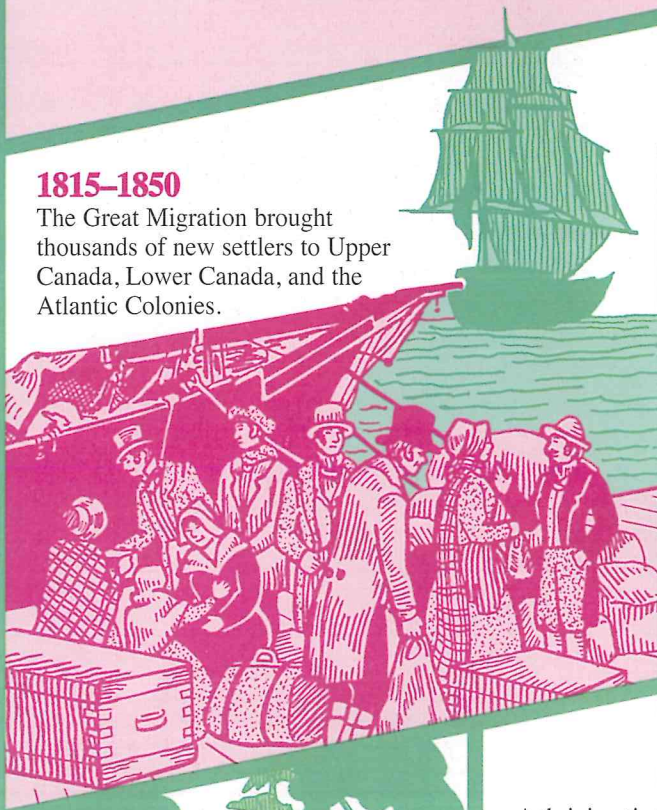# Chapter 7
Upper and Lower Canada (1815–1838)

Overview
Use this Overview to predict the events of this chapter.
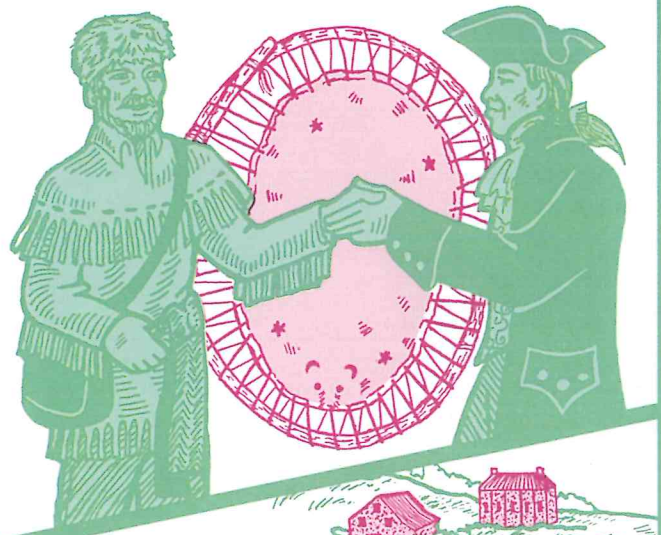
1815–1850

The Great Migration brought thousands of new settlers to Upper Canada, Lower Canada, and the Atlantic Colonies.

