

# “Oil Mania”: Colonial Land Policy, Land Speculation, and Settlement in Enniskillen Township, 1830s–1860s

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*Geography, plus the economic and social conditions of oil resource extraction, shaped settlement and land speculation in Enniskillen Township in southwestern Ontario from the opening of the township to settlement in 1835 through the “oil boom” of the 1860s. Colonial land policies were intended to encourage settlement by loyal, industrious British subjects, but did not prevent land speculation. During the early stages of the development of the oil industry, the activities of land speculators in the township were part and parcel of the normal workings of capitalism. Land speculation involved both settlement and improvement of land holdings. An analysis of settlement and land speculation in Enniskillen Township over this period demonstrates the continued usefulness of micro-studies in unravelling the nuances of colonial land-granting policies in Upper Canada.*

*La géographie et les conditions économiques et sociales de l'extraction des ressources pétrolières ont guidé la colonisation et la spéculation foncière dans le canton d'Enniskillen, situé dans le Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario, de son ouverture en 1835 jusqu'à la « ruée vers l'or noir » des années 1860. Les politiques coloniales d'aménagement du territoire avaient pour but d'encourager la colonisation des lieux par de loyaux et d'industriels sujets britanniques, mais elles n'empêchèrent pas la spéculation foncière. Aux premières heures du développement de l'industrie pétrolière, les activités des spéculateurs fonciers du canton faisaient partie intégrante des rouages normaux du capitalisme. La spéculation visait tant la colonisation que l'amélioration des biens-fonds. L'analyse de la colonisation et de la spéculation foncière dans le canton d'Enniskillen durant cette période montre que les micro-études sont d'une constante*

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*utilité pour nous aider à comprendre les nuances des politiques coloniales d'attribution des terres dans le Haut-Canada.*

COLONIAL GOVERNANCE was transformed during the early decades of the nineteenth century in the settler colony of Upper Canada. Colonial officials sought to create a terrain for capital accumulation through dispossession of Native peoples, transformation of land tenure towards freehold, and registration of property. Nineteenth-century practices of geographical reconnaissance and land registry made Upper Canada amenable to European settlement and colonial administration. According to the “civilizing” process imagined by colonial administrators, the wilderness frontier would give way to bounded property comprised of a landscape of family farms and compact villages, populated by loyal and industrious British subjects.

Land policies in Upper Canada did not affect every township equally, as studies by John Clarke, William Shannon, and Randy Widdis have illustrated, particularly when such factors as physical geography, the timing and extent of European settlement, and absentee ownership are taken into consideration.<sup>1</sup> Colonialism was never a uniform or coherent imposition, but rather a profoundly mediated set of relationships between local Crown lands agents, settlers, squatters, and speculators. It was at the local level that most settlers had dealings with the regulatory regime of the state. The local Crown lands agent allocated land grants and managed the sale of lots. Crown lands agents had considerable leeway, and imperial regulations were interpreted from colonial vantage points.

The free-grant policy was aimed at preventing land speculation in Upper Canada, but, as Gilbert C. Patterson writes, “That bird of evil omen, the land speculator, was not long in appearing on the scene.” Land speculators were marginalized by colonial administrators.<sup>2</sup> In Enniskillen Township, oil resource extraction uniquely shaped settlement and land speculation, from the opening of the township to European settlement in 1835 through the “oil boom” of the 1860s, when speculation in oil lands was rampant. Enniskillen Township was a rather unattractive site on the frontier of agricultural settlement. During the early stages of the development of the oil industry, the activities of land speculators in the township were part and parcel of the normal workings of capitalism. A discussion of the particular factors at work in Enniskillen Township over this period contributes to the literature in social history

1 Randy William Widdis, “Motivation and Scale: A Method of Identifying Land Speculators in Upper Canada”, *Canadian Geographer*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1979), pp. 338–351; William Shannon, “Brokers, Land Bankers, and ‘Birds of Evil Omen’: The Effect of Land Policies on Settlement in Upper Canada’s Collingwood Township, 1834–1860” (MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 1989); John Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), pp 304–312.

2 Gilbert C. Patterson, *Land Settlement in Upper Canada, 1783–1840* (16th Report of the Department of Archives, Province of Ontario, 1920), p. 32.

concerned with land transactions during European settlement of colonial Upper Canada.

A number of assumptions have been implied in the historical literature about Upper Canada's land speculators, and some debate has emerged about how to identify speculators. David Gagan, A. G. Brunger, and John Clarke use a "scale of operation" approach.<sup>3</sup> These scholars define land speculators as those who acquired large parcels of land, usually 400 or more acres, without intending to develop it themselves. Undeveloped land was purchased cheaply with the expectation that it could be resold at a profit. Widdis criticizes the "scale of operation" approach and suggests that speculation can be defined only by the "motivations" of the participants. In a similar vein, Shannon argues that the historical use of the term "speculator" in Canadian historiography ignores the elements of risk and quick turnover. Land speculation, moreover, did not always involve large parcels of land, as this study of Enniskillen Township explains.<sup>4</sup> In Enniskillen Township speculative activities occurred in a limited geographical area, on small parcels of land where substantial quantities of oil were believed to exist. Clearly, any approach to the historical study of land speculation in Upper Canada must also take into account variations that might be attributed to local geographic, economic, and social conditions.

Lambton County forms southern Ontario's western frontier and the southern border with the United States for a distance of 60 miles or more fronted by the St. Clair River. Geographically, Enniskillen constitutes the central township of Lambton County, bordered on the north by Plympton Township, on the east by Brooke, on the south by Dawn, and on the west by Moore and Sarnia Townships (see Figure 1). In the aftermath of the War of 1812, colonial officials encouraged the immigration of persons of British origin who, in their opinion, were more likely to be loyal subjects than those settlers who had already migrated from the United States. The colonial government sought land for British settlers in the Western District of Upper Canada where any further American incursions were likely to occur.

Long before the arrival of Europeans in the area, however, Native peoples had dug below the surface for oil. They believed that petroleum oil was sacred medicine. As Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe and his wife journeyed from Newark (later renamed Niagara-on-the-Lake) to Detroit in February 1795, Simcoe noted in his journal that "the Indians discovered a spring

3 John Clarke, "The Role of Political Position and Family and Economic Linkage in Land Speculation in the Western District of Upper Canada, 1788–1815", *Canadian Geographer*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1975), pp. 18–34; A. G. Brunger, "A Spatial Analysis of Individual Settlement in Southern London District, Upper Canada, 1800–1836" (PhD dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1973); David Gagan, "Property and Interest: Some Preliminary Evidence of Land Speculation by the Family Compact in Upper Canada, 1820–1840", *Ontario History*, vol. 70, no. 1 (1978), pp. 63–70.

4 Widdis, "Motivation and Scale", pp. 338–351; Randy William Widdis, "A Perspective on Land Tenure in Upper Canada: A Study of Elizabethtown Township, 1790–1840" (MA thesis, McMaster University, 1977); Shannon, "Brokers, Land Bankers, and 'Birds of Evil Omen'".



Figure 1 Map of the Western Townships of Lambton County.

of an oily nature which upon examination proved to be a kind of petroleum”.<sup>5</sup> Colonial officials were keenly interested in the economic potential of the region, and subsequently scientists at the Geological Survey of Canada conducted geological research in the Enniskillen oilfields. In the *Report of the Geological Survey for 1849–1850*, Sterry Hunt mentioned “the asphaltum or

5 Brigadier General E. A. Cruikshank, LLD, FRSC, ed., *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, with Allied Documents Related to the Administration of the Government of Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1923), p. 290.

mineral pitch” found on lot 19 of either the sixth or seventh concession of Enniskillen Township. In his report Hunt outlined practical uses for the mineral pitch: “The consumption of this material in England and on the Continent for the construction of pavements, for paying the bottoms of vessels, and for the manufacture of illuminating gas, to which it is eminently adapted, is such that the existence of deposits of it in this country is a matter of considerable importance.”<sup>6</sup> The following year, Alexander Murray conducted fieldwork in Enniskillen Township, where he measured the extent of the bituminous gum beds located on lot 16, concession 2, and reported that the bituminous bed was “of but small extent”. He indicated, “It occupies the ground close to the surface being covered only by about one or two miles.”<sup>7</sup>

Brothers Henry and Charles Nelson Tripp probably heard about the Enniskillen oil beds from Alexander Murray. Henry Tripp had worked as a plate photographer in Woodstock in the late 1840s, and Alexander Murray owned a farm in the area. Recognizing the economic gain that might be made from manufacturing asphalt from the oil gum in Enniskillen Township, Charles Tripp acquired lot 17, concession 2, on February 12, 1854, thus initiating the Tripp brothers’ ventures in the oil business in the region.

The International Mining and Manufacturing Company was incorporated on December 18, 1854, with Charles Nelson Tripp as president. Hiram Cook, a wood merchant from Hamilton, John B. VanVoorhis, a wood merchant and contractor from Woodstock, and Henry Tripp were chosen as directors of the company. The company was capitalized at a value of \$60,000, and each director was required to subscribe 250 shares with a par value of £1,250.<sup>8</sup> This venture in the manufacturing of asphalt was not successful, however. The problem of transportation was perhaps the greatest obstacle confronting the company. There was no railway or even a good road connection to the Enniskillen gum beds. As a result, the asphalt had to be transported during the winter months by sleigh over 30 kilometres to Port Sarnia and loaded onto ships. Early in 1856, the financially distressed Tripp Brothers began to divest themselves of their holdings in Enniskillen Township.

Enniskillen Township was transformed virtually overnight in August 1858 when James Miller Williams struck a flowing well by digging approximately 15 metres into the clay loam on lot 16, concession 2. The first petroleum wells, also known as surface wells, were dug until oil filled the pit, usually at a depth of between 45 and 70 feet. The sides of the wells, about eight feet wide

6 *Report of the Progress of the Geological Survey of Canada for the Year 1849–50* (Toronto, 1850), p. 99.

7 *Report of the Progress of the Geological Survey of Canada for the Year 1850–51* (Quebec, 1852), pp. 29–30, 33.

8 *Belden’s Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Lambton*, p. 12; Robert B. Harness, “Makers of Oil History, 1850–1880” (unpublished manuscript), pp. 10–11; Gary May, *Hard Oiler! The Story of Early Canadians’ Quest for Oil at Home and Abroad* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1998), pp. 29–30; Hope Morritt, *Rivers of Oil: The Founding of North America’s Petroleum Industry* (Kingston: Quarry Press, 1993), pp. 17–23.

and twelve feet long, were cribbed with logs put together inside the well using the same technique used to construct log houses. When the surface wells ceased to flow or became intermittent, oil producers began drilling into the rock. In her history of technology on the Ontario mining frontier, Dianne Newell writes about oil extraction in Enniskillen Township, revealing that, at first, rock wells were “kicked down” by men using spring poles.<sup>9</sup> The focus of Newell’s study, however, is on technological change on the mining frontier of old Ontario rather than on the nuances of colonial land transactions and oil speculation.

A special correspondent hired by the Toronto *Globe* visited the Enniskillen oil region in September 1861 and described the community that had sprung up over the course of the summer. Originally named “Victoria” after the Queen, the village was called “Olicia”, meaning “full of oil”, by the speculators who flocked to the region. “Oil Springs” was the name finally chosen for the new village. The *Globe* reporter described Oil Springs as a smaller edition of South Staffordshire, “quite as dirty and smelling a great deal worse”. The correspondent estimated, conservatively by his own account, that no fewer than 1,600 people had gathered at this spot. Nearly every shanty contained its quantum of boarders, Americans for the most part, although more Canadians had appeared recently. “There are not a few Californian miners, whose experience in gold digging materially assists them in their search after ‘grease’ as they call the oil,” the reporter continued. “All sorts and all conditions of men” congregated at Oil Springs — doctors, tailors, colonels, and cobblers. “Many of them come to get employment and they are sure of it,” the reporter noted; “others come with dollars in their pockets, to purchase land, and in a few days they have added others to the large number of wells already sunk or in course of being sunk.”<sup>10</sup>

The “Shaw Well”, located on lot 18, concession 2, came in on January 16, 1862. The property was owned by Hugh Nixon Shaw, an Irish immigrant who owned a general store in Cooksville. The narrative of Shaw’s career, as reported in the daily press, was one of “rags-to-riches”. Shaw began to drill for oil in Enniskillen Township sometime in late 1860 or 1861. He allegedly spent a good deal of his time and money fruitlessly. According to the *London Free Press*, his “means were exhausted; hope almost extinguished; credit gone; he was on the eve of utter despair” when his well came in, allegedly on the last day he had intended to work at it.<sup>11</sup> Shaw’s well was the first “gusher” in Enniskillen Township and ushered in the first real oil boom and the first serious wave of land speculation.

