

# HOW WAS CANADA WEST CHANGING?

During the first half of the 1800s, tens of thousands of British immigrants arrived every year in Canada West. They occupied fertile land on which First Nations peoples had been living. By the 1850s, Canada West was changing from scattered, isolated settlements to a lively network of farms, towns, and cities. What contributed to this change?

## INTRODUCTION OF THE RAILWAY SYSTEM

Before the 1850s, ships transported crops and timber for export to Europe and the United States. Transportation by ship benefited the people who lived near ports, rivers, or canals. Land was cheaper farther away from the Great Lakes, but it was difficult for farmers to get their crops to market. All of this changed with the boom in railway construction in the 1850s. The railways brought crops and other products to ports for export.

Examine **Figure 1.21**. This railway map shows the routes that connected Canada West and Canada East by the end of the 1850s. What do you notice about the locations of the routes?



What has changed in southern Ontario since the 1850s? What has remained the same?

**FIGURE 1.21** The darkest lines on the map show the railway routes of Canada West in 1857. **Analyze:** How would the railway help farmers living near Lake Erie and Lake Ontario?

What impact did the railways have on farming in Canada West?

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RURAL COMMUNITIES, TOWNS, AND CITIES

With the development of railways, towns and cities such as Toronto and Brantford became centres of commerce for the more remote settlements around them. Soon all of the fertile land stretching north from Lake Ontario and Lake Erie was being farmed.

As the railways expanded, more towns were established to offer services to rural populations. People visited towns to bring farming equipment to blacksmiths for repair and to shop in general stores. Small, local industries also developed as a result of nearby resources. For example, farmers sold their grain to mills, which converted it into flour to be sold thousands of kilometres away. Woollen mills turned sheep's wool into fabric for the clothing industry. This development encouraged other local farmers to expand their farming activities to include both sheep and grain.

## NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The economic growth the railways created provided new opportunities for immigrants moving to the towns and cities of Canada West. Thornton Blackburn and his family were Black Americans. They had escaped from slavery in the United States. His family came to Canada West soon after slavery was outlawed in the British Empire in 1833. After coming to Canada West penniless, the Blackburns were able to earn and save enough money to set up their own business. Thornton Blackburn eventually started the first cab service in Toronto.

We know little about the daily lives of the Blackburns, but the painting shown in **Figure 1.22** gives us a small clue. It includes a horse-drawn cab that the Blackburns owned. What does this painting reveal about life in Toronto in the mid-1800s? When Thornton Blackburn died in 1890, he left \$17 000 to his widow, Lucie Blackburn. This was a very substantial amount of money at the time. Many people lived on less than \$200 a year and could not afford to buy their own house. How might the success of the Blackburns show us why so many settlers came to this colony?

**FIGURE 1.22** This 1845 painting by John Gillespie is entitled *King Street, Toronto*. It shows a horse-drawn yellow cab belonging to Thornton Blackburn in the main business district of old Toronto. **Analyze:** How does this painting show the wealth and opportunities in Canada West?





## GROWTH AND CHANGES IN POPULATION

Between the 1840s and 1860s, the population of Canada West tripled to almost one and a half million. Among the hundreds of thousands of new arrivals were British immigrants and Black Americans. Irish people arrived in such large numbers that by the 1860s they had become the largest ethnic group in Canada West.

Many Irish immigrants did not have enough money to buy even the cheapest land. Railroad construction and local industries provided employment for many of them. However, the Irish had to compete with Canadians and other immigrants for these jobs. This created social tensions.

### IRISH CATHOLICS VERSUS THE ORANGE ORDER

Tensions also rose between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants in Canada West. Protestant societies and Catholic societies formed as a result of these conflicts. They held secret meetings and trained to defend their own communities. One of these societies was called the Orange Order.