1821

Rivalry between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company ended in 1821. The new company was called the Hudson's Bay Company.
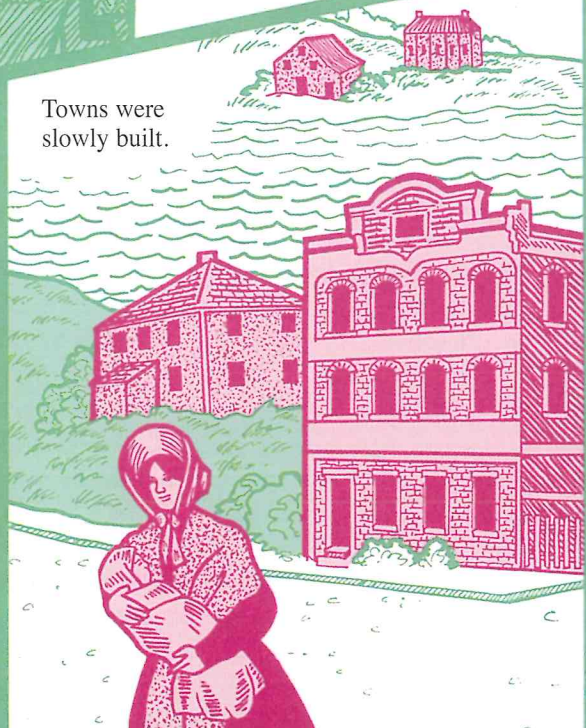
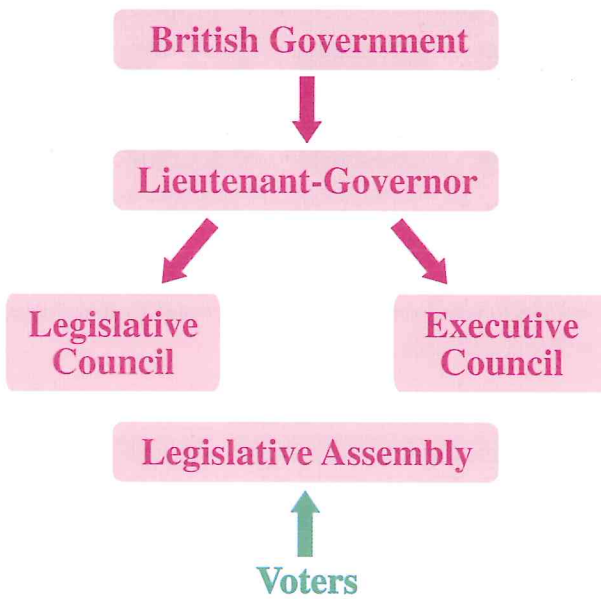A thriving timber industry developed in Upper Canada and Lower Canada.

Towns were slowly built.

Most of the new pioneers moved into the forested areas of Upper Canada. Many faced great hardship as they felled the trees and built new homes.

The structure of the government in Upper and Lower Canada was based on the Constitution Act of 1791.

Government of Upper Canada

British Government

↓

Lieutenant-Governor

↙ ↘

Legislative Council   **Executive Council**

Legislative Assembly

↑

Voters

Lower Canada had the same government structure but had an entirely separate government.

In both Upper Canada and Lower Canada, small groups of powerful and conservative men appointed by the governor controlled the government. They shaped policy and provided favours for their friends.

Executive Council

The ordinary people felt they had little influence in the government. Only property owners had the vote. Bills put forward by the elected assembly (the Legislative Assembly) could be stopped by the Legislative Council or the governor.

Legislative Assembly

Upper Canada
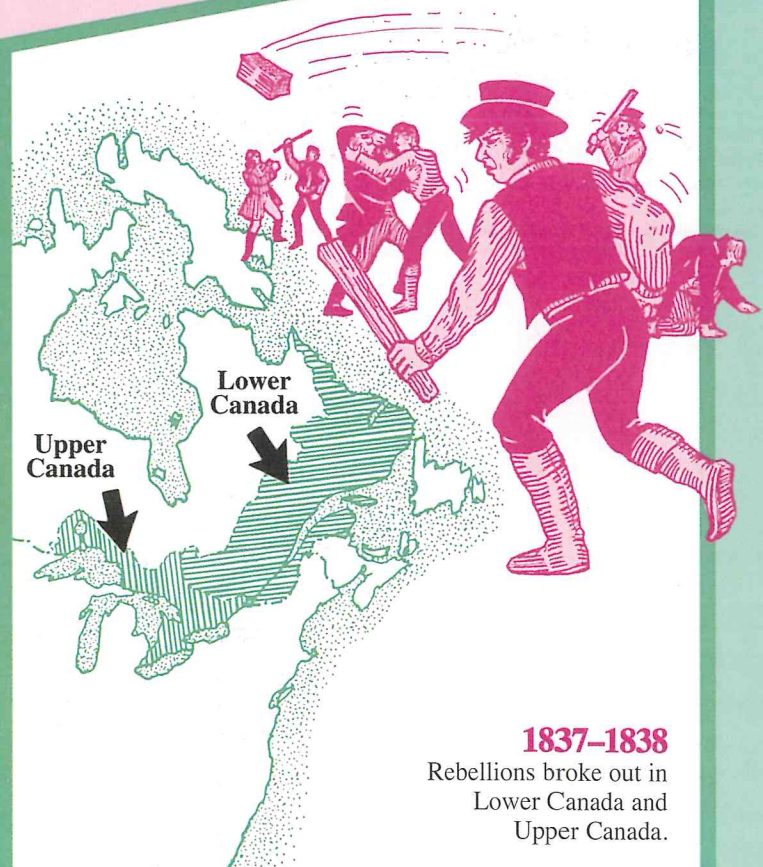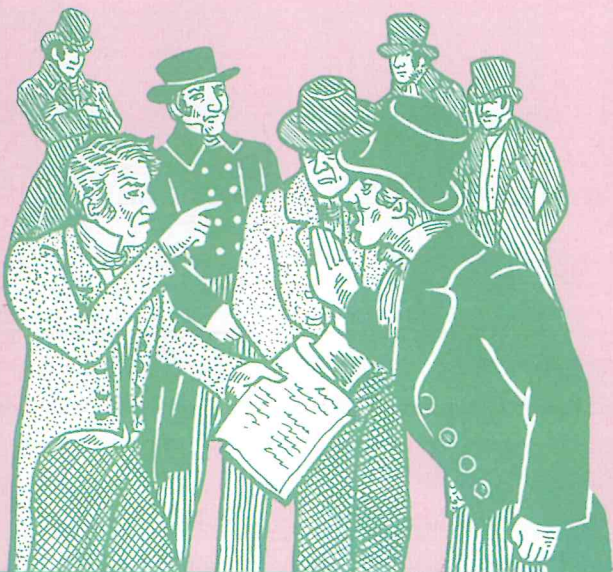
Lower Canada