9 Dianne Newell, *Technology on the Frontier: Mining in Old Ontario* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), pp. 121–127.

10 *Globe*, September 2, 6, and 12, 1861.

11 Reprinted in the *Samia Observer*, February 14, 1862. Shaw also patented a still for refining oil and operated a refinery until it was destroyed by fire in May 1862. On February 11, 1863, Shaw fell into his well and drowned. See *Globe*, February 14 and 20, 1863.

The speculation in oil lands in Enniskillen Township was limited to an area of approximately two and a half square miles: lots 15 through 20 inclusive, on the first, second, and third concessions, where thick deposits of oil had seeped to the surface to form what were known locally as the “gum beds”, and the area along Bear Creek on concession 10 around which the town of Petrolia or “Petrolea” was beginning to be built in the early 1860s. Most of the early oil producers were “shoe-string” operators, typical denizens of any nineteenth-century mineral resource community. Local historian Edward Phelps writes, “[M]ost of them had nothing to lose, lived on luck and swiftly departed in search of greener fields when the boom slackened off.”<sup>12</sup> Before the oil boom of the 1860s, however, land had been acquired from the Native peoples by the Crown and surveyed. In keeping with ideals of settler colonialism imagined by colonial officials, family farms were built on the prime agricultural lands during the 1850s.

### **From Wilderness Land to Bounded Property**

The first step in the colonization of Enniskillen Township was the alienation of Aboriginal claims by the Crown. The Ojibwa (Chippewa) First Nation ceded the lands in what would become the two south concessions of Enniskillen Township in two treaties completed in 1822 and 1827. As historian Rhonda Telford points out, the Native people never relinquished ownership of sub-surface or submarine rights, either in their reserves, in their unceded lands, or in their territories ceded by treaty. Thus the Crown never had title to the sub-surface or any of its resources, and still does not, even though most of the oil resources of Enniskillen Township have now been extracted. On March 13, 1841, Lewis Rendt sold the east half of lot 9, concession 10, to the Crown for £37, 10 shillings Canadian. The following year on March 8 David McCall sold 300 acres on the east half of lot 8, concession 10, and lot 8, concession 9, to the Crown for the sum of £220 Canadian. The lands sold to the Crown were intended as reserves for the Chippewa of the St. Clair River and the Chenail Ecarté band, but instead were sold again during the height of the Enniskillen oil boom. The ownership of the property is the subject of an ongoing court case, with the Chippewa First Nation of the Sarnia, Kettle Point, and Walpole Island bands arguing that the land was held in trust by the federal government for the three bands.<sup>13</sup>

12 Edward Phelps, “Foundations of the Canadian Oil Industry, 1850–1866”, in Edith Firth, ed., *Profiles of a Province: Studies in the History of Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967), p. 160.

13 Canada, *Indian Treaties and Surrenders*, vol. 1 (Ottawa, 1891), pp. 58, 71, 244, 246; Robert J. Surtees, “Indian Land Cessions in Upper Canada, 1814–1830”, in Ian A. L. Getty and Antoine S. Lussier, eds., *As Long as the Sun Shines and the Water Flows* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), pp. 65–83; Jean Turnbull Elford, *Canada West's Last Frontier: A History of Lambton* (Sarnia: Lambton County Historical Society, 1982), p. 45; Rhonda Telford, “‘Under the Earth’: The Exploration and Attempted Sale of the Oil and Gas Rights of the Walpole Island First Nation During World War I”, in David McNab, ed., *Earth, Water, Air and Fire: Studies in Canadian Ethnohistory* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), pp. 65–79; Rhonda Telford, personal correspondence, June 26, 2000; *Sarnia Observer*, May 12, 1977.

In the aftermath of the acquisition of First Nation lands by treaty, the surveying and mapping of Enniskillen Township was carried out in the autumn of 1832 by Lewis Burwell with the assistance of Eliakim Malcolm.<sup>14</sup> The Enniskillen survey established official lines of property on the township and imposed specific rights and obligations on those who settled in the region. Township surveyors mapped the landscape in a particular way connected to European scientific and enlightenment ideals of utilitarianism. They distinguished between “good” land for settlement and agriculture and “poor” or “desert” land based on an evaluation of tree species and vegetation.<sup>15</sup> Burwell did not report any deposits of surface oil, a noteworthy omission given his mandate to report any potentially “useful” resources.

The Enniskillen survey was carried out using the sectional system introduced in 1829. Lines were run for every other sideroad allowance and the concessions between every sixth lot, creating a section of 2,400 acres made up of 12 lots of 200 acres each. To reduce survey mileage, only alternate concession lines were run. The surveyors divided Enniskillen Township into 14 concessions with the lines running west and east and the sideroads north and south, creating a total of 448 lots on 82,174 acres. The land surface of Enniskillen Township is broken by two tributaries, running in a southwest direction, roughly parallel to one another: the north branch of the Sydenham River known as Bear Creek and its tributary, Black Creek.

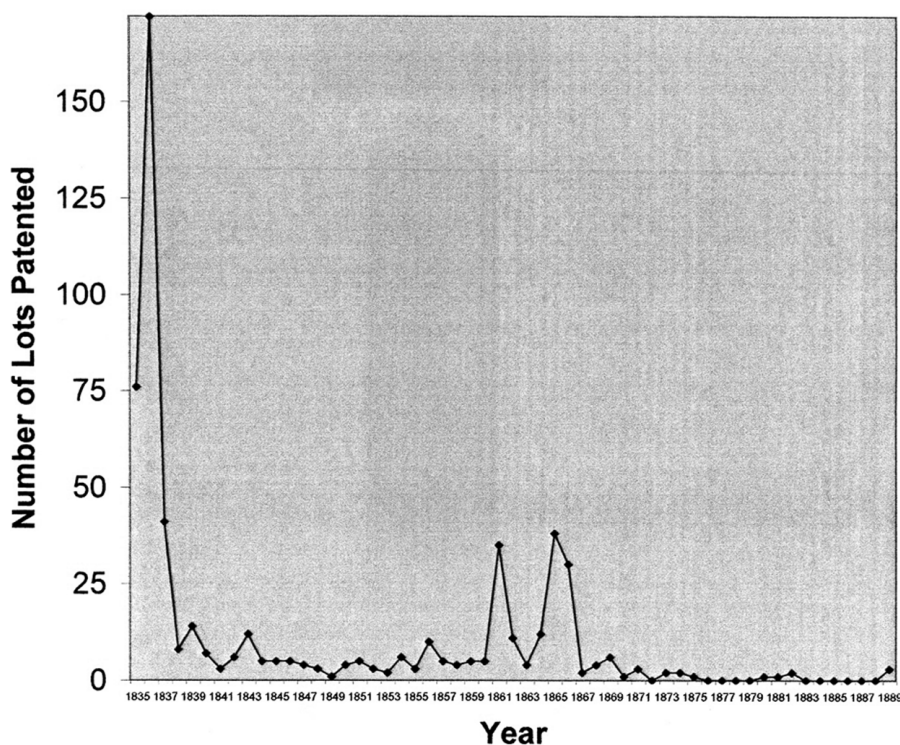
Surveying was abandoned on the eighth concession line when surveyors “found the water so deep and the swamp so very bad that it was impossible to run the line any further to the East”. The “Great Enniskillen Swamp” was largely a seasonal phenomenon: wet and impassable during the spring and autumn, it became a hard, dry bed during the summer months.<sup>16</sup> Patches of land on faint knolls broke the continuity of the swamp and were classified by the surveyors as “good land” for agriculture. The prevailing forest lore associated basswood, beech, cherry, hickory, oak, sugar maple, and walnut with “good land” potentially useful for timbering as well as for farming and settlement. Alder, birch, black ash, elm, soft maple, tamarack, and willow were associated with wet and swampy land that was hence unsuited for agriculture. The first European settlers occupied the prime lands along the northern township line on concession 14 and along Bear Creek and Black Creek. Knowledgeable of the surveyor’s mapping of the township, settlers deemed

14 Toronto, Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], RG 1, S. P. Hurd to Lewis Burwell, July 13, 1832.

15 Suzanne Zeller, *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 5, 184–185; J. Clarke and G. F. Finnigan, “Colonial Survey Records and the Vegetation of Essex County, Ontario”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1984), pp. 119–138.

16 AO, RG 1, Series CB–1, Box 9, MS 924, Reel 6, Survey Diary of Lewis Burwell. Extensive under-drainage was required before intensive agricultural development could be undertaken in Enniskillen Township. Later in the 1870s, with financial assistance made possible by the *Ontario Drainage Acts* of 1860 and 1873 and the *Municipal Drainage Aid Act* of 1873, a municipal drain was constructed spanning the entire length of every concession line in the township.





**Figure 2** Rate of Land Alienation in Enniskillen Township, 1835–1889.

these lots good lands for agriculture as they were covered with forests of hardwood comprised of beech, maple, elm, and hickory.

The Crown opened Enniskillen Township for settlement in 1835, thereby continuing the practice of absentee patenting by official grantees that had existed since the beginning of the century in the older settled districts of the province. A patent, a grant of privilege and property made by the Crown, was issued after the fulfilment of settlement duties and the payment of fees; it signified legal title to the land, the right to mineral and timber resources, and manhood suffrage. Enniskillen was a fresh, new township, and within the first three years after land became available on the market fully one-half of the lots were patented. Figure 2 illustrates the rate of land alienation from the Crown from 1835 to 1889 in Enniskillen Township. During this period a total of 578 patents were issued. Those legislated by the Crown as having a right to land in Upper Canada, namely military claimants, Loyalists, and the offspring of Loyalists, took advantage of the remission of settlement duties in 1835 and rushed to patent their claims. A total of 289 lots were patented between 1835 and 1837, producing the following compilation: 174 Loyalist grants; 81 military claimants; 10 Heir and Devisee grants; one sale of clergy

reserves; and 23 unknown. Thus 88.2 per cent of the patents issued by the Crown in Enniskillen Township went to official grantees. A second smaller wave of patenting occurred between 1861 and 1865, at the height of the speculative activity surrounding the oil boom. Another 15.9 per cent of the lots in Enniskillen were patented, most by assignment (in which case the locatee was not the first individual offered a specific parcel of land), and by the sale of Clergy and Crown reserves and other sales.

Those from the oldest parts of the colony claimed the majority of official grants. Land grants in Enniskillen Township also went to satisfy the accumulated claims of old Loyalist and military settlements and as gifts or payments to members of the elite. As J. K. Johnson notes, "Larger than normal grants of land were handed out as a matter of routine to anyone who could claim status or prominence."<sup>17</sup> Three prominent individuals received "larger than normal" grants: Isaac Buchanan, a Scottish-born merchant, politician, pamphleteer, and staunch advocate of protection for Canadian industry, was granted 1,200 acres; Scottish author John Galt, who was in charge of the Canada Company's field operations and spearheaded the settlement of a million acres of wilderness called the Huron Tract, received 1,100 acres; and Samuel Hatt, a militia officer and businessman from Chambly, Quebec, was granted 800 acres.<sup>18</sup> A few commissioned militia officers who served in the War of 1812 were also granted tracts of land in Enniskillen Township.

In most instances land changed hands quickly. Of the 289 lots patented from 1835 to 1837 inclusive, 138 claims had passed to other absentee owners within five years. The colonial government's plan to settle the Western District with retired militia offers and Loyalists and their descendants was unsuccessful by and large in Enniskillen Township, as was the case elsewhere in Upper Canada. Land patents alone, however, do not distinguish actual settlers from absentee owners and land dealers. John Clarke questions the reliability of asserting any correlation between patenting and actual settlement because of changes in settlement requirements over time. He studied the spatial portrayal of patented and occupied land in Essex County using a cross-sectional analysis of patents and assessment rolls divided into three categories: land identified as occupied in the assessment rolls or in the process of being patented with transactions occurring ahead of settlement; patented and unoccupied land; and unpatented and unoccupied lots.<sup>19</sup> A similar cross-sectional analysis was performed for Enniskillen Township using the

17 J. K. Johnson, *Becoming Prominent: Regional Leadership in Upper Canada, 1791–1841* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), p. 54.

18 *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 335–340; vol. 11 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 125–131; vol. 5 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp. 411–412; Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), pp. 100–107.

19 Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics*, pp. 184–186.

