	10.5	4.9
Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island	9	2.8	2.0
New Brunswick	3	0.9	0.7
Germany	3	0.9	—
Africa	1	—	—
Not given	1	—	—

This table shows that native Canadians from Canada West predominate among the illiterates. It is important to note that the former group make up only 40 per cent of adult illiterates yet 70 per cent of the population. Other groups are of interest, however. The English, Irish, French Canadians, and American-born illiterates are over-represented when compared to their share in the total population — all show a difference of about six per cent. Illiterates of Scottish birth are only very slightly over-represented by about one-half of one per cent.

The picture suggested, then, links illiteracy with immigration, as was found in the study of Hamilton. But no one nationality assumes a majority. On the whole, these figures generally are in line with the balance of the respective groups' representations in the population. While no group appears to be special, it should be noted that four were over-represented (if not dramatically), the Scottish were directly in line, and Upper Canadians were under-represented by almost 30 per cent. This is suggestive of the settlement of the county, as Scots came early and are reported to have exhibited a certain education-hunger. Some native Canadians (non-French) would have been in long residence and could have been a stable group, or were children of long-term residents. Perhaps what is most important is that no foreign-born group represents a significantly disproportionate share of the illiterate population, as the Irish had in Hamilton (70 per cent). In this regard, there seems to be a significant difference — at least in literacy — between migrants to the city and to the country, and this would relate both to economic differentiation and to opportunities for education.

Our next question is, of what religious background were these illiterates?

TABLE II. RELIGION OF ILLITERATES

(n=325)

Religion	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of Sect in Total Population*
Church of England	49	15.0	16.0
Church of Scotland	8	2.5	2.9
Church of Rome	40	12.3	4.9
Free Church Presbyterian	25	7.7	16.2
Other Presbyterian	1	—	—
Wesleyan Methodist	62	19.1	18.0
Episcopal Methodist	32	9.9	6.4
New Connection Methodist	16	4.9	3.5
Other Methodist	2	0.6	0.6
Baptist	49	15.1	18.4
Quaker	3	0.9	2.1
Protestant	5	1.5	0.6
Disciple	2	0.6	1.0
Mennonite and Tinker	1	—	—
Dunkard	2	0.6	—
Others, not given	28	8.6	4.3

This follows the picture found above — a lack of concentration of any religious group. A correspondence remains, too, between the representation of illiterates in these sects and their proportion in the population. Two religious groups are noteworthy. The Catholics were slightly over-represented, by about seven per cent in comparison to their strength in the total population, and Free Church Presbyterians were under-represented, by 8.5 per cent. These are not startling disparities, but give indication of both the economic and educational status of members of these religious groups. All others closely approximate (that is, within 2-3 percentage points) their sect's representation.

This discussion may be advanced further by isolating the most sizable religio-ethnic groups in Elgin County's population. Once again, no group predominates, and only Irish Catholics are represented by 10 per cent of the illiterates. None of this information is surprising, as a majority of Catholics were Irish and vice versa, and so on. Thus, the conclusion on the basis of religion and place of birth seems firm, no one group — religious or ethnic — is over- or under-represented to a noteworthy degree except the native Canadians, who, nevertheless, remain the largest single group. Religiously, only Free Church Presbyterians, who were predominantly Scottish, were significantly under-represented. The picture, then, is of fragments of groupings when examined in this way. These illiterates seem to have formed a residue who remained outside of the mechanisms of elementary instruction because of some factor; perhaps economic, social, demographic, geographic, or purely individual.

Let us now turn to the status in household of the 325 illiterates. We find that a vast majority, 76 per cent, were either heads of household or their wives; the same as was found in Hamilton. Slightly more illiterates

were sons and daughters (5.5 to 3.5); this could suggest a lower age for leaving home in the city. The percentage of relatives is the same (6.8), but almost four per cent more illiterate boarders were found in the country (10.5) and many fewer servants. This difference, it is expected, would relate to the economic bases of the two areas. Fewer servants are found in the rural areas and boarders could scarcely be other than agricultural laborers in Elgin County, a more limited economic category than what was available to a boarder in an urban area.

TABLE III. HOUSEHOLD STATUS OF ILLITERATES

(n=325)

Status	*Number*	*Percentage*
Head of Household	127	39.1
Wife of Household	122	37.5
Children	18	5.5
Relative	22	6.8
Boarder	34	10.5
Servant	2	0.6

The next problem is that of the demographic bases of illiteracy in Elgin County.