1837–1838
Rebellions broke out in Lower Canada and Upper Canada.

Changes to Upper and Lower Canada: 1815–1838

There were three major changes in Upper and Lower Canada between the end of the War of 1812 (which you read about in the last chapter) and the rebellions of 1837 (which you will read about in this chapter). Two of these changes, a population explosion and the development of a thriving timber trade, affected both Upper and Lower Canada. The other change, the end of competition in the fur trade, affected only Lower Canada.

Population Explosion

Changes in Population
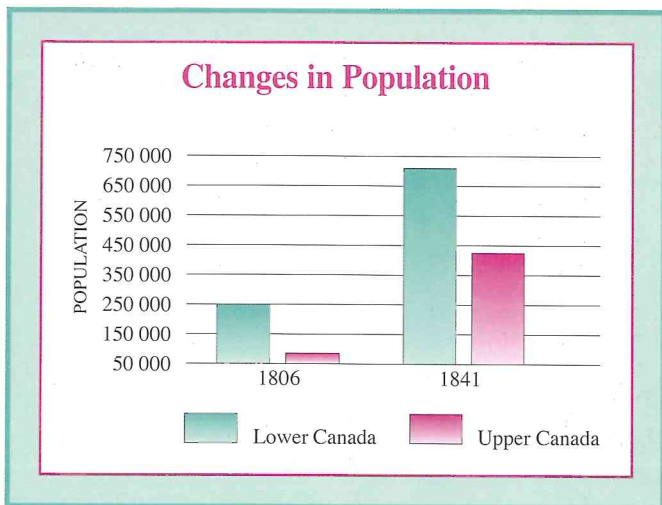
Lower Canada

The population in Lower Canada increased from 250 000 in 1806 to 717 000 in 1841. This population explosion was caused mainly by a very high birth rate among the French-speaking people of Lower Canada. In addition, some British and many American immigrants settled in the Eastern Townships* of Lower Canada. This was an area of Lower Canada that had been set aside for settlement by English-speaking farmers.

Upper Canada

Upper Canada was originally settled by Loyalists leaving the United States during and after the American Revolution; then, until the War of 1812, other American settlers moved there.

After the War of 1812, American settlers were no longer welcome in Upper Canada. A wave of settlers from Great Britain (Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales) took their

place. Historians call the period between 1815 and 1850 "The Great Migration."

Many tenant farmers in Great Britain were being forced by their landlords to leave their small farms because it was more profitable for the landowners to use the farms for grazing sheep than to rent them to the farmers. Many artisans were finding themselves unemployed because machines were taking over their jobs. In Ireland in the 1840s, many people were starving because of poor crops.