1852 tax assessment roll, the first assessment taken after Lambton became a provisional county.<sup>20</sup>

The cross-sectional analysis of the patent index and the 1852 tax assessment reveals that, of the 578 patents taken out between 1835 and 1889, 59.5 per cent of the lots were unoccupied in 1852. A considerable portion of the patents, 21.1 per cent, were on lots that were not included in the 1852 assessment. Unpatented and unoccupied lots comprised 13.8 per cent of the lots assessed, and only 5.5 per cent were occupied and in the process of the being patented. Similar to Clarke's findings for Essex County, patenting clearly preceded settlement in Enniskillen Township. The use of land as capital by the majority of grantees rather than for settlement might, in part, account for sparse settlement. Changes in settlement regulations and difficulties in complying with these regulations, the swampy terrain, and inadequate drainage all limited the potential for settlement and agriculture. The high expense of establishing a family farm in Enniskillen Township was detrimental to settlement. In addition, access to Enniskillen Township was limited to a rough track in the bush known as the Nauvoo Road between concessions 8 and 9, with the line running between lots 17 and 18.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the settlers who paid their fees, completed their settlement duties, and secured a patent, squatters were categorized as bogus settlers because they had no legal title to the property. These semi-migrants stripped the best timber and took a few good crops from natural clearings. Peter Ward, who possessed a location ticket for the west half of lot 14, concession 9, wrote to the Crown Lands Office on September 6, 1851, complaining about the state of the township. Ward indicated that there were only 34 actual settlers in Enniskillen, but there were plenty of shanties used only by those who were plundering the township of its most valuable timber and selling it in the American market. In his letter, Ward complained about the complacency of the settlers and predicted that the day would come when the timber would be gone. He suggested, "The Government would do well for the Country if they would give the land to actual settlers which would improve the Country."<sup>22</sup>

Among the first European settlers in Enniskillen were the Rouse, Oliver,

20 Under the proclamation of July 16, 1792, Upper Canada was divided into 19 districts. Essex and Kent Counties were part of the Western District. Initially, the townships of Moore, Sarnia, Plympton, Enniskillen, Warwick, Brooke, and Bosanquet were attached to the county of Kent. Not until much later, in 1835, were the surveys of the 10 townships comprising Lambton County completed. In 1852 Lambton became a provisional county. The union with Essex was formally dismantled on September 30, 1853, and Lambton became a fully independent county.

21 In 1846 a group of Mormon converts who wanted to join the Mormon community in Nauvoo, Illinois, hewed out a rough track in the bush to connect with the Egremont Road to Port Sarnia. Although the road has since been paved and designated Highway 79 by the Ontario government, locally it is still known as the Nauvoo Road. See Victor Lauriston, *Lambton's Hundred Years, 1849–1949* (Sarnia: Lambton County Historical Society, 1949), pp. 129–130; *London Free Press*, February 9, 1957.

22 AO, RG1, C–IV, Township Papers, Enniskillen Township [hereafter Enniskillen Township Papers], John Ward to the Honourable J. H. Price, September 6, 1851.

Eveland, and Durance families, who likely arrived sometime before 1837, in which year the militia officer came out from the Egremont Road and conscripted male members of those four families who were capable of bearing arms to join the force guarding the St. Clair River frontier.<sup>23</sup> Durance settled on lot 15, concession 8; Eveland on lot 14, concession 10; Oliver adjacent to them; and John Rouse and family at the site of the present village of Oil Springs.<sup>24</sup>

Settlement in Upper Canada was not a levelling but a differentiating process, as inequalities in the initial distribution of land resources laid the basis for enduring socio-economic differences. Some historians have argued that colonial land-granting policies were actually prohibitive to the labouring-class immigrant attempting to rise to the status of landowner.<sup>25</sup> The Township Papers located in the Crown Lands Records provide an indication of the difficulties experienced by settlers in Enniskillen Township and the strategies they used in selecting, patenting, and developing their land. For “unofficial” grantees who acquired land by paying fees and performing settlement duties, the task of establishing a farm in Enniskillen was expensive and onerous. Some settlers were poor men who struggled for what often turned into an elusive quest for propertied independence. In June 1843 the local Crown lands agent returned the location tickets for 200 acres on lot 29, concession 2, stating that, “the party being a poor man, and the land in that Township being generally very low and wet”, had been unable to fulfil the settlement requirements.<sup>26</sup> Other settlers sought wage labour off the farm to pay their fees. In his petition for lot 3, concession 10, Henry Clarke informed the Commissioner of Crown Lands that he was “a poor man with a large family, four boys and two girls with no means of support ... but working from place to place to earn a support for my family as we can get no support of [*sic*] this land”.<sup>27</sup> According to the 1843 tax assessment for the Western District, only 270 acres of land

23 Sir John Colborne was concerned about the defence of the western frontier. He visited St. Clair in 1835 and gave orders for a survey of a direct route from London, where he planned to establish a military depot to a point on Lake Huron. The Egremont Road was designed to link London with the county town of Errol. See Lauriston, *Lambton's Hundred Years*, pp. 72–74; Beldon's *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Lambton*, p. 15.

24 Elford, *Canada West's Last Frontier*, p. 45; Canada, *Census of 1861*, Enniskillen Township.

25 Leo Johnson, “Land Policy, Population Growth, and Social Structure in the Home District, 1793–1851”, *Ontario History*, vol. 63 (1971), pp. 41–61; Peter A. Russell, *Attitudes to Social Structure and Mobility in Upper Canada, 1815–1840: “Here we are laird ourselves”* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990); Joy Parr, “Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective”, *Labour/Le travail*, vol. 15 (Spring 1985), pp. 91–103; Rusty Bittermann, “The Hierarchy of the Soil: Land and Labour in a 19th Century Cape Breton Community”, *Acadiensis*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 33–55; Daniel Joseph Samson, “Industry and Improvement: State and Class Formations in Nova Scotia's Coal-Mining Countryside, 1790–1864 (PhD dissertation, Queen's University, 1997).

26 Enniskillen Township Papers, microfilm MS 658, Reel 132.

27 Enniskillen Township Papers, Henry Clarke to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, n.d.

were under cultivation in Enniskillen. In 1846 the total population of Enniskillen and Moore Townships combined was only 780.<sup>28</sup>

Enniskillen Township appeared as a separate district in the decennial census for the first time in 1861. The census manuscript provides one of the earliest extant descriptions of European settlement in the township. In the margins of the census form, enumerator John Smith remarked:

A few persons settled in this Township as early as A.D. 1835, but for many years it was dreaded by settlers as a miserable swamp, and made very little progress. In the year 1854 the settlers had increased until there were fifty-four on the assessment roll, and the Township was erected into Municipality under the amended Municipal Act.

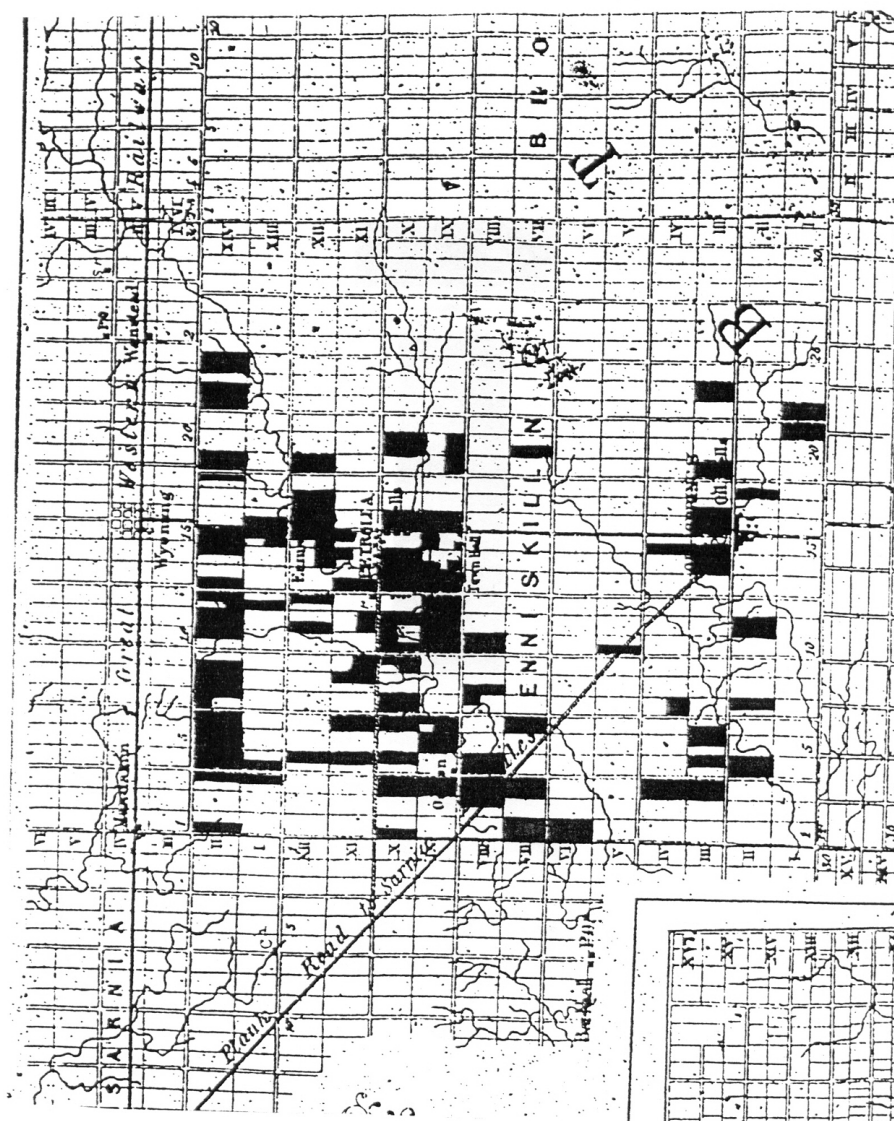
“Since that time,” Smith continued, “the increase of the farming population has been steady and a good deal of improvement both in roads and land clearing, buildings, etc (also in schools) has been made.”<sup>29</sup>

A total of 1,067 persons were counted in the 1861 census of Enniskillen Township, 670 males and 397 females. Only 15,283 acres, or 18.6 per cent of the total area of Enniskillen Township, had been taken up for farming in 1861, with 2,661 acres actually under cultivation in 129 households. As Figure 3 reveals, the first areas settled were the well-drained, prime farmlands on the northern township line and along Bear Creek and Black Creek away from the swamp in the eastern section of the township, a pattern that laid the basis for a “hierarchy of the soil”. Successful family farms were built on these properties beginning in the 1850s.

The names and locations of 129 farmers were identified from the 1861 agricultural census manuscript, out of which 116 linkages were made with the Abstract Indexes to Deeds compiled by the County Land Registry Office. The analysis reveals that, rather than any opposition between settlers and colonial administrators, the majority of settlers shared the colonial administrators’ masculine gender ideal for a settler-citizenry that embraced self-sufficient and respectable men of property. They completed their settlement duties, patented their property, and were considered “independent” of any other person’s will by virtue of their property. Credit was extended to farmers by mortgages, and, consistent with the findings of Gagan for Toronto Gore Township and of Clarke for Essex County, Enniskillen farmers entered hesitantly into formal mortgage agreements; when they did secure mortgages, they paid them off as quickly as possible. Most of the capital generated from mortgaging came from within through private lending; insti-

28 Lambton County Library, Wyoming, Ontario, General Abstract of the Collection & Assessment Rolls for the Western District for the year 1843, microfilm MS 577, Reel 1; Sutherland Bros., *County of Lambton Gazetteer, and General Business Directory for 1864–5* (Ingersoll: C. W., 1864), p. 61.