The Orange Order was founded by Irish Protestants, but soon many non-Irish in the mostly Protestant population of Canada West joined the organization. Orangemen of the Orange Order strongly influenced politics, policing, and firefighting during the second half of the 1800s in Toronto. Of the 23 mayors who held office in Toronto between 1845 and 1900, 20 were Orangemen. Many city councillors were also members of the group. Examine the photo in **Figure 1.23**, which shows an Orange Order parade in Toronto. What does this photo illustrate about the problems that might arise from government and important services like policing and firefighting being controlled by a particular ethnic or religious group?

Read the quote by Constable Devlin in **Figure 1.24**. How does Devlin's account help us understand the tensions between Protestants and Catholics at the time? In response, members of the Orange Order attacked a Catholic cathedral. Between 1849 and 1864, conflicts between Catholics and the Orange Order caused nine major riots in Toronto.

**FIGURE 1.23** This 1867 photo shows an Orange Order parade in downtown Toronto. **Analyze:** Why do you think an organization like the Orange Order would hold a parade?



“There were five or six men on the sidewalk. There was no one with me but my wife and child. It was opposite Crawford’s house that I was attacked. The remarks they made was about the colours that I wore, and as soon as I turned round, I was knocked down, and they all pounced upon me, the men kicking and jumping upon me, and I am very much injured about the kidneys.”  
— Constable Devlin

**FIGURE 1.24** Devlin was a Protestant attacked by Irish Catholics while walking home from church in 1857. This testimony was taken at the trial of his attackers in 1857. **Analyze:** Why would his attackers make remarks about the colours that he wore?

## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Slavery was abolished in British North America in 1833. However, it was still legal in the southern part of the United States. To help enslaved Black people escape to the northern states and British North America, a secret network developed. It became known as the Underground Railroad. It was not an actual railroad, but it was a network of people and safe housing. In 1850, the United States passed the *Fugitive Slave Act*. This law gave slave owners the right to find and recapture escapees, even where slavery was illegal. This caused even more people to flee to British North America. Between 30 000 and 40 000 people fled to British North America along the Underground Railroad.

Several Black settlements formed in southern Canada West, from Chatham, east of Windsor, to Georgian Bay. Many of these communities established their own schools and churches. One of these schools was started by Mary Ann Shadd, a Black Canadian activist. In the 1850s, she established the first of two **abolitionist** newspapers that informed the public of Canada West about slavery and about the Underground Railroad.

### HARRIET TUBMAN

“Conductors” working for the Underground Railroad would guide escapees from one safe house to the next. Often they would travel at night. During the 1850s, Harriet Tubman worked as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. She had escaped slavery herself. Examine the painting of Harriet Tubman helping people to escape from slavery, shown in **Figure 1.25**. How would those who escaped to British North America change Canada West’s population?

Harriet Tubman made 19 secret missions deep into the southern states to guide about 300 Black people to Canada West. She was assisted by many white people and freed Black people. They hid her and the people she rescued in their own homes. By the mid-1850s, a large reward for her arrest was posted throughout the southern states. It was even dangerous for Tubman to be close to the United States border, as many slave hunters came to Canada West to kidnap people who had escaped from slavery.

The Underground Railroad was the largest freedom movement in North America. Slavery was officially abolished across the United States when the American Civil War ended in 1865.

**FIGURE 1.25** This 1984 painting by Jerry Pinkney shows Harriet Tubman arriving in Canada West with a group of Black Americans. **Analyze:** What does the painting tell you about the conditions and challenges of the journey on the Underground Railroad?



**abolitionist** a person who wants and works to end slavery

How might different groups have viewed Harriet Tubman's actions?



FARMING AND INDUSTRY

The railroad and the demand for agricultural products led to more farming in Canada West. In turn, farming encouraged other industries. Even people with little money could take out loans to buy machinery to make farming easier.

Entrepreneurs began manufacturing farm machinery to meet the demand. By 1861, 31 factories were producing farm machinery in Canada West. Before these companies started, such machinery was manufactured in Britain or the United States. Since the price of wheat was greatly increasing at this time, farmers borrowed money to buy the new technology. They were able to transport the equipment to their farms more easily with the new railways. By 1886, the Massey Company’s farm machinery factory was the largest factory in Toronto, employing 700 people.