These immigrants came to seek new lives for themselves in British North America. Many of the immigrants bought land and became farmers. Others came to the cities. They often worked as servants, labourers on canals and railways, in the forest industry, or at whatever job was available. By 1860, the majority of English-speaking people in Canada** were of Irish descent.

As a result of British immigration, the population of Upper Canada increased from 71 000 in 1806 to 432 000 in 1841. In 1815, the population was 80 percent American-born. In 1841, almost 50 percent were recent British immigrants.

Upper and Lower Canada, 1791–1841

During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the population of both Upper and Lower Canada increased greatly.

*The triangle of land in Lower Canada between the St. Lawrence River and the American border
**Sometimes Upper and Lower Canada were called the Canadas or Canada, and the people were called Canadians.

The land the pioneers selected for their homesteads was still in its natural state—an uncleared dense forest. As the pioneers cut trees and drained swamps, the wildlife was forced farther inland, away from the newcomers who were making Upper Canada their home.

Clearing a forested area of thousands of trees and building a new home was a time-consuming and difficult task. But gradually life on a homestead became more comfortable as time went on. The pictures show a pioneer homestead from the early years of settlement, 15 years after settlement, and 30 years after settlement.

The first house of a pioneer family was usually a one-room log cabin with a dirt floor and a wooden chimney. A blanket might be used to divide the room into two for sleeping purposes. These homes were cold and draughty. As the logs dried, they shrank, making the gaps between

Above: Once new roads were built, it became easier to travel.
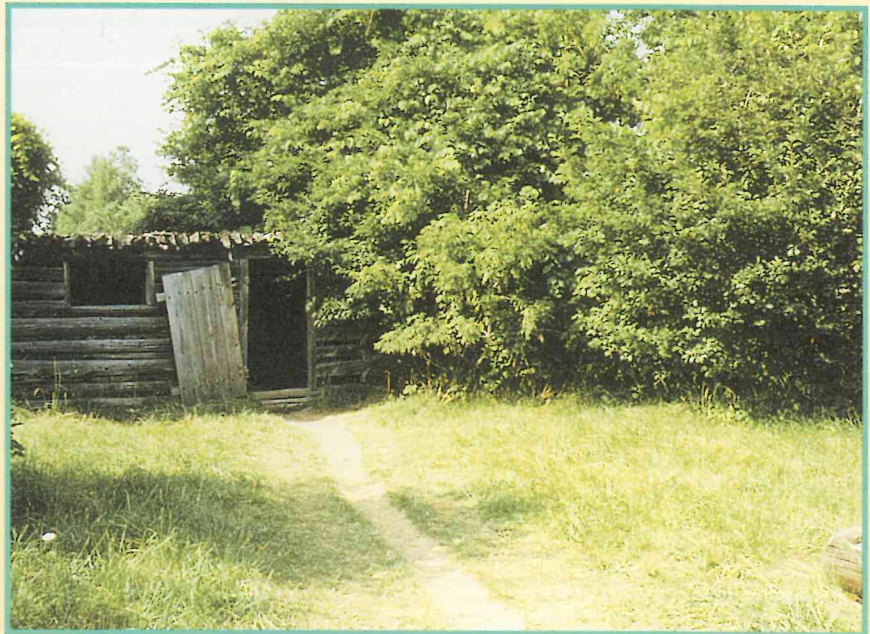
Right: A pioneer homestead in the early years of settlement was usually a one-room log cabin with a dirt floor.

Below: Fifteen years later, this family had built a larger house with several rooms.
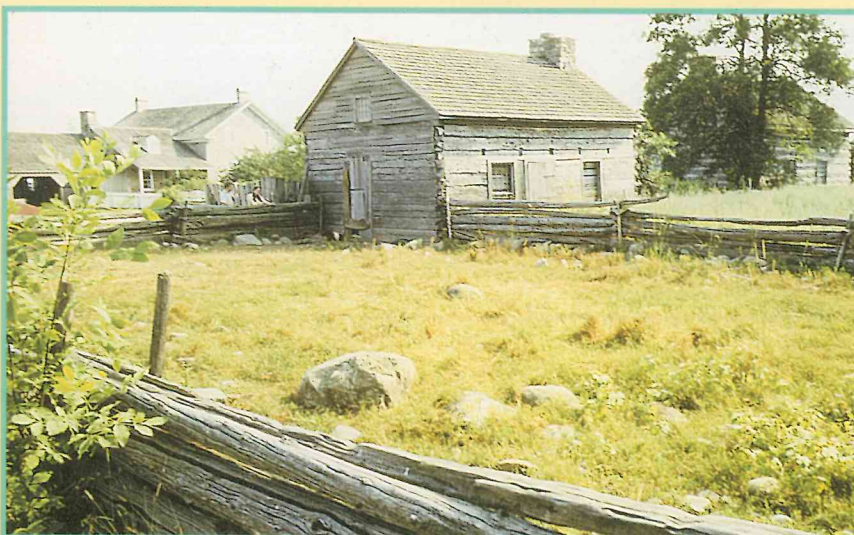