29 Canada, *Census of 1861*, Enniskillen mss.



**Figure 3** Farms in Enniskillen Township, 1861.

tutional lending occurred infrequently during the 1850s and 1860s. Only 20 settlers, or 17.2 per cent, used primary mortgaging to capitalize the purchase of new or additional property. Secondary mortgaging was used more extensively in 47 Enniskillen farm households, or 40.5 per cent. As Gagan and Clarke suggest, secondary financing was probably used to underwrite capital

improvement to the farm, to acquire modern machinery, to purchase live-stock, or to see a farmer through a period of personal hardship.<sup>30</sup>

Settlers who were unable to pay their settlement fees or to complete their settlement duties appealed to the Crown lands agent for an extension. In these situations neighbours signed sworn affidavits before the Justice of the Peace attesting to any improvements made on the property and to the settler's compliance with ruling-class masculine gender ideals despite difficult financial circumstances. On May 15, 1855, George Wright and John Gaus signed a written oath before George B. Johnston, J.P., that they were acquainted with the situation of lot 15, concession 11, Enniskillen Township. William Anderson had taken possession of the property more than two years earlier and had been an occupant ever since. Wright and Gaus swore that Anderson and his family had made improvements on the property — a log house had been constructed on the lot and five acres of land had already been cleared. The men also testified that William Anderson was of worthy character and a British subject. Although of “delicate pecuniary circumstances”, he was viewed by his neighbours as sober and industrious, and was attempting to create a home-stead for himself and his family.<sup>31</sup> Officially, however, the property had already been granted to another, a resident of Hamilton. The Crown Lands Office informed Anderson that he must abandon the property, but that he would be compensated for the improvements he had made on the land.<sup>32</sup> Settlers who complied with colonial ruling-class ideals were generally treated with leniency by the colonial administration. Thus the pragmatics of settler colonialism were more complex than a simple opposition between colonial officials and settlers.

Although settlers came to Enniskillen Township with the intent of establishing family farms, John Smith, in conducting the 1861 census enumeration, commented that the “oil mania” brought the greatest influx of population into the township. “It commenced in April last,” Smith remarked, “and has tended greatly to increase the inhabitants, and to put a fictitious value on land, many parcels of land that a few years ago were thought hardly worth the taxes are now held at high prices.” Smith referred to the prevalence of speculation in Enniskillen Township and defined “oil speculator” as “the occupation of a number of well dressed persons who deal in oil claims; hunting up claims and getting leases”.<sup>33</sup> The question of how land speculation was accomplished in Enniskillen Township, and how to identify land speculators, is integral to an understanding of the effects of colonial land-granting policies.

30 Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics*, pp. 271–286; David P. Gagan, “The Security of Land: Mortgaging in Toronto Gore Township, 1835–95”, in F. H. Armstrong, H. A. Stevenson, and J. D. Wilson, eds., *Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Ontario: Essays Presented to James J. Talman* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 135–153.

31 Enniskillen Township Papers, George Wright and John Gaus, May 15, 1855.

32 Enniskillen Township Papers.

33 Canada, *Census of 1861*, Enniskillen mss.

**“Oil Fever” and Land Speculation**

Throughout the early part of the 1860s, the land market in Enniskillen Township was exceedingly volatile. The daily press alluded to the activities of oil speculators on a regular basis, thereby pointing to the prevalence of the practice in the area. Newspaper correspondents typically presented speculators as dubious characters with a tendency to overindulge in alcohol. For instance, on February 1, 1861, the *Sarnia Observer* reported that, although the thermometer had been well below freezing for more than a week, “oil fever” raged on. Its effects, according to the *Observer*, were “not like those of other fevers; the patient does not require to be confined to bed”. On the contrary, “oil fever” patients might “camp out in some *chinkless* and unplastered log shanty, sleep in a corner on a bundle of wild hay or straw, wrapped in a horse-rug, and in clothing worn during the day, and which is, of course, well bespattered with mud, and redolent with the fumes of oil”. To wind up this catalogue of “enjoyments”, the *Observer* continued, they could “feast on unleavened cakes baked in the ashes, and pork ‘spitted’ in the smoke of a log fire ... the whole washed down by a decoction of strong tea, to which, mayhap, is occasionally added by way of *seasoning*, (if the patient be not a teetotaler, — and we guess there ain’t many of these among the ‘oil men’) a dose of old Bourbon or Monogabela”. The *Observer* cautioned that the benefit to the settlers of the township might not be as great as assumed at first glance and warned, “The speculation will have a tendency to draw their attention from the work of digging the surface, and reaping the reward in the shape of fine farms, good crops, and superior stock, for the *less certain* employment of finding oil in the earth’s bowels.”<sup>34</sup>

Oil fever was accompanied by a dramatic increase in the price of property alongside the oil-rich banks of Black Creek and Bear Creek. In March 1861 the *Sarnia Observer* reported that land was changing hands rapidly in Enniskillen Township and sold at anywhere from \$8 to \$1,000 dollars an acre, “according to its supposed propinquity to the oleaginous deposit”. That same month a special train was hired to allow land dealers from London to attend an auction of Crown and Clergy lands in Sarnia. Speculators were reportedly reaping rich profits by buying up traces of land and selling them out in lots at enormous advances.<sup>35</sup>

The local populace tended to view oil speculators with derision. In February 1861 John Duff, from neighbouring Plympton Township, penned a letter to the editor of the *Observer* in which he disparaged the fact that nine-tenths of the oil lands were now in the hands of “foreigners — fully-blown *Yankees*; men who have been attracted hither by a thirst for mammon, and who cared little about the progress or prosperity of the country”. Duff complained that European settlers born in Canada West, and the Scottish immigrants

34 *Sarnia Observer*, February 1, 1861.

35 *Sarnia Observer*, March 15 and 16, May 31, 1861.



among them, had “allowed to grow up in their midst an extensive foreign monopoly of the recent discoveries in oil”. He compared the speculation in oil land with the situation in the southern United States, where slave owners “look upon their colored victims merely as a source of profit, and as such only are the objects of concern”.<sup>36</sup>

Duff’s disdain for American speculators was not shared by all of his contemporaries, however. His letter prompted a response, also published in the *Sarnia Observer*, from “A. Thrifty”, who pointed to the inconsistency of blaming “Yankee” speculators for exhibiting the promptness and energy of action that Canadians and Scotchmen were denounced for failing to show. He rejected Duff’s argument and instead proposed that men of capital and possessing what he viewed as “rare and valuable qualities” should be encouraged to invest in the oil industry. “A. Thrifty” suggested that a “new” public opinion, along the lines of that taught in Belgium, Holland, and England, was needed. Men of capital were encouraged and protected in these countries, and whoever “develops the resources of a country, whatever his nation of origin, was a benefactor and not a robber”.<sup>37</sup>

As the newspaper articles disclosed, and as historians Leo Johnson and John Clarke write, we can simply assume *a priori* that land speculation took place in Upper Canada given the operation of *laissez-faire* capitalism.<sup>38</sup> A combination of homestead, male property right, and military bounty grants was intermeshed into colonial land policy in Upper Canada. In the absence of money the state used land in lieu of cash as a reward for service. Many who received land in this way viewed it not as the means to establish an agricultural life, but as capital to be accumulated and spent as needed. Paradoxically, while colonial administrators marginalized land speculators, land granting policies only succeeded in promoting this activity, particularly the provisions for Crown and Clergy reserves.

In the historical literature pertaining to land speculation in Upper Canada there has been considerable debate about how to identify land speculators. The scale-of-operations approach used by Gagan and Brunger and by Clarke in his early research considered arbitrarily selected holdings of 400 or 500 acres as indicative of speculation.<sup>39</sup> This approach neglects smaller-scale speculation, such as that which occurred in Enniskillen township during the oil boom. Widdis further criticizes these early studies for their reliance on patents to identify land speculators. This approach ignores other transactions on the property, including subsequent speculative activity after the original grantee relinquished control of the land. Subsequent studies by Shannon,

<sup>36</sup> *Sarnia Observer*, February 22, 1861.

<sup>37</sup> *Sarnia Observer*, March 22, 1861.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, “Land Policy, Population Growth and Social Structure”; Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics*, p. 296.

<sup>39</sup> Clarke, “The Role of Political Position and Family”, pp. 18–34; Brunger, “A Spatial Analysis”; Gagan, “Property and Interest”, pp. 63–70.

Widdis, and Clarke have revealed that motivation is a key element in identifying speculators. Shannon and Widdis identify three categories of land speculators based on motivation: land brokers who profited from a brokerage in land with a minimum of risk; investors who bought land in the hope of capital gain by “sitting tight”, holding onto property, and benefiting from the improvements made on neighbouring properties by other settlers; and “quick flippers” who held their property for only a short period of time, usually less than five years, and who selected land with the greatest potential for high and immediate profit.<sup>40</sup>

In his recent book entitled *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, John Clarke identifies land speculators using a two-pronged approach: a simple summation of the acreage held by each individual, and a reconstruction of the tenure status of each lot using the Abstract Index of Deeds for Essex County. Clarke concurs that scale is not the sole determinant of speculative activity, but he maintains that it is a useful determinant of power and economic influence. Equally important, Clarke suggests, were the number of transactions qualified by instruments through which property was obtained, namely patent, bargain and sale, indenture, gift, mortgage, and sheriff's deed.<sup>41</sup> This approach combines number of transactions with length of time in the market with total acreage, thereby permitting a detailed examination of the broad zone along the speculator/investor continuum. The nineteenth-century use of the term speculator, therefore, included not only the absentee landowner of agricultural land, but also the dealer in oil lots.

An approach similar to that used by Clarke, but retaining the categories of speculators identified by Shannon and Widdis, was used to study land speculation in Enniskillen Township. Every registered land transaction in Enniskillen Township was examined from 1835 to 1869 using the Abstract Index of Deeds, which were then linked with the Copy Books.<sup>42</sup> Individuals were classified as either land brokers, investors, or “quick flippers” according to the extent of their speculative activity measured by a summation of the acreage accumulated between 1835 and 1869, length of tenure, total number of transactions, and the location of the lots. A distinction was made between speculators taking advantage of colonial land policy who purchased or were granted their land by the Crown through the patent process, and those operating in the market economy. Individuals were identified as potential speculators if they held at least 400 acres of land or engaged in a minimum of three transactions using an instrument of conveyance, either a “bargain and sale” or a “deed” or an “agreement”, in addition to family exchanges of property. Although property did not actually change hands, a commercial transaction

40 Widdis, “Motivation and Scale”, pp. 338–351; Shannon, “Brokers, Land Bankers, and ‘Birds of Evil Omen’ ”.

41 Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics*, pp. 305–307.

42 At the height of the oil boom in the early 1860s property changed hands quickly with a handshake. Many of these transactions were never recorded and a number of disputed claims made their way to Chancery Court.

did occur when leases were signed for the development of oil properties. Hence leases and “agreements” were included when they were associated with oil resources.

In this methodology, motivation remains the key element in identifying speculators. Individuals who purchased or were granted land in Enniskillen Township early and had a long tenure had different motives from those who poured into the area at the height of the oil boom and held their investments for a short period of time. The scale of risk was different between 1835, when prices were low, and the 1860s, when prices went up and declined again according to the availability of and market for oil. Also, speculation in oil lands in the early 1860s was largely, although not exclusively, confined to a particular space. The “territory” upon which producing wells were sunk covered an area of about two and a half square miles and encompassed lots 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 on the first, second, and third concessions, where a thick deposit of oil had risen to the surface to form the “gum beds”, plus the “flats” on concession 10 around which the town of Petrolia was built.

This approach, as Table 1 indicates, yields a total of 108 individuals engaged in land speculation in Enniskillen Township between 1835 and 1869. The 44 “investors” were characterized by early entry into the land market and a long period of tenure. The majority of the investors, 84.1 per cent, secured property before the oil boom of the 1860s. Their activities were indicative of the “classical speculator” who obtained large, but poorly developed, acreage from the Crown. They did not show much discrimination as to where the property was located, and they were more likely to have obtained their property by patent than the “quick flippers” who arrived in Enniskillen Township at the height of the oil boom in the early 1860s. The investors tended to sit on their property until the 1860s, when they sold off part of all their property in the mania surrounding the oil boom.

Among the investors in Enniskillen Township were several prominent merchants and politicians who amassed a considerable amount of property throughout Upper Canada, including Malcolm Cameron, Sir Allan Napier MacNab, and Alexander Fraser. For this group of absentee landowners, their property in Enniskillen Township was an obvious investment and a deliberate business strategy. As Douglas McCalla writes, early merchants in Upper Canada took on many roles: “they were at once partners and independent businessmen; importers and exporters, the latter on others’ account as well as their own; wholesalers and retailers; transshippers at point of break-in-bulk; owners of mills and ships; dealers in land; creditors and financial intermediaries; and central figures in the province’s external and internal communications.”<sup>43</sup> These early investors acquired land as a kind of stock when the alternative was limited largely to Bank of Upper Canada shares.

43 Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784–1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 141–142. See also Clarke, “The Role of Political Position and Family”, pp. 18–34; Johnson, *Becoming Prominent*, pp. 37–60.