TABLE IV. SEX OF ILLITERATES

(n=325)

	Number	*Percentage*	*Cohort*	*% of Total Adult Population*	*Illiterates as % of Total*
Male	155	47.7	7758	52.4	1.9
Female	170	52.3	7036	47.6	2.4

Females outnumber males, both absolutely and in proportions of the adult population, but not by a great degree. This is very significant, as women outnumbered men by a ratio of 1.6 in Hamilton. There appears to be a wide divergence in sex-ratios between the country and the city, pointing directly to greater educational opportunity for women in rural areas, in either formal or informal ways; this merits more investigation.

Turning to the age-spread of illiterates, we discover that as in Hamilton, there is a pronounced tendency for illiteracy to be higher in older age groups. However, it would seem that the gradient was less steep in Elgin than it was in the urban area. Both male and female illiterates were under-represented in their age cohorts in the bracket 20-29, but are almost equally represented by ages 30-39. After age 40, however, the illiterates show greater strength than would be expected from their cohort distribution. The increase is most startling at ages 50-59 and narrows from that point. This is indicative of the spread of elementary education in the county; it points to a beginning of greater availability of primary instruction when the 30-39 group were children. This would place the educational advance in the decade of the

1830's, corresponding to the time of greatest influx of settlers, and would suggest that schools rather closely followed settlement, probably with a lag of several years.

TABLE V. AGES BY SEX OF ILLITERATES

Ages	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Age Cohort*	*Age Cohort as a % of Adult Population*
Male		(n=155)		
20-29	35	22.6	2722	35.1
30-39	36	23.2	1911	24.6
40-49	36	23.2	1493	19.2
50-59	26	16.8	774	9.9
60-69	17	10.9	578	7.5
70-79	4	2.6	229	2.9
80-89	1	0.7	45	0.6
Female		(n=170)		
20-29	39	22.9	2718	38.7
30-39	50	29.4	1782	25.3
40-49	32	18.8	1086	15.4
50-59	28	16.5	694	9.9
60-69	10	5.9	527	7.5
70-79	8	4.7	176	2.5
80-89	2	1.2	44	0.6
90-99	1	0.6	9	0.1
Male and Female		(n=325)		
20-29	74	22.8	5440	36.8
30-39	86	26.5	3693	24.9
40-49	68	20.9	2579	17.4
50-59	54	16.6	1468	9.9
60-69	27	8.3	1105	7.5
70-79	12	3.7	405	2.7
80-89	3	0.9	99	0.7
90-99	1	0.3	14	0.1

A comparison of the age-sex distribution for males and that for females shows a greater unity of experience than in Hamilton, where the women outnumbered men by ratios of 1.5 to 2.3 until the age of 50. However, in Elgin County the difference is never that broad and is striking only in the 30-39 year old range, where men were slightly under-represented and women over-represented by five per cent. But females were more greatly under-represented in the 20-29 bracket. It would seem that the initial introduction of education on a wide scale was more to the male advantage, but that within a decade female attendance began to catch up.

Another interesting consideration is the distribution of age by place of birth. This shows 40.9 per cent of the native-born in the 20-29 group and 25.0 per cent in the 30-39 range. All other nationalities are most frequently found scattered throughout the ranges, but more generally concentrated in the 30-60-year old or older brackets. From this evidence, one could predict that illiteracy in rural Southern Ontario was beginning to wane and that it

was becoming more a problem for the native-born. No other group had as many as one-half of its members under the age of forty. What we are observing is the pattern of primary educational development in rural Ontario, as viewed in Elgin County, in the way the spread of education affected the ordinary people.

There remain other demographic indices by which to examine the Elgin illiterates. The first is the mean number of children in each household headed by an illiterate. A sample (1 in 10) drawn from the manuscript census indicates that the average number of children at home for literate heads of household was 3.85.[27] However, the illiterate-headed families of Elgin showed an average of 2.99 children — as recorded by the census — a startling difference from the above. In fact, families headed by a laborer had a mean of 3.21 children, while those headed by a farmer had 2.88, the reverse of what would be expected if family size related only to wealth. In Hamilton, too, the illiterates had fewer children but not by such a large difference. This finding gives additional support to the possibility that illiterates had distinctly smaller families, as did the poor, and may have practiced family limitation.[28] However, the illiterates may merely have married later.