them even larger. These gaps were filled with mud or lime plaster, which had to be replaced every year.

After a year or two, when there was a little more time, a larger and more comfortable house would be built. It would have several rooms on the main floor, with a loft or attic as well. The fireplace would be stone or brick. Once this house was finished, the old log cabin might be used as a shelter for pigs or other farm animals.
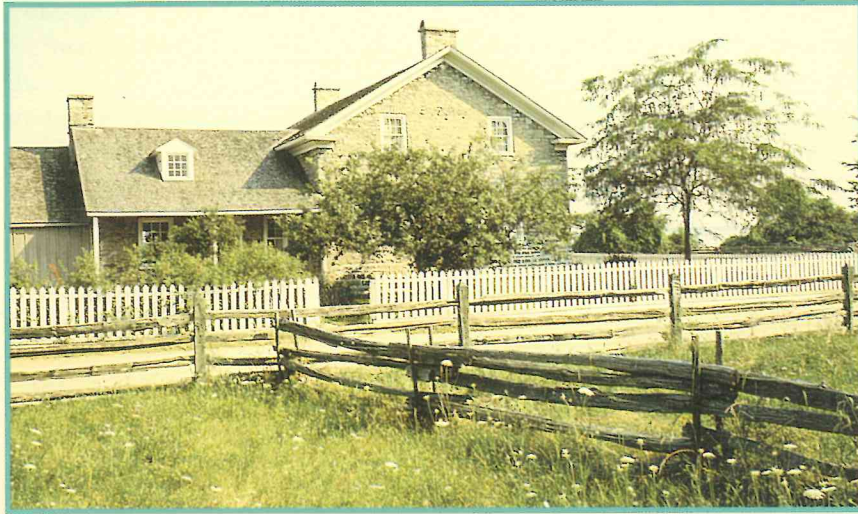
A few years later, the family might add on to the log house, or build a new home of fieldstone or sawn lumber, if there was a sawmill in the district. This house would have glass windows instead of oiled paper or rags, such as covered the windows of the other houses. Glass was expensive because, until 1825, it had to be imported. After that it was manufactured in Upper Canada.

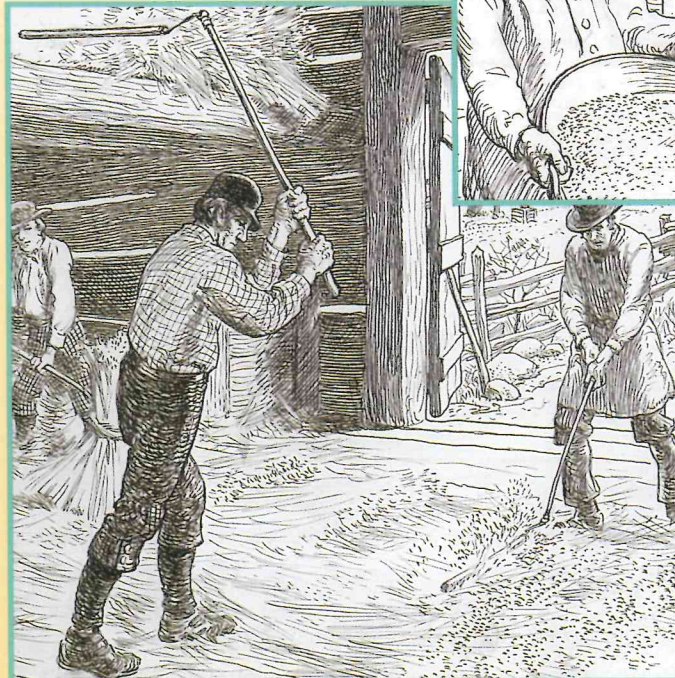Thirty years after settlement, a pioneer homestead might look like this.