**Table 1 Land Dealers in Enniskillen Township, 1835–1869**

Name of speculator	Background	Acres assembled	Number of transactions	Number of patents	Acres patent	Time held (years)	Duration
<i>Land brokers</i>							
William Richardson	Oil Springs, agent	626	32			4	1865–69
<i>Investors</i>							
Adolphus Mahon	London, Middlesex	1,500	36	5	600	7	1854–61
Alex. Cameron	Toronto	1,000	19	3	300	12	1857–69*
Alex. Manning (& Nathaniel Dick)	Toronto	1,188 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>	14			4	1865–69*
Alexander Dixon	Toronto, Esq., sadler	500	14	3	500	20	1836–56*
Alexander Fraser (Hon.)	Charlottesburgh, Esq.	4,200	30			16	1835–51
Alexander Graham	Oil Springs or Janesville, Wis.?	863 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	20			10	1855–65
Allan N. MacNab (Sir)	Hamilton, Esq.	2,700	31			20	1835–55
Almond Buck	Hamilton, gentleman; Coburg	600	7			10	1845–55
Andrew Elliott	Cornwall, contractor, Esq.	5,250	103	15	2,900	8	1861–69*
Andrew Heron	Yorkville	1,000	12			19	1847–66
Angus Carmichael	Wyoming	1,756	55			7	1861–68
Angus P. McDonald	Hamilton, contractor	800	5			9	1856–65
Anquilla B. Mitchell	Enniskillen, yeoman	100	12			7	1861–69*
Asahel Haskin	Enniskillen, yeoman	400	15			13	1849–62
David Thompson	Port Dover	400	5			26	1835–61
Frederick Wright	Belleville, merchant	604	11			14	1851–65
George N. Ridley	Belleville, surgeon	600	7	3	600	11	1846–57
George S. McPherson	Enniskillen, yeoman	600	25	3	400	26	1839–65
George Stevenson	Sarnia	400	12			4	1865–69*
J. H. Fairbank	Oil Springs	404	15			4	1865–69*
James Henderson	Toronto	1,950	27	5	950	24	1843–67
James Harvey	Montreal	800	22			28	1838–66
James Holmes	Montreal, merchant	3,000	14			27	1838–65

**Table 1 (Continued)**

Name of speculator	Background	Acres assembled	Number of transactions	Number of patents	Acres patent	Time held (years)	Duration
James M. Williams	Hamilton, Esq.	1,800	41	1	200	12	1854–66
John B. Williams	Chatham, Esq.	1,000	13	3	400	10	1855–65
John Leys	Toronto, engineer	681 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	17			4	1865–69
John Spiers	Montreal, merchant	600	4			17	1838–55
John W. Sifton	Oil Springs	448 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>	23			10	1857–67
Malcolm Cameron (Hon.)	Toronto	4,700	123	2	400	27	1842–69
Michael Murphy	Enniskillen, yeoman	663	36	1	100	10	1858–68
Oliver W. Chamberlin	Enniskillen	351	14			4	1865–69*
Patrick Barclay	Enniskillen, yeoman	344 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	45			15	1853–68
Peter Carroll	Hamilton	1,325	44			12	1854–66
Philip VanKoughnet	Cornwall	1,600	13			20	1835–55
Robert Berrie	Inverness; London, England	600	13			10	1854–65
Robert King	Vaughn Township, yeoman	850	13			27	1836–63
Robert Stanton	Toronto	400	7			16	1840–56
Thomas C. Street	Stamford, Welland County, Esq.	1,600	31	1	100	18	1849–67
Thomas Forsyth	Sarnia	450	7			9	1856–65
Thomas Graham	Paris, France, Esq.	2,800	44			27	1838–65
Thomas M. Jones	Toronto, Esq.	2,800	38			20	1838–58
William Hutton	Belleville, Esq.	1,100	7			14	1843–57
William Little	Enniskillen (London), yeoman	1,190	22			11	1858–69
William Proudfoot	Toronto, Esq.	1,100	21			29	1838–67
Zacheus Burnham	Hamilton, gentleman	800	3			9	1838–47
<i>“Quick flippers”</i>							
Aaron Choate	Hamilton, gentleman	600	6			1	1837–38
Abel A. Adams	Erie, Pa., & Enniskillen	295	15			5	1860–65
Abigal (Alizah) W. Farrar	Boston, Mass.	317	5			5	1860–65
Abram Farewell	Oshawa	613	18			5	1864–69

**Table 1 (Continued)**

Name of speculator	Background	Acres assembled	Number of transactions	Number of patents	Acres patent	Time held (years)	Duration
Alexander Knapp	Chatham	400	6			3	1853–56
Alfred Boulton	Newmarket	525	11	2	300	3	1866–69*
Alonzo Farrar	Boston, Mass.	316 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	18			5	1860–65
Andrew J. Whipple	Oil Springs	608	24			4	1862–66
Benjamin Holmes	Montreal, Esq.	1,300	12			1	1844
Charles A. Sadler	Hamilton, Esq.	1,000	14			3	1856–59
Charles A. Weller	Peterborough	600	10			4	1861–66
Charles K. Scholfield	Toronto	500	12			5	1853–59
Charles N. Tripp	Hamilton	1,850	31	4	100	3	1853–56
Cosmore Bruce	Painsville, Ohio	60	4			1	1860
Donald McDonald (Hon.)	Toronto	400	40			4	1865–69
Edgar J. Jarvis	Toronto, gentleman	600	8	4	552	5	1861–66
Edward H. Buche	Sarnia, Esq., doctor	2,243	11	3		3	1860–63
Ephraim W. Bond	Springfield, Mass.	1,500	17			1	1865–66
Eugene S. Pike	Painsville, Ohio	200	20			5	1860–65
Frederick W. Watkins	Hamilton, merchant	947	21			6	1860–66
George L. Thayer	Boston, Mass.	220	20			5	1860–65
George Lowe Reid	Hamilton	1,978	28			8	1861–69
Henry Benjamin	London	265	9			2	1865–67
Henry Tripp	Petersburg, Va., gentleman	2,798	7			5	1855–60
Hiram Cook	Hamilton, lumber merchant	780	9			4	1856–60
Isaac Buchanan	Toronto, merchant	1,500	15	6	1,200	1	1835–36
James Metcalfe	York	3,884	90	9	1,137	8	1861–69
James N. Scatcherd	Buffalo, N.Y., attorney	195	14			5	1860–65
Jesse H. Morley	Cleveland, Ohio	1,300	13			4	1861–65
John Brown	Hamilton, merchant	400	8			4	1865–69
John C. Bullett	Philadelphia, Pa.	600	12			1	1865–66
John Galt	Colborne, Esq.	1,100	6	6	1,100	1	1838

**Table 1 (Continued)**

Name of speculator	Background	Acres assembled	Number of transactions	Number of patents	Acres patent	Time held (years)	Duration
John Kemp	Enniskillen	133	21			4	1865–69
John L. Morris	Perth, gentleman	600	5			4	1865–69*
John Macaulay	Kingston, Esq.	800	4			1	1836–37
Joseph Horrocks	Toronto, gentleman	600	17	2	400	5	1861–66
Joseph Price	Hamilton	2,209	37			3	1866–69
Joshua Adams	Sarnia, attorney	920	20			3	1866–69
Leonard Stevenson	Enniskillen	125	17			2	1865–67
Melville Parker	Oil Springs	300	12			1	1866–67
Micajah L. Adam	Joliet, Illinois	200	11			1	1865
Michael Shoemaker	Jackson, Missouri	220	17			3	1866–69
Nathaniel Davies	York, brewer	1,100	20			5	1852–59
Nicol Kingsmill	Toronto, barrister	380	10			4	1865–69
Oliver F. Farrar	Boston, Mass.	283 $\frac{1}{2}$	12			5	1860–65
Peter Taylor	Moore Township	217	33			4	1865–69*
Philip Ham	Belleville, merchant	2,400	23			3	1836–39
Robert Tindall	Toronto, yeoman	877	18			7	1854–61
Robert Widdis	Oil Springs, carpenter	167	12			1	1868–69
Stephen G. Lason	Pontiac, Michigan	141 $\frac{3}{5}$	9			1	1865–66
Stephen M. Jarvis	Toronto, Esq.	174	8			1	1865–66
Thomas A. Staynor	Quebec City; Esq.; Toronto	2,000	3			1	1839
Thomas D. Ledyard	Toronto, barrister	2,099	47			5	1862–67
Thomas Fatzinger	Seneca County, N.Y.	433 $\frac{1}{3}$	36			1	1865–66
Timothy B. Pardee	Sarnia	2,256 $\frac{2}{3}$	30	3	400	2	1864–66
Tristan Bickle	Hamilton	900	12			1	1865
Urbain Thibandeu	Quebec City, gentleman	533 $\frac{1}{3}$	14			1	1863–64
Walter A. Dickson	Guelph, gentleman	600	31	2	300	8	1861–69

**Table 1 (Concluded)**

Name of speculator	Background	Acres assembled	Number of transactions	Number of patents	Acres patent	Time held (years)	Duration
William Darling	Montreal	300	9			1	1865
William E. Sanborn	Erie, Pa., gentleman; Port Huron	325	27	1	300	2	1860–62
William Kelly	Erie, Pa.	1,560 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	63			4	1860–64
William Kemp	Plympton, yeoman	250	18			5	1860–65
William Richardson	Oil Springs, agent	626	32			4	1865–69
William Stuart	Stormont, yeoman	600	3			1	1838
Wm. Richardson	Enniskillen	560	35			4	1865–69
William T. Cooke	Chicago, Illinois; Petrolia	100	12			1	1866

\* Denotes individuals with land dealings after 1869.

Source: Archives of Ontario, Township Records, Enniskillen Township, Abstract Index of Deeds.



The land dealings of Malcolm Cameron in Enniskillen Township were typical of the investor described by McCalla. The son of Presbyterian Scots, Cameron spent his early years in Lanark County where he entered into business as a general merchant. In 1835 he established a general store at Port Sarnia, and two years later he moved there himself. At Port Sarnia, Cameron set up lumber and flour mills and built ships to transport goods along the Great Lakes. In 1847 he was a contractor in the building of the Great Western Railway. He also acquired 100 acres of what is now downtown Sarnia and subdivided the land into lots, some of which he sold in the 1840s, and later at a large auction in April 1857. He ran as a moderate Reformer for Lanark County in 1836. In 1842 he was appointed Inspector of Revenue under the Baldwin-La Fontaine ministry, and in 1848 he became assistant Commissioner of Public Works under the second La Fontaine-Baldwin ministry.<sup>44</sup> Over a period of 27 years between 1842 and 1867, Cameron accumulated 4,700 acres scattered indiscriminately throughout Enniskillen Township. He engaged in a total of 73 transactions, sometimes mortgaging part of his holdings, probably to raise capital to finance his other business dealings. He left his Enniskillen properties undeveloped or underdeveloped and operated as a manager, holding onto his land for resale at a capital gain.

The speculative and other business activities of James Miller Williams in Enniskillen Township were also characteristic of the investor. In August 1858 Williams struck a flowing well on lot 16, concession 2, after digging approximately 15 metres into the clay loam. Williams was born in Camden, New Jersey, in 1818 and as a young man was apprenticed to a local carriage maker. He moved to London, Canada West, in 1840, where he entered into partnership with Marcus Holmes to manufacture carriages. In the late 1840s William moved to Hamilton, where in partnership with Henry G. Cooper he formed the Hamilton Coach Factory.<sup>45</sup> On February 3, 1856, Williams, in partnership with Hamilton contractors Angus P. Macdonald and George H. Harris, Charles Anderson Sadlier, also from Hamilton, and Woodstock contractor John B. VanVoorhies, purchased 600 acres on lot 18, concession 1, and lots 16 and 17, concession 2, from the financially distressed Charles Nelson Tripp. On December 1, 1858, Williams acquired 600 acres on lot 18, concession 1, and lots 16 and 17, concession 2, part of the “gum beds”, by indenture of bargain and sale from Charles Sadlier, thus beginning his 12-year career as an investor and oil speculator.

At first Williams refined oil on his property in Enniskillen Township. According to the *Sarnia Observer*, the illuminating oil produced at Williams’s

44 Johnson, *Becoming Prominent*, pp. 179–180; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 10 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 124–129.