As in the city, the rural illiterates overwhelmingly resided in one-family units, even more in Elgin than in Hamilton. In fact, single-family dwelling was expected as there were 4,815 families in Elgin and 4,816 houses counted. This would indicate that almost all of the families in Elgin lived alone, but it was found that at least 5 per cent of the illiterate-headed ones did not. So, we find that the difference in family residence of illiterates discovered in Hamilton is less significant, but still present. In addition, few illiterate-headed families had resident relatives (23) and still fewer had boarders (8); none possessed servants. These are often signs of wealth or higher economic status.

TABLE VI. OCCUPATION OF ILLITERATES

(n=325)

Occupation	*Number*	*Percentage*	*% of Occupation*
Blacksmith	2	—	—
Carpenter	1	—	—
Farmer, Yeoman	78	24.0	2.4
Joiner	1	—	100.0
Laborer	67	20.6	2.8
Lumberman	1	—	4.8

[27] For the purposes of comparison when aggregated figures are not available, samples of the literate heads of household were drawn from both the nominal census and the agricultural census. The samples were ten per cent (1 in 10) of the census heads and of all enumerated on the latter document (n=548 and n=333).

[28] See GRAFF, thesis, *op. cit.*, 63-64, for the original formulation of this argument. However, census information alone is insufficient, for that document gives only the number of children resident at that time, and not the completed family size, which may be obtained by family reconstitution techniques.

Plasterer	1	—	20.0
Servant, female	1	—	—
Tavernkeeper	1	—	6.3
Weaver	1	—	5.3
Gentleman	1	—	—
Wife	125	38.5	—
Shoemaker	3	—	3.2
Spinster	11	3.4	—
Widow	14	4.3	—
None given	17	5.2	—

It must be remembered that any assessment based on occupational classification is tenuous, but this distribution may still be indicative. Farmers and laborers were the two most common occupations in Elgin in 1861, and they were the most common among the illiterates. Secondly, there were 170 female illiterates, but only 151 were classed as wife, widow, spinster, female servant. So, 19 considered themselves to be farmers or laborers sharing the tasks of men, generally their husbands. Laborer must be considered an occupation low in both status and economic standing, and farmer is a most ambiguous category; this will be examined below.

However, more may be said about several of the other occupations. There were illiterate blacksmiths, carpenters, joiners, lumbermen, tavernkeepers, weavers, and shoemakers. These occupations fall into classes of proprietors and skilled labor. Certainly it was possible, as it was in Hamilton, for an illiterate to hold a post requiring skill and training, if not the ability to read and write. As shown, a relatively high percentage of some of Elgin's skilled work force was illiterate and presumably some were well-to-do, although the groups themselves are small. It must be doubted that in the traditional economy of rural Elgin County, the lack of literacy skills could be much of a hindrance to success. When these occupations are examined by birth-place, there are no important distinctions as the distribution spreads across lines of nationality.

Further economic information is available, from two sources. The first is data obtained from the manuscript census, such as type of house, livestock owned, carriages owned, property owned, type of business, and amount of capital invested. However, much of this information was incomplete on the Elgin returns; the type of dwelling being the only category completed for all heads of household. The majority of illiterate-headed households resided in one-story frame or log dwellings, as did the overwhelming majority of the households in Elgin County. As a measure of economic standing, type of dwelling is a most ambiguous category; but we may observe that illiterates fell well into the norm. One may also note that two illiterates resided in two-story stone or brick houses — a very rare form as there were but 12 and 3 respectively throughout the county. However, those who resided in one-half story dwellings or shanties may be considered to have fallen below this rough norm.

As stated above, other economic indices derived from the census are very incomplete. More complete, and probably more accurate information

is available from the second source, the agricultural census of 1861.[29] The agricultural census of 1861 was an exhaustive inventory of land, values, and produce (a source which deserves more use by both historians and historical geographers). From this document, information on number of acres owned, value of land, value of livestock, and value of farm implements is obtained. However, the principal difficulty in using this information is that it restricts us to only farmers' economic position, enabling us to deal with a base of only 61 per cent of illiterate heads of household. In fact, it was possible to link 55 of the 78 farmers (71 per cent) or 43.3 per cent of all heads of household to the agricultural census.

