3
Persistence, Mobility, and Literacy

The years following 1861 marked continued development in the commercial cities of Upper Canada. Commerce continued to dominate their economic activities, but early industrialization, with its impact upon social and spatial structures, transformed them into more modern, more industrial cities. The decade of the 1860s, the years this chapter spans, was a relatively prosperous period; it represented in many ways the onset of a new social order, based more than ever before upon larger industry and increasing institutionalization. These of course were irregular and uneven processes of change, whose effects were differentially and relatively felt.[1] In this context, illiterate men and women continued their lives in the cities, working and striving to maintain or improve their positions. Although a short period of time, the decade provides an opportunity for further examination of the economic and adaptive abilities of those who lacked educational achievement. We may investigate the roles of literacy and illiteracy over a period of some years, testing and extending the interpretation developed from their positions in 1861. How did they fare over time? Did the restrictions represented by their lack of skills and achievement become more severe or less with time and with the social transformations of their places of residence? Was social and economic mobility available to the uneducated; did their

[1] On the relationship of modernization and industrialization, see E. A. Wrigley, "The Process of Modernization and the Industrial Revolution in England," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3 (1972), 225–259; J. Rogers Hollingsworth, "Perspectives on Industrializing Societies," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 16 (1973), 715–739; Michael B. Katz, "The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism," ms. in progress (1978).

ascriptive bonds loosen or tighten in this context? These questions shape the analysis in this chapter.

The main concerns of this analysis reflect upon issues in social theory, modern social inquiry, and the understanding of the modernization process. Despite continuing debate and active dissent, a general consensus exists about the relationship of education to modern, industrial society; a conclusion stressing the heightened need for and significance of education, for individuals and for economic and social development, dominates theoretical and sociological literature and its assumptions analogous to the issues of the preceding chapter. With increased change toward a modern society, schooling becomes more central, valued, and requisite. In a volume that summarizes well many of the relevant issues, Donald Treiman makes this case in formal propositional terms. The more industrialized a society, he begins, the greater the proportion of eligible children who will be attending school—which has indeed been the case. In more industrialized societies, further, education will have a greater direct influence on occupational status and mobility, while, conversely, a father's status will have a smaller direct influence on his children's status. The direct influence of education on income, however, should lessen, but occupational status' direct impact on income should nevertheless increase in a cumulative path toward advancement. Despite ambiguities in findings and evidence of some persisting role for "background" ascriptive influences, the lines of the major interpretation are clear: with social and economic developments comes increased education, which influences social placement and mobility more than other measured factors. These connections, implanted in ideologies of educational opportunities, dominate both theory and popular received wisdom today.[2] Hauser succinctly summarizes the conclusions: "Educational attainment is a powerful intervening variable in the stratification process. Socioeconomic origins (race excepted) have rather small effects on adult socioeconomic achievements beyond those implicit in their influence on educational attainment and its influence on later achievements." Or, as Blau and Duncan state, "The chances of upward

[2] Treiman, "Industrialization and Social Stratification," in *Social Stratification*, ed. E. O. Laumann (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1970), 207–234, *passim*. See also S. M. Lipset and R. Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley: University of California, 1959); the works cited in Chapter 2, note 23 by Blau and Duncan; Sewell and Hauser; Sewell, Hauser and Featherman. For dissenting views, see Boudon; Bowles and Gintis; Berg; Collins; Squires (cited in Chapter 2, Note 3). The empirical dimensions of the controversy are by no means settled for the present, quite aside from earlier periods. On educational developments, see Ian Davey's Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Toronto, 1975 (Chapter 1, Note 9).

mobility are directly related to education. . . ." [3] Set within the mainstream of evolutionary social theory, this interpretation derives from the past two centuries of western development and links the past century of educational expansion directly with the present.

In the developing urban context of industrial and educational growth, these conclusions strongly suggest that the position of the uneducated should deteriorate, especially in occupational attainments but also in access to wealth and property. Their lack of schooling should be an increasing barrier to individual progress, with time and with social change, attenuated only by experiential gains. An assessment of the performance of the illiterates from 1861 to 1871 must address this conclusion and its historical evaluation, reducing the limitations of the initial "static" view of 1861 by the addition of the dynamic of time, through the decade.