45 T. M. Bailey, ed., *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography*, vol. 1 (Hamilton: Dictionary of Hamilton Biography, 1981); *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 11 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 929–930.

refinery was of a “superior quality”. Its properties were reportedly so great that an ordinary-sized lamp could provide the light of six or eight candles. The illuminating oil sold for \$1.50 a gallon.<sup>46</sup> Williams soon transferred his refining business to Hamilton, and in 1859 he was operating a refinery in that city under the name of J. M. Williams and Co. In 1860 Williams opened an office at 18 MacNab Street North called the Canadian Oil Company, and a plant for refining oil was built at the foot of Wentworth Street, near the Great Western Railway line. Two years later, the Canadian Coal Oil Company employed 16 men and turned out about 120 barrels of illuminating and machine oil per week. All of the crude was procured from the Enniskillen oil fields.<sup>47</sup> Discovery of a flowing well, plus the construction of a refinery, encouraged land speculation in Enniskillen Township and provided an impetus for the development of the local oil industry.

Williams, as Table 2 explains, accumulated 1,400 acres in Enniskillen Township over a three-year period between December 1858 and June 1861, most of it in the oil territory on concessions 1 and 2. He also acquired a few lots scattered throughout Enniskillen Township, possibly with the intent of selling them for a profit should the oil deposits be found to cover a wider territory. Williams, in partnership with Messrs. Anthony and Bush, subdivided his property on lots 16 and 18, concession 1, and lots 16 and 17, concession 2, and sold or leased these smaller lots to developers to raise capital.<sup>48</sup> Over the 12 years between 1854 and 1866, Williams was involved in 29 transactions, exclusive of his extensive leasing arrangements on the subdivided lots. Like many nineteenth-century businessmen, Williams had diverse interests. He gradually passed control of the Canadian Oil Company to his son, Charles Joseph, and turned his attention to the manufacture of tin ware.

Andrew Elliott, a contractor from Cornwall, Upper Canada, was the largest landowner in Enniskillen Township during the early 1860s. He amassed just over 5,929 acres between 1861 and 1869. In the spring of 1861, Elliott was approached by a consortium of oil developers to provide the planks for a road between Oil Springs and the Great Western Railway line at Wyoming. An obstacle to the development of the local oil industry was the lack of a suitable road to transport crude and refined oil from Oil Springs to the railway line. Between 1858 and July 13, 1861, only 5,529 barrels of oil were shipped by the Great Western Railway. During the winter months oil was more easily transported by sleigh, but in summer a team of oxen could haul only two barrels of oil using a flat-bottomed “stone-boat” along the mud road known locally as “the canal”. Teams waded through mud up to their

46 *Sarnia Observer*, Decemer 30, 1858.

47 *Hamilton City Directory, 1862–63* (1862), p. 16.

48 See AO, Enniskillen Abstract Index A, 1861, 1955, Sub-division for Williams, Anthony and Bush’s Plan, microfilm copy. The subdivision covered 400 acres on lots 16 and 18, concession 1, and lots 16 and 17, concession 2.

**Table 2 James M. Williams, Land Transactions**

Concession	Lot	Instrument	Date	Grantor	Grantee	Quantity	Price
1	18	B&S <sup>1</sup>	October 11, 1854	John Prince	James M. Williams	200	£200
1	18	B&S	December 1, 1858	Charles Sadlier	James M. Williams	200	£1,000
2	16	B&S	December 1, 1858	Charles Sadlier	James M. Williams	200	£1,000
2	17	B&S	December 1, 1858	Charles Sadlier	James M. Williams	all	£1,000
1	18	B&S	September 19, 1859	Samuel W. Hawes	James M. Williams	5 (rights to drill)	\$8,660
1	18	B&S	February 15, 1860	James M. Williams	John Fisher	2/3 of 5 acres	\$2,000
2	16	B&S	February 15, 1860	James M. Williams	John Fisher <i>et al.</i>	2/3 5 acres	\$2,000
2	16	B&S	January 14, 1861	James M. Williams	Canadian Oil Co.	part 5 acres	\$2,000
1	18	B&S	April 20, 1861	Angus P. McDonald	James M. Williams	200	£100
2	16	B&S	April 20, 1861	Angus P. McDonald	James M. Williams	200	£100
2	17	B&S	April 20, 1861	Angus P. McDonald	James M. Williams	200	
1	18	B&S	May 3, 1861	James M. Williams	William Anthony	1/2 200 acres	\$20,000
2	16	B&S	May 3, 1861	James M. Williams	William Anthony		\$20,000
2	17	B&S	May 3, 1861	James M. Williams	William Anthony	2/3 200 acres	
1	16	Patent	June 5, 1861	Crown	James M. Williams	200	
1	18	B&S	June 14, 1861	James M. Williams	Canadian Oil Co.	part 5 acres	\$2,000
1	16	Plan	September 4, 1861	Samuel Peters, P.L.S.		200	
2	16	Plan	September 11, 1861	Oil Springs Plan no. 2			
2	17	Plan	September 11, 1861	Samuel Peters, P.L.S.			
1	18	Plan	September 26, 1861	Samuel Peters, P.L.S.			
2	16	Sispend	November 30, 1861	James Carroll	James M. Williams	all	
2	17	Sispend	November 30, 1861	James Carroll	James M. Williams	all	
2	16	Part. Deed	December 13, 1861	William Anthony	James M. Williams	all	
1	18	Agreement	December 14, 1861	William Anthony	James M. Williams	all	Partition lands
2	17	B&S	December 14, 1861	James M. Williams	William Anthony		
1	16	Agreement	January 13, 1862	James M. Williams	Thomas H. McLean	2/3 200 acres	\$30
2	16	Agreement	January 13, 1863	James M. Williams	Thomas H. McLean	all	

**Table 2 (Concluded)**

Concession	Lot	Instrument	Date	Grantor	Grantee	Quantity	Price
1	16	B&S	February 24, 1863	James M. Williams	Urban Thibandeau	200	\$13,305
2	16	B&S	February 24, 1863	James M. Williams	Urban Thibandeau	part	\$13,305
1	16	Mort.	March 13, 1863	Urban Thibandeau	James M. Williams	200	
1	18	Mort.	March 13, 1863	Urban Thibandeau	James M. Williams		\$5,655 (discharge)
2	16	Mort.	March 13, 1863	Urban Thibandeau	James M. Williams	part	\$5,655 (discharge)
1	16	Assignment	May 2, 1863	James M. Williams	Calvin McQuestion	2/3 200 acres	
2	16	Assignment	May 2, 1863	James M. Williams	Calvin McQuestion	all	
1	18	Agreement	January 13, 1865	James M. Williams	Thomas H. McLean	part	\$30 / acre
1	18	B&S	February 24, 1865	James M. Williams	Urban Thibandeau	443 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	\$13,305
1	18	B&S	March 17, 1865	Henry B. Williams	James M. Williams	200	5 sch.
7	5	Agreement	December 19, 1865	John Groom	James M. Williams	all 200	to sell
10	23	Agreement	December 19, 1865	James Filman	James M. Williams	200	\$2,400
10	23	B&S	March 26, 1866	James Filman	James M. Williams	200	
11	8	B&S	April 3, 1866	David Thompson	James M. Williams	E 1/2 100 acres	\$3,000
10	23	B&S	April 16, 1866	James M. Williams	Robert Milron	W 1/2 100 acres	\$2,600
10	23	B&S	April 24, 1866	James M. Williams	George Roach	E 1/2 100 acres	\$3,500
11	8	B&S	October 31, 1866	James M. Williams	John Topping	E 1/2 100 acres	\$5,500
7	5	Release	November 9, 1866	James M. Williams	John Groom	all 200	\$3,920

1 Bargain and sale.

Source: Archives of Ontario, Township Records, Enniskillen Abstract Index A, transactions of James M. Williams.

bellies, making the construction of a plank road absolutely necessary if the local oil industry was to succeed.<sup>49</sup>

The construction of the plank road was completed in the spring of 1862 in keeping with the agreement Elliott had made with the oil developers. Elliott, however, was not paid the agreed-upon price of \$20,000; he received only \$13,000. In lieu of payment of the \$7,000 owed, he was given tolls for three years.<sup>50</sup> As a result, Elliott fell behind in the settlement payments on his land holdings in Enniskillen Township. In January 1865 he asked the Honourable George Brown to use his influence to secure an extension on the payments for his Enniskillen properties from Alexander Campbell, the Commissioner of Crown Lands.<sup>51</sup> Upon producing an affidavit signed by Reeve George McPherson, Elliott was granted an extension of six months. McPherson's affidavit provided details of the improvements made by Elliott to lots 14, 15, and 16 on concessions 6 and 7. The improvements included the construction of a sawmill worth \$4,000, six dwelling houses, three stables, one barn and other outbuildings, one blacksmith shop, approximately 20 acres cleared, an interest in the Wyoming and Enniskillen Plank Road running through the centre of the properties, and the sinking of two oil wells. Land speculation, as Elliott's activities reveal, did not merely imply "sitting on the land". It also involved settlement and improvement, thus revealing that the distinction between investor and speculator was not clear-cut, but rather a broad zone, as Clarke suggests.<sup>52</sup> Elliott was obviously a speculator who was also engaged as a producer in the development of his properties. As Table 3 further discloses, he also mortgaged some of his lands as part of a private business of raising capital to invest in oil production and the sawmill, in addition to buying and selling land to finance his business endeavours.

Only one land broker could be confirmed from the analysis of the land registry records, although an examination of commercial and business directories suggest that there were more.<sup>53</sup> William Richardson operated as an oil agent for oil land dealers in the 1860s, managing leases and sales of oil lots, much like a contemporary broker in stocks and bonds.

The majority of the land speculators identified from the analysis of land registry records, 58.3 per cent (n = 63), can be characterized as "quick flip-

49 *Globe*, September 2, 1871.

50 *Globe*, April 25, 1865.

51 Enniskillen Township Papers, Andrew Elliott to George Brown, April 7, 1865; George Brown to Alexander Campbell, January 23, 1865; Memorandum from A. Campbell, April 26, 1865; George S. McPherson to Andrew Elliott, April 19 and 22, 1865. On June 30, 1865, the *Sarnia Observer* suggested that collusion had occurred between the subordinates of the Crown Lands Department and the purchasers. By an arrangement between 20 or 30 land speculators, each was allowed to bid without competition. The *Observer* charged that prominent friends of George Brown were involved in the transaction. See *Sarnia Observer*, June 30, 1865.

52 Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics*, pp. 301–302.

53 McEvoy & Co., *Gazetteer and Directory of the Counties of Kent, Lambton, and Essex, 1866–7* (Toronto, 1866), p. 269.

**Table 3 Andrew Elliott, Land Transactions**

Concession	Lot	Instrument	Date	Grantor	Grantee	Quantity	Price
11	7	Ass't. M	May 25, 1860	Malcolm Cameron	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	\$2,000
11	8	Ass't. M	May 25, 1860	Malcolm Cameron	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$2,000
11	3	Ass't. M	May 28, 1860	Malcolm Cameron	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	discharge
2	23	B&S	December 1, 1860	Henrietta Sampson	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$600
2	23	Mort.	December 1, 1860	Andrew Elliott	Henrietta Simpson	W 1/2 100 acres	\$450
9	7	Mort.	December 1860	Andrew Elliott	Allen Burton	W 1/2 100 acres	\$1,479
9	7	B&S	December 24, 1860	Allen Burton	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$1,500
2	5	B&S	January 2, 1861	Thomas Graham	Andrew Elliott	200	£1,050
2	5	Mort.	January 2, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Thomas Graham	200	£787.10.1
3	7	B&S	January 2, 1861	Thomas Graham	Andrew Elliott	all 200	£1,050
3	7	Mort.	January 2, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Thomas Graham	all 200	£187.10.0
							other land
3	9	B&S	January 2, 1861	Thomas Graham	Andrew Elliott	200	£1,050
3	9	Mort.	January 2, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Thomas Graham	200	£787.10.0
8	3	B&S	January 31, 1861	Hugh Buchanan	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$300
2	12	B&S	February 6, 1861	John Dobbyn	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$920
3	11	Mort.	March 22, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Thomas Graham	E 1/2 100 acres	£150
1	25	B&S	March 26, 1861	William Mattice	Andrew Elliott	all 200	\$500
3	11	B&S	April 4, 1861	Thomas Graham	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	
13	21	B&S	April 8, 1861	Fred'k. Watkins	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	\$581
1	3	B&S	April 14, 1861	Edward G. Penny	Andrew Elliott	200	\$2,272
1	3	Mort.	April 30, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Edward Penny	200	\$2,079
2	7	Mort.	April 30, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Edward Penny	W pt. 3 acres	Discharge
11	3	Ass't. M	June 4, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Malcolm Cameron	E 1/2 100 acres	\$2,000
11	7	Ass't. M	June 4, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Malcolm Cameron	E 1/2 100 acres	\$2,000
11	8	Ass't. M	June 4, 1861	Andrew Elliott	Malcolm Cameron	W 1/2 100 acres	\$2,000
1	11	Patent	August 2, 1861	Crown	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	
7	22	Patent	August 2, 1861	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	
4	19	Patent	August 3, 1861	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	

