



**University of Guelph
Department of History**

MA Thesis Defence

Student: Patrick Leahy	Date: Thurs., May 5, 2016
Time: 2:00 pm	Place: MCKN Ext. 2020

Title

"Driving Forward: The Power of the Horse in Douro Township 1850-1900"

Abstract

Rural Ontario was highly dependent upon the horse in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the horse's role in rural life has not received the scholarly attention it fully deserves. Economic historians often present the horse as an archaic means of doing farm work or as the necessary impetus for the creation of the internal combustion engine while other scholars have studied the breeding and marketing of horses. Little attention has been paid to the impact of the horse on a more intimate level such as in a rural community or within a family, and thereby examined the personal meaning and relationship which people had with a working horse. Utilizing a farmer's diaries, municipal records, census data, and photographs, this thesis adopts a case study approach to the horse in rural life. Horses were integral between 1850 and 1900 for William Moher and his community in Douro Township, Peterborough County. Moher kept a daily diary from 1876 to 1907, which relates the operation of a large farm and details his family's high degree of involvement in their local community. The use of horses allowed for the development and expansion of mixed farming operations utilizing successive technological advances. Travel, whether for business or recreational purposes, was done by horse drawn vehicles which often reflected societal standing and took on great importance as a means of engaging with society. Raising horses provided economic value for farmers, and the increasing availability of new genetics allowed farmers to breed increasingly specialized horses for their own needs as well as for sale. Furthermore, the culture which developed around the use of horses allowed for competition among neighbours, influenced masculine identities, and above all created a unique bond between horses and the people working with them.

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