The experience of the illiterate adults who persisted in the cities over the course of the decade contradicts important aspects of these expectations, complicating the normative interpretation but also increasing our understanding of the nature of education and literacy in processes of attainment and adjustment. In occupation, little change occurred, while in wealth and homeownership important upward and improved shifts were made. Illiteracy did not block progress for those illiterates who persisted in each city, as the significance of ascriptive characteristics was reduced, but by no means erased. The stratification process had not changed in ways that made education mandatory for mobility or a requirement for success, despite theory and expectations to the contrary.

Presenting this analysis and interpretation will involve three closely related topics: first, the nature of geographic persistence and the identity of "persisters" will be examined; second, linking persistence with mobility, the status of illiterates in 1871 and the extent of movement from their earlier positions will be assessed.[4] This allows further exploration of the nature of inequality and stratification and the effects of age and time. Finally, patterns of mobility will be discussed. In these ways, the meaning of literacy may be elaborated and the case for a revision of dominant expectations advanced.

[3] Robert M. Hauser, "Educational Stratification in the United States," in *Social Stratification*, ed. Laumann, 111; Blau and Duncan, *Structure*, 155–156; Sewell and Hauser, *Education*, conclusions, *passim*.

[4] On the crucial relationships of transciency and mobility see Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), Ch. 3; Stephen Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); Sune Åkerman, "Swedish Migration and Social Mobility: A Tale of Three Cities," *Social Science History*, 1 (1977), 178–209.

This was an important decade in the social and economic development of these cities, signalling the emergence of a modern industrial order. The fullest effects of this complex of changes, in mode and scale of production, social relations, institutional maturation, and spatial differentiation, were not felt for another decade or more, but the transformation had nonetheless begun. The rise of heavy industry, the use of technology and mechanization, the arrival of larger firms, and the persistence of commerce and crafts all marked the onset of early industrialization. The process, 1871 census data show, was uneven, and the three cities of Hamilton, Kingston, and London exhibit differential patterns of development. Hamilton with a population of 27,000 counted 317 industrial establishments, Kingston (population 12,500) had 202, and London had 205, with economic development accompanying population and commercial growth (Table 3.1). Many of these establishments were small, of course, employing few hands, and artisanal in nature of production. Larger work settings and factories were increasingly common by 1871, however, especially in Hamilton with its greater development, but also in the other cities. The more modern sectors expanded markedly and the ratio of hands to firms ranged from 6.4 to 14 across the cities, despite the many small shops. Substantial numbers of men,

Table 3.1
Industrial Development, 1871 (Published Returns, Census of 1870–1871, Vol. 3)

A. Number of hands		Capital invested ($)	Number of establishments
Hamilton	4,456	1,541,264	324
Kingston	1,298	526,855	203
London	2,261	1,001,789	206
Ontario	87,281	37,874,010	—

B. Types of industries (census classification)	Hamilton		Kingston		London	
	N	Hands	*N*	Hands	*N*	Hands
I. Manufacturies (1)	182	2,329	143	760	144	1,749
II. Manufacturies (2)	64	642	35	263	36	466
III. Manufacturies (3)	26	252	11	49	10	30
IV. Manufacturies (4)	25	278	8	107	9	49
V. Miscellaneous	20	894	5	16	6	46
Total	317	4,395	202	1,195	205	2,340
Average number of hands	13.75		6.39		10.98	

women, and children worked in industry: 4,500 in Hamilton, 1,300 in Kingston, and 2,300 in London, representing perhaps 40 to 50% of the workforce.[5] Education also expanded in this period, with more facilities and higher enrollments. In sum, modernization and industrialization reshaped the cities in which the illiterates had to work, make their livings, house, and maintain their families.[6]

I. Persistence and Transiency

In recent research, historians have discovered the tremendous volatility of population movements in the past, particularly the extent of mobility in and out of nineteenth-century cities. Population turnover was apparently so common and frequent that students now grant that only a minority of individuals persisted in one place *over even one decade.* Studies in this period, despite methodological and conceptual weaknesses, demonstrate, typically, a geographic persistence rate of about one-

[5] On industrial work and the meaning of its changes, see E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present,* 38 (1967), 56–97; Sidney Pollard, *The Genesis of Modern Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815–1919," *American Historical Review,* 78 (1973), 531–588. For Canada, see The Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor (Ottawa, 1889); W. T. Easterbrook and H. G. J. Aitken, *Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970); Harold Innis, *Essays in Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956); G. S. Kealey and P. Warrian, eds. *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976).