**Table 3 (Continued)**

Concession	Lot	Instrument	Date	Grantor	Grantee	Quantity	Price
6	25	Patent	August 3, 1861	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	
7	16	Patent	August 3, 1861	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	
3	27	Final order	November 27, 1861	Elizabeth Tait	Andrew Elliott	200	
2	13	B&S	January 27, 1862	Robert Slead	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 & E 1/2 of W 1/2	\$2,000
1	3	Agreement	March 26, 1862	Andrew Elliott	Chas. Mackenzie	all	
1	25	Agreement	March 26, 1862	Andrew Elliott	Chas. Mackenzie	200	
3	27	Agreement	March 26, 1862	Andrew Elliott	Chas. Mackenzie	all 200	\$15 per acre
7	22	B&S	April 15, 1862	Andrew Elliott	Donald C. Thomson	E 1/2 100 acres	\$863.75
3	15	B&S	June 3, 1862	Thomas J. Devore	Andrew Elliott	und 1/2 100 acres	\$2,350
3	15	B&S	June 30, 1862	William Kelly	Andrew Elliott	und 1/2 100 acres	\$2,500
2	20	Mort.	November 21, 1862	William Kelly	Andrew Elliott	1/4 50 acres	\$1,043.55
2	20	Quit claim	August 6, 1863	William Kelly	Andrew Elliott	all 200	\$1
2	20	Quit claim	January 29, 1864	Mary M. Caldwell	Andrew Elliott	?	\$1
7	16	Mort.	May 5, 1864	Andrew Elliott	George N. Carter	200	\$3,658
							other land
13	21	Mort.	May 5, 1864	Andrew Elliott	George H. Carter	E 1/2 100 acres	\$3,658
2	20	Mort.	May 7, 1864	Andrew Elliott	Thomas J. Devore	und 1/4 of W 1/2	\$1,209.27
7	22	Mort.	May 7, 1864	Andrew Elliott	Thomas J. Devore	W 1/2 100 acres	\$1,209.27
3	27	Mort.	September 15, 1864	Andrew Elliott	Eliz. & Marg't. Tait	200	\$1,510
2	12	B&S	March 20, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Robert T. Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$2,000
1	11	B&S	March 30, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Robert T. Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	\$7,000
2	13	B&S	March 30, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Robert T. Elliott	E 1/2 & E 1/2 of W 1/2	\$7,000
3	11	B&S	March 30, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Rob't. T. Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	\$7,000
8	3	B&S	March 30, 1865	Andrew Elliott	S. & Fl. Plank Rd.	2 acres pt. W 1/2	\$1
4	19	B&S	April 15, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Donald C. Thomson	E 1/2 100 acres	\$863.75
1	4	Agreement	April 18, 1865	Wm. A. Rumsay	Andrew Elliott	200	\$3,000
3	15	Mort.	May 23, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Richard Arnold	all	\$436 discharge
3	15	B&S	May 29, 1865	Andrew Elliott	S. & Fl. Plank Rd.	part	\$1
3	15	Mort.	May 30, 1865	Andrew Elliott	James A. Wilkinson	200	\$600

**Table 3 (Continued)**

Concession	Lot	Instrument	Date	Grantor	Grantee	Quantity	Price
2	20	Conveyance	July 5, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Charles Heron	all 200	5 shillings
3	15	B&S	September 9, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Robert T. Elliott	Lot 1 F 14	\$250
2	20	Quit claim	December 5, 1865	Charles Heron	Andrew Elliott	Parts	\$200
2	23	B&S	December 8, 1865	Andrew Elliott	Thomas C. Chisholm	W 1/2 100 acres	
11	12	Quit claim	December 14, 1865	Mary Radenbury	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	\$200
9	14	Deed	January 28, 1866	Andrew Elliott	Hector Cameron	17 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> acres of E 1/2	
6	14	Patent	January 30, 1866	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	
6	15	Patent	January 30, 1866	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	\$4,520
6	16	Patent	January 30, 1866	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	
7	14	Patent	January 30, 1866	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	\$4,520
7	15	Patent	January 30, 1866	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	\$4,520
1	3	Mort.	March 3, 1866	Andrew Elliott	Nicol Kingsmill	200	\$3,000
1	23	Patent	March 9, 1866	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	\$600
7	15	B&S	March 9, 1866	Andrew Elliott	A. J. Whipple	200	\$8,000
3	15	D of M	April 4, 1866	David Thompson	Andrew Elliott	200	
2	12	B&S	April 25, 1866	Richard Bell	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$4,000
3	15	D of M	May 1866	Richard Arnold	Andrew Elliott	200	
12	21	B&S	May 4, 1866	James Patterson	Andrew Elliott	W 1/4 50 acres	\$2,500
11	12	Sispendus	May 11, 1866	Mary Radenbury	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	
12	21	Mort.	May 16, 1866	Andrew Elliott	James Patterson	W 1/4 50 acres	\$2,500
11	12	B&S	May 30, 1866	Mary Radenbury	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	\$2,000
11	12	B&S	August 1866	Rob't. Tait Elliott	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	\$25,000
3	27	Patent	August 2, 1866	Crown	Andrew Elliott	200	
2	23	D of M	August 12, 1866	W. C. Samson	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	Discharge
9	9	B&S	August 13, 1866	Rob't. Tait Elliott	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$20,000
9	9	Mort.	September 5, 1866	Andrew Elliott	James Patterson	W 1/2 100 acres	\$2,680.76 other land
12	21	Mort.	September 5, 1866	Andrew Elliott	James Patterson	W 1/4 50 acres	\$2,680.76
9	14	Sispendus	September 25, 1866	Elliott & McPherson	Livingstone & Chadwick	E 1/2 100 acres	
9	14	Sispendus	October 11, 1866	Ananias Smith	Elliott & Ross	E 1/2 100 acres	



**Table 3 (Concluded)**

Concession	Lot	Instrument	Date	Grantor	Grantee	Quantity	Price
5	6	Deed	October 31, 1866	Andrew Elliott	Joseph Elliott	200	\$10
4	19	B&S	November 7, 1866	Andrew Elliott	Mart Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	\$6,000
9	7	D of M	November 24, 1866	Allen Burton	Andrew Elliott	W 1/2 100 acres	
1	3	Mort.	November 28, 1866	Andrew Elliott	Nicol Kingsmill	200	\$3,000
9	14	Dismissal	December 5, 1866	Court of Chancery	Smith vs. Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	
8	3	Mort.	January 16, 1867	Andrew Elliott	Colonial Securities Co.	W 1/2 100 acres	\$800
7	14	Mort.	January 31, 1867	Andrew Elliott	McGarvey & Thompson	200	\$825
9	14	Sispendus	February 22, 1867	Thos. Robinson	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	
9	14	Deed	March 28, 1867	Thos. Livingstone	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	5 shillings
9	14	Deed	March 29, 1867	Andrew Elliott	T. C. Livingstone	15 acres of E 1/2	\$2,000
11	12	Sispendus	May 23, 1867	Mary Radenhurst	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	
11	12	Dismissal	June 13, 1867	Mary Radenhurst	Andrew Elliott	E 1/2 100 acres	
9	7	Mort.	July 23, 1867	Andrew Elliott	James Austin	W 1/2 100 acres	\$600
6	14	Mort.	November 6, 1867	Andrew Elliott	James Patterson	W 1/2 100 acres	5 shillings
6	25	Mort.	February 14, 1868	Andrew Elliott	Nicol Kingsmill	E 1/2 100 acres	\$3,000
1	6	Agreement	March 13, 1868	Alex. Manning	Andrew Elliott	all	
9	14	Deed	October 14, 1869	Andrew Elliott	Walter M. Ross	60 acres of E 1/2 & 1/2 acre of E 1/2 & mort. prem.	

Source: Archives of Ontario, Township Papers, Enniskillen Abstract Index A, transactions of Andrew Elliott.

**Table 4 Charles Nelson Tripp, Land Transactions**

Concession	Lot	Instrument	Date	Grantor	Grantee	Quantity	Price
2	17	B&S <sup>1</sup>	February 12, 1853	Thomas Wait	Charles N. Tripp	E 1/2 100 acres	£250 Can.
11	13	B&S	April 18, 1853	Luther Dunn	Charles N. Tripp	Pt 50 acres	£250 Can.
2	16	B&S	May 19, 1853	Augustus Jones	Charles N. Tripp	200 acres	£6
2	16	B&S	June 2, 1853	Robert Graham	Charles N. Tripp	200 acres	£112.10.0
2	16	Mort	June 2, 1853	Charles N. Tripp	Robert Graham	200 acres	£618.10.0
3	17	B&S	October 15, 1853	Alexander McNab	Charles N. Tripp	E 1/2 100 acres	£100
2	21	B&S	December 6, 1853	Charles Hendershot	Charles N. Tripp	W 1/2 100 acres	£50
7	13	B&S	December 17, 1853	William Wage	Charles N. Tripp	E 1/2 100 acres	£75
9	13	B&S	December 23, 1853	Thomas Graham	Charles N. Tripp	N 1/2 100 acres	£206.05.0
1	18	B&S	January 12, 1854	Joseph Raymond	Charles N. Tripp	200 acres	£250 Can.
3	17	B&S	April 21, 1854	John Rouse	Charles N. Tripp	W 1/2 100 acres	£125
3	17	Mort.	April 21, 1854	Charles N. Tripp	John Rouse	W 1/2 100 acres	£50 discharge
4	11	Patent	June 21, 1854	Crown	Charles N. Tripp	E 1/2 100 acres	
4	11	B&S	August 23, 1854	Charles N. Tripp	Andrew Stevens	E 1/2 100 acres	£58.10.0
2	17	B&S	October 3, 1854	James Beam	Charles N. Tripp	W 1/2 100 acres	£200
7	13	Deed	February 2, 1855	Charles N. Tripp	Henry Tripp	E 1/2 100 acres	10 shillings
2	21	Deed	February 22, 1855	Charles N. Tripp	Henry Tripp	W 1/2 100 acres	10 shillings
1	19	B&S	June 28, 1855	Gavin Nicolson	Charles N. Tripp	200 acres	£250 Can.
1	19	Mort.	June 28, 1855	Charles N. Tripp	Oliver T. Maclem	200 acres	£150 Can.
3	17	B&S	September 8, 1855	Charles N. Tripp	Henry Tripp	200 acres	£400

**Table 4 (Concluded)**

Concession	Lot	Instrument	Date	Grantor	Grantee	Quantity	Price
10	13	Mort.	September 14, 1855	Charles N. Tripp	A. P. McDonald	200 acres	£300
2	16	Mort.	October 9, 1855	Charles N. Tripp	Edward McGivern	200 acres	£300
2	17	Mort.	October 9, 1855	Charles N. Tripp	Edward McGivern	200 acres	£300
1	18	B&S	February 22, 1856	Charles N. Tripp	Angus P. McDonald	200 acres	\$2,000
2	17	B&S	February 22, 1856	Charles N. Tripp	Angus P. McDonald	200 acres	n.a.
1	18	B&S	February 22, 1856	Charles N. Tripp	Angus P. McDonald	200 acres	\$2,000
1	19	B&S	February 29, 1856	Charles N. Tripp	Theophilus Mack	S 1/2 100 acres	£125
9	13	B&S	March 4, 1856	Charles N. Tripp	Hiram Cook	N 1/2 100 acres	£500
10	13	B&S	March 4, 1856	Charles N. Tripp	Hiram Cook	S 190 acres	£1,500
11	13	B&S	March 4, 1856	Charles N. Tripp	Hiram Cook	NE 40 acres of SE 1/4	£1,500
2	16	B&S	October 22, 1856	Charles N. Tripp	Angus P. McDonald	200 acres	£2,000
1	18	Deed Poll <sup>2</sup>	June 22, 1857	Sheriff of Lambton	Charles Sadlier	200 acres	£170

1 Bargain and Sale.

2 Tripp's land seized and sold to the highest bidder.

Source: Archives of Ontario, Township Records, Enniskillen Abstract Index A, transactions of Charles N. Tripp.

pers". They accumulated and disposed of oil lands quickly because of fluctuations in the demand for refined illuminating and lubricating oils on the market and uncertainty as to the extent of crude resources. The tendency towards quick turnover of oil properties in Enniskillen Township started early in the development of the oil industry, beginning with the speculative activities of the Tripp brothers in the 1850s. Charles Tripp saw the potential of manufacturing asphalt from oil gum, and on February 12, 1853, he acquired lot 17, concession 2, from Thomas Wait, an Illinois farmer, by an indenture of bargain and sale. Over the next several months, as Table 4 reveals, Charles Tripp acquired neighbouring lots on what were known locally as the "gum beds", including lot 18, concession 1, lots 16 and 21, concession 2, and lot 17, concession 3, all by indentures of bargain and sale. The extent of the Enniskillen oil field was unknown at the time. Between 1853 and 1856, Charles Tripp amassed 1,450 acres in Enniskillen Township in 23 transactions, and his brother Henry acquired just under 2,733 acres and carried out 12 transactions over a five-year period between 1850 and 1860. While they engaged in productive activity, mining for oil and manufacturing asphalt, the Tripp brothers also turned over some of their properties to raise capital.