A Summary of Rural Life in Upper Canada in the Early Years of the Nineteenth Century

Most inhabitants:

- lived on the forest frontier
- used physical labour to fell the trees and remove the stumps
- persisted through years of hard work and effort to create a home
- began as **subsistence farmers**
- had to work daily to provide their necessities
- lived a fair distance from their neighbours
- received the little education they had from their parents or a literate neighbour
- visited towns to use the mills to grind their grain or the sawmill to get lumber
- worked together to get big projects accomplished and to have some social activity
- depended on their own ingenuity for their survival.

Above: This man is winnowing—allowing the chaff to blow away so only wheat remains.
Left: These men are threshing to separate wheat from chaff.

Subsistence farmer—only grew enough food for the family; no surplus production to sell for cash to buy other products and supplies

As more fields were cleared in Upper Canada, more wheat was grown. Farmers could sell wheat for cash. Villages began to grow at places that were convenient for the farmers, like crossroads or mill sites. In the villages the farmers could sell their wheat and purchase goods with the money. A fairly large village could be expected to provide the following services for its local farmers: stores, taverns, shoemaker, blacksmith, miller, carpenter, lawyer, doctor, wagonmaker, tinsmith, tailor, school, church, and newspaper.

Eyewitness Account

Catherine Parr Traill, an early settler, describes the changes that took place in her community over a few years:

When we first came up to live in the bush . . . there were but two or three settlers near us and no roads out . . . . Very great is the change that a few years have effected in our situation . . . .

A village has started up where formerly a thick pine-wood covered the ground; we have now within a short distance of us an excellent sawmill, a grist mill and store, with a large tavern and many good dwellings.

—from The Backwoods of Canada by Catherine Parr Traill

Kingston

Kingston developed as a British military and naval base for Lake Ontario and was the largest and most important town in Upper Canada for many years.

Eyewitness Account

Here is a description of Kingston, written about 1820:

Kingston, although the largest town in the Upper Province, contains only 2336 inhabitants, most of whom are the descendants of those loyalists who sought asylum in Canada after the revolutionary war.

The rest are English, Irish, and Scotch, with a few Germans and Frenchmen. The streets are laid out with considerable regularity; but the houses, like almost all others in the Canadas, are very irregularly built. In consequence of the neglected condition of the roads in this as well as in every other part of the Province, it is scarcely possible in wet weather to walk out without sticking fast in the mire. The public buildings of Kingston are of such an inferior description as scarcely to be worthy of notice.

—from *Five Years' Residence in the Canadas* by Edward Allen Talbot

York

The British military began clearing land to build a fort at York in 1793. Governor Simcoe decided to build a capital there. In 1834, it was renamed Toronto.

Despite damage caused by American invaders in 1812, York became more important as newcomers moved westward. It became a business and government centre.

Eyewitness Account

Here is a description of York, written about 1820:

The streets of York are regularly laid out, intersecting each other at right angles. Only one of them, however, is yet completely built; and, in wet weather, the unfinished streets are, if possible, muddier and dirtier than those of Kingston.

—from *Five Years' Residence in the Canadas* by Edward Allen Talbot

This painting shows King Street, which is still one of Toronto's main streets.

These pictures are from a reconstructed Upper Canada Village.

**Right:** As communities developed, lumber mills made possible the construction of frame houses.

Below: Weaving of woollen and linen fabrics was one of the early industries.

Below: On winter and summer evenings, travellers were relieved to find food and shelter at an inn. This picture shows the livery stable behind the inn.

Right and below: As soon as the members of the community could afford them, they built schools and churches.
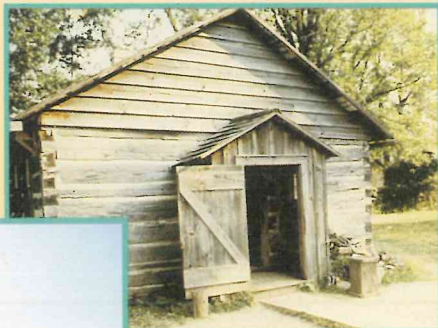
Right: Later there would be a more elaborate centre of government, such as this city hall.

