



Consumers in the Bush: Shopping in Rural Upper Canada (McGill-Queen's Rural, Wildland, and Resource Studies Series)

Douglas McCalla

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General stores are essential to the image of a colonial village. Many historians, however, still base their stories of settlement on the notion of rural self-sufficiency, begging the question: if general stores were so common, who were their customers? To answer this, *Consumers in the Bush* draws on the account books of country stores, rich evidence that has rarely been used. Douglas McCalla considers more than 30,000 transactions on the accounts of 750 families at seven Upper Canadian stores between 1808 and 1861. These customers were typical of rural society - farmers, artisans, labourers, and often women. At village stores they found a wide variety of products, most imported from Britain, a few from the United States, and a surprising number that were produced locally. Three chapters focus on the major product categories of dry goods, groceries, and hardware; a fourth considers local products, and a fifth addresses a variety of items - from household goods to footwear to school books. In telling us about the goods colonists bought, this book explores what they were used for and the stories they allow us to tell about rural lives and experience. By seeing rural Upper Canadians as consumers, *Consumers in the Bush* reveals them as full participants in the rapidly changing nineteenth-century global world of goods.

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