Early in 1856 Charles Tripp began selling off his property in Enniskillen Township. In November he left the province, eventually making his way to the United States. He abandoned his wife, and in 1862 she asked the Chancery Court to replace Henry Tripp and Richard Martin as trustees of her properties in Enniskillen Township. Vice-Chancellor Spragge used the discretionary right of the court to appoint new trustees, but the court did not authorize her to take control of the properties herself.<sup>54</sup> In November 1866 the *Sarnia Observer* reported that Charles Nelson Tripp had died in New Orleans on September 30 of "congestion of the brain".<sup>55</sup> Charles Tripp selected land in Enniskillen Township with the greatest potential for high and immediate profit, choosing sites that were oil rich in a small area in the hope of realizing a quick profit. In June 1860 Henry Tripp, who was also heavily in debt, gave up his claim to his properties in Enniskillen Township by "quit claim". Henry Tripp borrowed from Edward H. Buche, a Sarnia physician and oil speculator, but foreclosure on the properties was imminent.

The strategy of purchasing property and selling or leasing plots to oil developers was used by the "quick flippers". For instance, on May 28, 1861, George B. Cook and J. B. Bradley, both from Pennsylvania, leased 25 lots from William E. Sanborn, also an American from Erie, Pennsylvania, on the

54 Lori Chambers, *Married Women's Property Law in Victorian Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 66–67. The court did not authorize Mrs. Tripp to take control of the estate herself; because divorce was unavailable to Mrs. Tripp, there was always the possibility that her husband would return and enforce his marital rights. Vice-Chancellor Spragge ordered that new trustees be appointed to serve the interests of Mrs. Tripp and that she be paid one-half the rents and profits from the estate, the other half to be paid into the court in trust for her husband.

55 *Sarnia Observer*, November 2, 1866.

west half of lot 18, concession 2, for a period of 99 years. Under the terms of their agreement, Cook and Bradley promised, within a period of eight months, to commence sinking a well or wells on the lot and to work them with “due diligence and skill” and, if a “good and successful well” was attained, “to pump and work the same with like due diligence and skill”, yielding and paying to Sanborn one-third of the oil obtained from the premises, this to be delivered within 20 days. It was agreed that, if Cook and Bradley failed to obtain a successful well after “fair trial”, they would have the privilege of abandoning the premises. Also, if they failed to obtain a successful well after one year, Sanborn would have the right to take full possession of the premises.<sup>56</sup> The number of lease agreements in Enniskillen Township during the 1860s is staggering. A perusal of land registry records suggests that the agreement between Sanborn and Cook and Bradley was typical. Newspaper accounts suggest, however, that not many of the “wildcatters” who leased lands in Enniskillen Township found oil or became wealthy.<sup>57</sup>

Enniskillen farmers engaged in land speculation during the 1860s and sold or leased parts of their property to oil developers. The leasing arrangements between farmers and oil operators illustrate how the oil industry was integrated with agriculture, much like agriculture and forestry in the eastern parts of the province. Farmers with property near the oil fields leased portions of their holdings to oil producers for a sum of money and a royalty, usually one-third of the oil produced. On May 28, 1861, William E. Sanborn leased 100 acres on the west half of lot 18, concession 2, from Moses Wilton, a farmer. Under the terms of the agreement, Wilton agreed to let Sanborn subdivide the land into one-acre plots for oil exploration and the construction of two roads to connect with the main concession road at the north end of the lot. Provincial Land Surveyor E. R. Jones marked out a plan for the subdivision, and one-acre plots were leased to various oil producers.<sup>58</sup>

Unstable markets, an excess of supply, and consumer preference for the “sweeter” smelling American illuminating oil over the pungent smell of sulfur residue that lingered in oil refined from Enniskillen crude hindered the development of the local oil industry during the early 1860s and made for a highly volatile land market. Unlike the classic speculators who held their investment in property for a considerable length of time, “quick flippers” held their property for only a short period, usually less than five years, and tended to acquire less total acreage. Land speculation in Enniskillen Township intensified briefly after the infamous “Shaw Well”, located on lot 18, concession 2, came in on January 16, 1862. The Shaw Well was the first of the “great producing wells”, reportedly yielding 15,000 barrels a day for several days and 660 barrels a day after the flow was contained.<sup>59</sup> A month later,

56 Land Register Volume C, Enniskillen Township, Instrument No. 1289.

57 *Sarnia Observer*, April 5, 1861.

58 Enniskillen Township Copy Book Register B, No. 1086; Enniskillen Abstract Index Volume A.

59 *Sarnia Observer*, February 14, 1862.

on February 18, 1862, the Bradley well, located approximately 200 yards from Shaw's well, came in. Soon afterwards, Hugh Black struck oil on the east half of lot 17, concession 1, approximately one mile south of the Shaw and Bradley wells. Optimism was high in the spring and summer of 1862, as the quantity of oil in the underlying strata of the Black Creek region seemed limitless. Nevertheless, oil producers complained of dull markets and steadily declining prices.

The almost universal cessation of the flowing wells in the early months of 1863, beginning with the Shaw Well, created a panic among oil producers, and their attention shifted to the question of supply. In the spring of 1863 James Miller Williams began selling off his properties in Enniskillen Township. The oil producers who remained were forced to bore deeper, and into the rock, thereby increasing capital expenditures for drilling. With the oil business virtually at a standstill, a group of oil producers decided to put down a "test well" on property owned by William Sanborn. Boring was carried out with vigour throughout the summer of 1863. The project was abandoned in October, when at a depth of 600 feet no oil was struck.

In February 1865 there were signs of renewed activity in the Enniskillen oil fields. Large joint stock companies, most of them financed by Americans with experience in the oil fields of Pennsylvania, were formed. They bought up large blocks of land from small, financially strained producers, who possessed cheap and primitive machinery. These large companies possessed the capital and the machinery to bore deep into the rock for oil. One of the largest companies, the Wyoming Rock Company, was formed in New York and had among its trustees W. F. Havemeyer and George Opdyke, both former mayors of New York. Although typical of business practices at the time, a large nominal capitalization of \$1 million was set for the company. In April 1865 the *Globe* revealed that the Company had already spent \$40,000 on the development of 275 acres in Enniskillen Township.<sup>60</sup> Prospectors from Michigan poured across the border. Producers who had abandoned their leases only a couple of years earlier returned, and disputes over whether "due diligence" had been exercised under the terms of these leases and questions over ownership of lots were settled in Chancery Court. On April 26, 1865, the Commissioner of Crown Lands issued a memorandum of instructions for "Lambton Oil Sales", stipulating that squatters had no rights under the Crown, nor did the original purchasers who were in actual occupation prior to November 26, 1864, but that they might be permitted to purchase the lots if improvements of a substantial character had been made, consisting of at least four acres cleared and roads, and coupled with a dwelling house in *bona fide* occupation.<sup>61</sup> The colonial administration, however, was not successful in its attempts to curb speculation and squatting by wildcatters in the oil fields.

<sup>60</sup> *Globe*, April 14, 1865.

<sup>61</sup> AO, RG 1, G-1, vol. 8, Crown Land Papers, Lambton Oil Sales, Memorandum of Instructions.

Osgoode Hall barrister J. D. Edgar published *A Manual for Oil Men and Dealers in Land* in 1866. In his introduction, Edgar indicated, “The unprecedented activity in land speculation, that has lately sprung up in the oil regions of Western Canada, suggested to the author the urgent necessity, at the present time, of a Manual which would give to oil men some light upon the transactions of every day.” The term “speculator” in Edgar’s narrative was intended as a term of derision. He wrote, “There are always men who are willing to enter into agreements and speculations by which others can be bound, and who endeavour to escape from liability themselves if the result of the enterprise happen to be unprofitable.” In a separate chapter Edgar reminded his readers of the qualifications for a “good title”: “The seller must either show by clear evidence that he, or the persons through whom the land came into his hands, had it in possession or ownership for sixty years back.” He pointed out that all instruments by which land in Upper Canada might be disposed of or affected were put on record in the registry office of the county where the lands lay, and that “it is always necessary to make a careful search in these offices”.<sup>62</sup>

In 1866 a combination of occurrences resulted in the end of the first “oil boom”. The Fenian threat posed a concern for oil speculators, many of whom were of American origin. Afraid that war between British North America and the United States was imminent, the oil men fled back across the border. Also, early wildcatters had drilled too many wells close together, and the natural gas pressures were bled off. Because the wells were left uncapped, they could not re-pressurize. In June 1867 Robert McBride, an Oil Springs flour and feed merchant, amateur poet, and outspoken critic of land speculation and the policies of the Canada Land Company, penned “To Oil Springs Birds of Passage”. He wrote:

You land speculators, with oil on the brain,  
When will you revisit those regions again?  
Like swallows in summer, you’re still on the wing,  
To catch other flies at the opening of spring.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

This analysis of Enniskillen Township points to the continued usefulness of micro-studies in unravelling the nuances of colonial land-granting policies in Upper Canada. Geography, plus the economic and social conditions of oil resource extraction, shaped settlement and land speculation in Enniskillen Township in distinctive and unique ways. With the oil boom of the early 1860s, land speculation in Enniskillen Township was rampant. The majority

62 J. D. Edgar, *A Manual for Oil Men and Dealers in Land* (Toronto, 1866), pp. viii, 41.

63 Robert McBride, *Poems Satirical & Sentimental, on Many Subjects Connected with Canada. Including a Complete Exposure of our County Court, and Division Court System* (London, 1869), p. 111.

of those who speculated in land during the oil boom were identified as “quick flippers” who engaged in a large number of land transactions in their attempts to profit from the temporary surge in the land market brought about by the wave of “oil mania”. The market for oil and the extent of the supply of oil resources also contributed to land speculation and fluctuations in the land market in Enniskillen Township during the 1860s.

The activities of investors like the Tripp brothers, James Miller Williams, and Andrew Elliott reveal that land speculation was a component of the early working of capitalism in Upper Canada. Land was a commercial commodity and was used to finance the building of the oil industry in Enniskillen Township. Land speculation involved both settlement and improvement, and it would appear that in the nineteenth century, at least, speculation and improvement of land holdings occurred simultaneously and were never dichotomous. James Miller Williams, for example, built an oil refinery, subdivided his land holdings, and leased and sold lots to developers to raise capital.

Although colonial administrators were highly critical of land speculators and sought to curb their activities, colonial land granting policies actually encouraged land speculation. Three categories of land dealers have been used by historians to identify land speculators in Upper Canada: land brokers, investors, and “quick flippers”. Investors in Enniskillen Township tended to acquire property early and hold it for a longer period of time than “quick flippers”. They also had a tendency to acquire considerable acreage, but did not show much discrimination as to where the property was located. The intent of land speculators was always to profit from their investment. They were never entirely, or even predominantly, at the mercy of colonial administrators or colonial land policies. Many of those who actually settled in Enniskillen Township during the 1850s, however, conformed to colonial ruling-class ideals of the manly settler-citizen. They completed their settlement duties, paid off their mortgages as quickly as possible, and secured patents on their land.

For historians of colonial land policies, the “scale of operation” approach is not an adequate indicator of the extent of land speculation in Upper Canada; it is necessary to consider the motivations of land dealers as well. In the case of Enniskillen Township, furthermore, most of the land speculation occurred in a limited geographical area on small parcels of land where considerable quantities of oil were known to exist. Thus a reliance solely on the “scale of operation” approach would not reveal the true extent of land speculation and how it occurred in Enniskillen Township during the oil boom of the early 1860s. This finding suggests that, to gain a full understanding of land speculation in nineteenth-century Upper Canada, historians must also consider smaller-scale speculation.