Ninety per cent of illiterate farmers owned one hundred acres or less and 47 per cent possessed fifty or fewer acres, while 82 per cent of all farmers had one hundred or less. The illiterate-headed households approximate the land-holding patterns of the county, but fall below the normal distribution, average holdings of 82 compared to slightly over 100 (sample data). A higher percentage of illiterates held twenty acres or less and fifty acres or less (differences of 9 and 3 per cent from all farmers). Holdings of 50-100 acres were most common, among all holders and among illiterates, but the proportion of illiterates is lower. Similarly, the illiterate farmers were under-represented in the larger holdings. This would point to a slightly depressed condition for illiterate farmers. But, in terms of acres held, a correspondence between size of farm and value does not often hold for farms of 100 acres or less.

A more accurate picture emerges, however, from an examination of the cash value of farms held by illiterate farmers. The mean value of their farms was $1,800, a value three-fourths that of farms in the agricultural census sample. As Table VII indicates, sixty per cent of illiterates' farms fell below the fortieth percentile of farms examined in the ten per cent sample. However, the illiterates show a more representative distribution in the next two percentile brackets and some strength in the 80-89th, while proving high in the top one per cent.

TABLE VII. CASH VALUE OF FARMS OF ILLITERATES

(n=55)

Value $	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentile of all Farms (1 in 10 sample data)*	*Range in Acres*
0- 960	18	32.7	0-19	0-200
961-1560	16	29.1	20-39	50-100
1561-2300	9	16.4	40-59	50-135
2301-3800	7	12.7	60-79	100-196
3801-4000	2	3.6	80-89	100
8001+	3	5.5	99	140-341

[29] It must be noted that the most accurate and preferrable economic data would be obtainable only from the assessment rolls. However, these were not available and only recently have been collected — they will be utilized in future studies.

This distribution suggests that the valuation of the illiterates' farms was below that of literates, but one which was not tremendously depressed. Note that twelve owned farms of over $2,300 value, and that three owned farms at $8,000-$10,000, certainly significant sums in 1861. This analysis also suggests that the number of acres owned, at least to 100 acres, is a rather unreliable index for assessing economic standing, as a 100-acre farm could be valued at a worth ranging from $100 to $3,500. Value is thus a more accurate category. So we find that illiterate farmers represent a wide range of farm values, indicating that literacy would not always correspond with agricultural success and that an illiterate farmer could certainly cultivate a very valuable farm. Also, one should note, as J. K. Galbraith reminds us, "farm income, unlike salary income, yields no exact figure by which people can be known and graded with precision". [30] A further question would be, did literacy? — and I would think not.

It would appear that no over-riding economic differential related to religion or place of birth. However, Scots and English fared well generally, Upper Canadians and Americans found mixed success, and Irish and French Canadians had less success. Religiously the lines are less clear, but Anglicans and Free Church Presbyterians found less difficulty than other groups. Methodists and Baptists had mixed economic success, and Catholics generally fell somewhat below the others.

Moving now to the geographical distribution of the 325 illiterates, we discover, at first glance, extensive clustering in Bayham, Dorchester South, Malahide, and Southwold. But while 78 per cent of all illiterates reside in those four townships, only one, Dorchester South, had resident illiterates constituting a significant portion of the adult population.

TABLE VIII. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION BY DISTRICT AND TOWNSHIP OR TOWN

Township/ District	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Population*	*Illiterates as % of Population*
Aldborough	16	4.9	1051	1.5 (adults)
District 2	4	1.2	478	0.8
District 3	10	3.1	325	3.1
District 4	2	0.6	539	0.4
Bayham	64	19.7	2345	1.9 (adults)
District 1	4	1.2	1270	0.3
District 2	4	1.2	704	0.6
District 3	2	0.6	972	0.2
District 4	44	13.6	1389	3.2
District 5	10	3.1	807	1.2
Dorchester South	74	22.7	975	7.6 (adults)
District 1	2	0.6	1247	0.2
District 2	72	22.2	956	7.5

[30] GALBRAITH, *op. cit.*, 49.

