



**University of Guelph
Department of History**

MA Thesis Defence

Student: Katie Anderson	Date: March 6, 2014
Time: 3:00 pm	Place: MacKinnon Extension, Rm. 2020

Title

“Hitched Horse, Milked Cow, Killed Pig”: Pragmatic Stewardship and the Paradox of Human/Animal Relationships in Southern Ontario, 1900-1920

Abstract

This thesis examines the complex relationships between early twentieth century Southern Ontario farmers and their primary animals for subsistence on the mixed family farm: horses, cattle, and pigs. Southern Ontario between 1900 and 1920 was a period in which many non-rural Ontarians romanticized rural communities as harmonious and pastoral; a place where farmers had sentimental and nurturing relationships with their animals. At the same time, Southern Ontario was the site of an increase in government initiatives by the Canada Department of Agriculture and Canada Food Board, particularly during the First World War. These efforts encouraged farmers to regard their animals as machines and producers that should be manipulated for maximum efficiency and output, in order to support the war effort overseas and for Canada’s food industry to become competitive on international markets.

Southern Ontario farmers existed in between these two unattainable and paradoxical expectations of early twentieth century modernity. They adopted a pragmatic stewardship over their livestock that was neither overly sentimental, nor altogether removed from regarding their animals as living beings with agency and self-direction. Farmers negotiated their degree of attachment or detachment to different animal species on the farm based on the particular use, cultural value, and breed of the animal, as well as the farmer’s own personality and economic situation. This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the examination of human/animal relationships in early twentieth century Ontario, utilizing contemporary rural sociology as a framework for analysis to aid the interpretation of the historical primary source documents.

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