HISTORY AT WORK

ARCHAEOLOGIST

What lost stories are buried beneath the streets of your community? Archaeologist Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost has spent much of her career digging up artifacts in local communities to discover their links to history.

In 1985, Dr. Frost (Figure 1.26) had the opportunity to work with the Toronto School Board. She focused on what was then the new and growing field of public archaeology. Public archaeologists collaborate with communities to teach them about archaeology and local history, as revealed through excavations. “We have some official documents about ordinary people,” says Dr. Frost, “but very little knowledge of their daily lives.”



FIGURE 1.26 Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost on a dig

Clues to the lost story of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn were unearthed by Dr. Frost and her team. The Blackburns had escaped from slavery in Kentucky. With the help of students and community volunteers, the playground of Toronto’s Sackville Street Public School was dug up. The dig revealed the foundations of the Blackburns’ house and barn. More than 3000 artifacts they had used during their lives in Toronto were recovered.

Using evidence from the dig and other historical documents, Dr. Frost pieced together the story of the Blackburns’ lives and their connection to the Underground Railroad. She went on to recount this story in her Governor General’s award-winning book *I’ve Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*. Today, Dr. Frost is a university professor. She continues to consult on public archaeology digs.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

- 1. Public archaeologists sometimes excavate sites that reveal the lives of ordinary people. How might learning about the lives of ordinary people affect our understanding of Canadian history?
- 2. Public archaeologists work with local communities and volunteers. How could you get involved with public archaeology? How might this benefit your community?

IMPACT OF FARMING ON FIRST NATIONS

By the mid-1800s, some First Nations communities had successfully adopted European styles of agriculture. The Mississauga of the Credit River were one such community. However, new immigrants and land development companies all wanted the last of the fertile land. The government refused to acknowledge that the Mississauga had ownership of their land and would not sell them the land. The Credit River Mississauga left their village and farmland in 1847. The land was then auctioned off to settlers. As the railways pushed farther north from Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, settlers took over more land.

Two Ojibwe leaders at the time were Nahnebahwequay, also known as Catherine Sutton, and Kezhegowinninne, also known as David Sawyer. They travelled through Canada West to help local bands start farms in such places as the Garden River Reserve, Owen Sound, and Rice Lake. The success of these farms attracted the attention of eager immigrant farmers who wanted more fertile land. The government of Canada West forced band after band to sign away their assigned territories. A few First Nations tried to buy their own land back. The Canadian government would not allow them to do so. Catherine Sutton and many other First Nations people spoke out against this unfair treatment. Many people in Britain also protested against this treatment after learning about it. Read the excerpt from a British magazine in Figure 1.27. It pleads the case for First Nations living in British North America. Why do you think First Nations were not given the same rights as those given to refugees from slavery and European immigrants?

What is the significance of these events for First Nations in Ontario today?

“Thus, when to save themselves they purchased their own lots at the sale of Indian lands, their money was refused, and it was stated that ‘those lots could not be sold to Indians....’ With these startling facts before us, our readers will feel, as we do, that there can be no just reason why these Indians ... should be driven from place to place.”  
— The British Friend

FIGURE 1.27 This excerpt is from an 1860 article published in *The British Friend* magazine. The term *Indian* was common at that time. Today, a preferred term is *First Nations*, or *Aboriginal peoples* when including Inuit and Métis. The excerpt expresses some of the opinions of the British public during the mid-1800s. **Analyze:** How is the British public’s view of First Nations rights different from the Canadian government’s view?

CHECK-IN

- 1. **HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** What significant changes occurred after the construction of the railway? Which groups experienced changes that were positive? Which groups experienced changes that were negative?
- 2. **CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE** What effect did slavery laws in the United States have on the population of Canada West?
- 3. **FORMULATE QUESTIONS** Review the information about First Nations and their loss of land. What questions do you have about this information? What questions do you have about the perspectives of the different groups on land and land ownership?