Dunwich	15	4.6	1282	1.2 (adults)
District 1	3	0.9	666	0.5
District 2	8	2.5	353	2.3
District 5	4	1.2	724	0.6
Malahide	62	19.1	2420	2.4 (adults)
District 1	16	4.9	821	1.9
District 2	6	1.8	837	0.7
District 3	10	3.0	870	1.1
District 4	28	8.6	1717	1.6
District 5	2	0.6	992	0.2
Southwold	50	15.4	2493	2.0 (adults)
District 2	1	0.3	1690	0.5
District 4	12	3.7	613	1.9
District 5	37	11.4	1146	3.2
St. Thomas	3	0.9	725	0.4 (adults)
Vienna	3	0.9	402	0.7 (adults)
Yarmouth	37	11.4	2874	1.3 (adults)
District 1	21	6.5	1556	1.3
District 2	3	0.9	1175	0.3
District 4	13	4.0	1220	1.1

Note also that the two areas of most concentrated settlement, the town of St. Thomas and the village of Vienna, had almost insignificant numbers of illiterates.

This analysis is refined by examining the distribution of illiterates by district within the townships. They were generally finely distributed throughout the population, being found in 26 of 34 divisions if St. Thomas and Vienna are considered. In only five of these 26 districts were the illiterates present in higher proportion than they were in the entire population. Only in the Second District of South Dorchester did they comprise a significant number representing 7.5 per cent of the entire population. A closer look at those districts with some concentration confirms the picture drawn above, as we find illiterates scattered throughout Elgin, with only slight concentration. That concentration relates to the ethnic and religious composition, undoubtedly due to settlement patterns, of each area.

We must next confront the question of school attendance; were illiterate heads of household sending their children to school? Recall that a very high school-attendance rate was found in Elgin in 1861, perhaps as high as 65-70 per cent, and that the years preceding had been a period of educational growth and consolidation. How did this expansion affect the children of illiterate parents? First, we find that of 65 illiterate-headed families with school-age children, 42 or 64.6 per cent were sending at least one child to school. This compares very favorably with the urban illiterates of Hamilton; there only 46 per cent were sending a child.

Considering the individual children of illiterates, we may obtain comparable figures for the total population. Here we find that 50.8 per cent (92 of 181) were in attendance, 53.7 per cent of boys and 47.7 per cent of girls. This most likely places the children of illiterates behind the rate for the entire population, but very possibly not by the full twenty per cent found in Hamilton. A slightly higher over-all attendance rate too may be found in rural Elgin, compared with 62 per cent in Hamilton; this is uncertain and must be further investigated. As with children of urban illiterates, Elgin's fell below the rest of the population in chances for education. Some of this gap undoubtedly relates to the low economic condition of some illiterates, but as they generally approximate the norm this is an insufficient answer. Perhaps, and this is but an hypothesis, some illiterates were either unaware of any supposed gain from attending, looked down on formal education as unnecessary in light of their own experience, required the child's labour at home, or felt that their children should not be made aware of their own literary ignorance. Also, we discover that males outdistanced females in school attendance by six per cent, corresponding with seven per cent in Hamilton. Thus, in rural areas as in the city, then and now; male educational opportunity exceeded female.

In Hamilton, the most common ages of attendance for all children were 8-12 and for children of illiterates 7-11 years. While we have no comparable figures for all school children in Elgin County, findings for those of illiterate heads are strikingly different. Here we find no gradual progression in increase or falling off at certain ages, but a mix of rises and falls with an increase discernible at least to age twelve. School-going in rural areas would be more seasonal, more fluctuating and irregular than in urban areas. As well, we must ask if the child, regardless of the educational level of his parents, benefitted from exposure to the school or if he did gain literacy of other skills from a more informal source. (Table IX)

Finally, we must ascertain whether there were significant variations due to parental birthplace. Scottish illiterate parents sent 67 per cent of their children, Irish parents sent 65 per cent of theirs, French Canadians sent 60 per cent, and English sent 55 per cent — all above the average. It is interesting to note that the Irish in Hamilton fell slightly below that average; undoubtedly these Irish migrants differed both in time of arrival and in economic standing. On the other hand, native non-French Canadian illiterate parents sent 49 per cent of their eligible children and American-born sent but 35 per cent. Some of this variation is no doubt due to geographic location as well as economic levels, but one must note that in District Two, South Dorchester Township, 86 per cent of the illiterate-headed families sent at least one child and 67 per cent of all eligible children were considered as attending school.