Services Provided in the Towns

In the early 1800s in Upper Canada, town services were few. Running water, natural gas for home heating, sewers to take away water and waste, garbage collection, sidewalks, paved roads, police, and fire protection were not available.

The unpaved roads turned to mud in the rain. People threw their garbage onto roads or into streams and lakes. Many got their drinking water from the same streams where they disposed of their garbage. However, by the 1840s, cities had begun to install sewer systems to take away used water.

Toronto had a water system by 1841, but its main purpose was not to provide clean water for drinking. It was for firefighting. Fire was a serious threat to the wooden buildings of early towns, with their poorly constructed or open fireplaces. There were no paid firefighters. The firefighting was done by the people of the town. By law, every house had to have a water bucket and a ladder on its roof near the chimney. When a fire broke out, people from all around came with their buckets to help fight it. Some towns were lucky enough to have a fire engine that could be pulled by men or horses to the fire. In the 1820s and 1830s towns began to establish volunteer fire departments. This was more effective, since the volunteers received some training.

By the 1840s cities were beginning to have gas lights. Pipes were installed to bring flammable gas to lampposts on streets and to light fixtures in houses. The gas was lit with a flame to produce light.
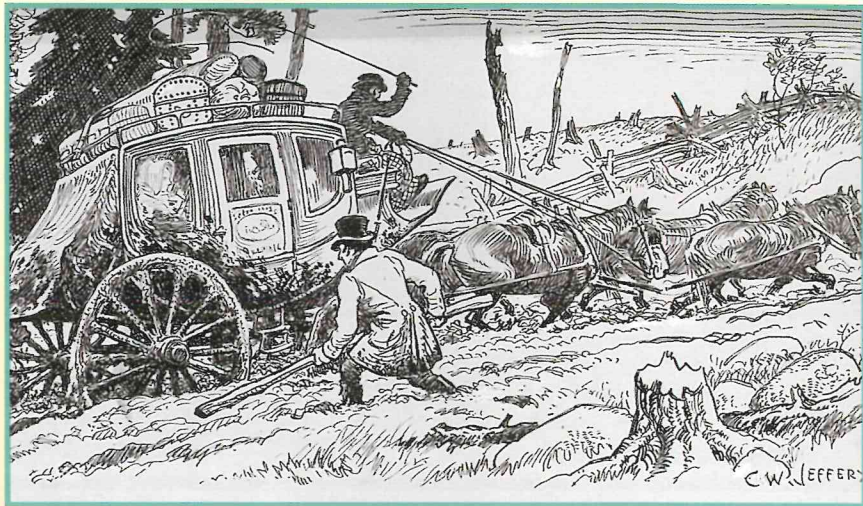
Mail was delivered by coach in the 1800s.

Transportation in Upper Canada

Walking was often the safest and fastest means of getting around in Upper Canada, since the first roads were often nothing better than wide, muddy footpaths. Even in the towns the unpaved streets turned to mud when it rained. By the 1830s, a few main streets had been macadamized, which meant they were paved using crushed stone or gravel. But most streets remained unpaved. In the countryside, corduroy roads were built. Logs were laid side by side across the road in order to create a hard surface. The result looked like the bumps on a piece of corduroy. These roads were very uncomfortable to walk on or drive over.

Eyewitness Account

Here is one traveller's description of such a road:

... Indeed, "corduroy" is dreadful. When we came to it I tried every thing to save my poor bones—sitting on my hands, or raising my body on them—but it was of little use; on we went, thump, thump, thumping against one log after another, and this, in the last part of our journey, with the bare boards of an open wagon for seats... But we got through without an actual upset or breakdown, which is more than a friend of mine could say, for the coach in which he was went into so deep a mud hole at one part of the road, that it fairly overturned, throwing the passengers on the top of one another inside, and leaving them no way of exit, when they came to themselves, but to crawl out through the window.

—from *Adventures in Canada, or, Life in the Woods* by John C. Geikie

Waterways, as well, were often used for transportation. In the winter, horse-drawn sleighs could travel swiftly over the ice. The rest of the year, many types of boats were used. By the 1820s, steamboats were going back and forth across Lake Ontario, carrying passengers and cargo between the falls of Niagara and the beginning of the St. Lawrence at Kingston.