The beginning of a picture of illiteracy and its relationships to the social structure now emerges. As seen, Elgin's illiterates stood relatively well on the various indices of economic standing and approximated many of the

TABLE IX. AGES OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Age	MALES			FEMALES			ALL CHILDREN OF ILLITERATES		
	Eligible	*Attending*	*Percentage Attending*	*Eligible*	*Attending*	*Percentage Attending*	*Eligible*	*Attending*	*Percentage Attending*
6	8	2	25.0	10	3	30.0	18	5	27.3
7	13	6	46.2	11	3	27.3	24	9	37.5
8	4	2	50.0	9	4	44.4	13	6	46.2
9	11	6	54.5	9	6	66.7	20	12	60.0
10	5	2	40.0	4	0	—	9	2	22.2
11	10	7	70.0	9	5	55.6	19	12	63.2
12	11	8	72.7	11	7	63.6	22	15	68.2
13	10	6	60.0	4	2	50.0	14	8	57.1
14	6	3	50.0	7	5	71.4	13	8	61.5
15	9	4	44.4	7	5	71.4	16	9	56.3
16	8	5	62.5	6	1	16.7	14	6	42.9
Total	95	51	53.7	86	41	47.7	92	181	50.8

other characteristics of the general population. However, in many respects, they differed from urban illiterates as viewed in Hamilton.

Elgin County — A Comparative View

It is important to place Elgin County in perspective with other areas at the same time. We found that in 1861 there were 325 adult illiterates, giving a literacy rate of 97.81 per cent. Using statistics computed from the aggregate census of 1861, we may compare Elgin with Canada West and Canada East and with Canada as a whole. This reveals:

Elgin County	Canada West	Canada East	Canada
97.8	92.8	64.2	80.2

This places Elgin very high, a full five per cent above Canada West and seventeen per cent above all of Canada. It is fascinating to note, too, that Elgin County was more literate than the urban areas.

Elgin County	Hamilton	Kingston	London	Toronto
97.8	90.4	92.2	92.2	91.3

Elgin was a full five to seven per cent more literate than these pre-industrial centres. This suggests that a settled and stable agrarian area may well have had a more effective system of primary instruction than the city, a somewhat intriguing idea. The countryside would not possess the problems of immigration, concentrated poverty, and commercial-industrial activity that made the city.

It is also possible, and essential, to examine literacy rates for all of Canada West in 1861. The rates for the 43 counties and districts were:

TABLE X. Literacy in all Census Divisions of Canada West, 1861

County	*Population — Adults*	*Illiterates*	*Literacy Rate*
Brant	14,244	1,262	91.1
Bruce	11,651	733	93.7
Carleton	13,183	1,086	91.8
Dundas	8,246	438	94.5
Durham	16,682	617	96.3
Elgin	14,591	325	97.8
Essex	11,488	2,052	82.2
Frontenac	12,956	968	92.5
Glengarry	10,179	1,746	82.9
Grenville	10,605	656	93.8
Grey	16,286	1,204	92.6
Haldimand	9,854	468	95.2
Halton	10,453	534	94.9
Hastings	19,822	1,670	91.6
Huron	22,508	1,220	94.6
Kent	13,833	1,693	87.8
Lambton	22,150	1,085	95.1

Lanark	13,874	686	95.1
Leeds	16,991	721	95.8
Lennox & Addington	13,928	985	92.9
Lincoln	13,593	821	93.9
Middlesex	20,167	1,113	94.5
Norfolk	12,960	375	97.1
Northumberland	17,576	784	95.5
Ontario	19,757	1,223	93.8
Oxford	21,525	591	97.3
Peel	12,269	441	96.4
Perth	16,698	921	94.5
Peterborough	11,216	877	92.2
Prescott	6,278	2,102	66.5
Prince Edward	9,304	415	95.5
Renfrew	8,697	978	88.7
Russell	3,130	911	70.9
Simcoe	19,134	1,354	93.0
Stormont	7,939	877	88.9
Victoria	10,551	902	91.5
Waterloo	16,815	632	96.2
Welland	12,269	503	95.9
Wellington	22,261	760	96.6
Wentworth	14,418	772	94.7
York	27,719	1,760	93.7
Algoma District	1,565	726	53.6
Nipissing District	1,554	664	57.3

The majority of these counties, predominantly rural, were more literate than the cities, and Elgin County would rank first, if the census figures are accepted. But Elgin's rate is not surprising, as 29 rated above any of the cities and fourteen were over 95 per cent literate. Thus, the countryside seems to be more literate than the city, providing greater educational opportunity, as we found in Elgin. It would seem that settlers in such areas came with the explicit intention of creating educational facilities and that these were developed by 1861. The different nature of immigration, as we have seen, adds to an explanation of this important contrast with the commercial city.

What is even more striking is the difference in sex ratios between the cities and the counties. In the cities, female illiteracy consistently outdistanced the male rates, but in five of eight selected counties, (Oxford, Wellington, Essex, Prescott, Russell as compared to Elgin, Waterloo, Glengarry), male rates exceeded those for females. We saw that the difference did not lie entirely with an equality of education opportunity, but with the timing of the school development and selective migration patterns. Turning to international comparisons, one must note first that we are dealing with a wide variety of sources for literacy rates, none derived with the rigor of those for Elgin County, or those for Hamilton. There are two secondary sources which make such figures available, those of Lawrence Stone and Carlo Cipolla. From Stone we find that Elgin's 97.81 per cent placed it

above France's 70 per cent, Scotland's 90 per cent, and England and Wales' 80 per cent. [31] Cipolla, however, offers a wider range for comparison:

TABLE XI. ESTIMATED ADULT LITERACY
(percentages) [32] (1861 unless otherwise noted)

	Adult Population	*Males*	*Grooms*	*Females*	*Brides*	*Army Recruits*
Elgin County	97.81	97.96	—	97.55	—	—
France	—	—	71	—	66	68
England & Wales	—	—	75	—	65	—
Scotland	—	—	89	—	79	—
Denmark (1859-60)	—	—	—	—	—	97
Russia (c. 1850)	5-10	—	—	—	—	—
Prussia (1849)	80	—	—	—	—	—
Sweden (1850)	90	—	—	—	—	—
Austrian Empire (1851)	55-60	—	—	—	—	—
Belgium	50-55 (1856)	—	—	—	—	61 (1860)
Italy	20-25	—	—	—	—	—
Spain (1857)	25	—	—	—	—	—
Europe (c. 1850)	50-55	—	—	—	—	—
United States (c. 1850)	85-90 (whites)	—	—	—	—	—

This information puts Elgin County truly into international perspective and reveals that it held a very high position. Comparison with national areas indicates that Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, and the United States were its and, indeed, Canada West's only close rivals in the diffusion of literacy skills. The statistics for these nations are of doubtful precision: but assuming that they are fair indicators of literacy levels, Elgin, as did Hamilton, stands very well. Comparison with urban areas, using statistics gathered by Cipolla, places only Norway and Sweden close, with 87 and 90 per cent. [33] Unfortunately, such statistics for American cities are not available. More detailed study of both rural and urban areas is necessary both for comparative purposes and for a greater understanding of the meaning of literacy in the nineteenth century.

Let us note in conclusion the most significant, perhaps, of the variations between the city and the country, the number of illiterates. Elgin had six hundred fewer than Hamilton, as reported in the census, giving it a literacy rate eight per cent higher with an economy which probably demanded less familiarity with such skills. In this way the allocation of the abilities to read and write related less to economic needs than to social stratification and social control. In Hamilton, there were more illiterates and they were poorer; predominantly Irish Catholics. This in turn relates to immigration

31 STONE, *op. cit.*, 120.
32 CIPOLLA, *op. cit.*, 14, 72, 88, 89, 91, 99, 115, 119, 122, 124. It is best to be cautious in using these figures as Cipolla notes, for type of enumeration and level of accuracy varies widely.
33 *Ibid.*, 74.

and the allocation of economic resources, as we see in the regional variation in literacy between the city and the rural countryside. This undoubtedly made a difference in their behavior, as we have seen. However, we are left with one very significant element of commonality — that of the smaller family size. What is to be made of this?

It is possible to conclude that the illiterate adults of Elgin County, while exceptions to the social processes which allocated some form of education to a majority of their cohorts, more closely resemble the rest of the population of the county than did the Hamilton illiterates. Generally, it would seem, they fared well, if not as well as the majority, without the ability to read or write, and it would seem that their numbers were on the decline.

Here, we have an attempt at comparative perspectives on literacy: in rural and urban Ontario in 1861. We have seen that the city and the countryside differ substantially, but retain significant similarities — are these due to any uniqueness of place? Or are they indicative of more general nineteenth-century patterns that we have only begun to uncover?