[6] Several different subpopulations of illiterate adults form the basis of the following analysis. I ask readers to note these groups and their changing compositions, at the relevant points in the text. 1. Heads of household linked from the 1861 census (January) to the 1861 Assessment (April in Hamilton, March in Kingston); 2. Illiterates linked from the 1861 census to the 1871 census (January); 3. Illiterate heads of households linked from the 1871 census to the assessment of 1870–1872 (Hamilton: April, 1872 [1871 fire-damaged]; Kingston: March, 1870 [1871 not located]; London: April, 1871); 4. Illiterate heads of household linked in the 1861 Census and Assessment and in the 1870–1872 census and assessment (four-way links). Care will be taken to identify each population and to note changing bases in the pages that follow.

On the record linkage, which was totally manual, See Appendix E. On nominal record linkage in theory and practice, see Ian Winchester, "The Linkage of Historical Records by Man and Computer," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 1 (1970), 107–124; papers by Winchester and Katz in the *Reports of the Canadian Social History Project;* E. A. Wrigley, ed. *Identifying People in the Past* (London: Arnold, 1973); Katz and John Tiller, "Record Linkage for Everyman," *Historical Methods Newsletter,* 5 (1972), 144–150.

third, to two-fifths, between censuses, with some variation by class, status, wealth, ethnicity, age and sex. Transiency and persistence were, nevertheless, very complex processes.[7]

In assessing the dynamics of persistence and transiency, we consider the evidence from three experiences: short-term persistence, from census to assessment-taking in 1861 *and* 1870–1872, and decade-long, census to census, from 1861 to 1871. All four linked populations of illiterates are used; comparative data derive from Hamilton's literate and total populations, as available.

Studies of migration and population persistence, if imperfect, do point to certain regularities despite their commonly inconclusive nature. For example, fairly high levels of geographic mobility are found throughout the west since at least the early modern period; rates of movement also seem to vary quite regularly by individual and family life cycles, wealth, property ownership, and ambition. Sex, ethnicity, culture, and occupation in some cases and contexts bear on migration, but overall their relationship has proved relatively elusive to investigators. Migrants, moreover, reveal a propensity for moving frequently from place to place. Research on the nineteenth century, in particular, shows that with such high rates of transiency virtually *all* types of persons were moving regardless of these general probabilities.

In general, two implicitly contradictory patterns are seen to tie education to migration. On one hand, there is evidence (such as that discussed in Chapter 2) that migrants are better educated and more aware of opportunities than nonmigrants, while the uneducated (more often poor as well) are immobilized and trapped in their predicaments. The uneducated, the poor, and the unskilled, on the other hand, are often seen as moving frequently, perhaps almost randomly, searching for work and subsistence in an almost rootless and restless

[7] See Thernstrom and Peter Knights, "Men in Motion: Some Data and Speculations about Urban Population Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 1 (1970), 7–36. Other historical studies of transiency and geographic mobility include, Katz, *People;* Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians;* Knights, *The Plain People of Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Howard Chudacoff, *Mobile Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Katz, Michael Doucet, and Mark Stern, "Migration and the Social Order in Erie County, New York, 1855," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 8 (1978), 669–701, "Population Persistence and Early Industrialization in a Canadian City: Hamilton, Ontario, 1851–1871," *Social Science History,* 2 (1978), 208–229, among a burgeoning historical literature. See also the studies by Åkerman, Long, and Anderson cited in Chapter 2; Julian Wolpert, "Behavioral Aspects of the Decision to Migrate," *Regional Science Association, Papers,* 15 (1965), 159–169; James W. Simmons, "Changing Residence in the City," *Geographical Review,* 58 (1968), 622–651; Sidney Goldstein, *Patterns of Mobility, 1910–1950: The Norristown Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958).

manner. Higher mobility rates for poor and disadvantaged individuals lend credence to the latter view, although it is not difficult to locate expectations or evidence that both patterns have existed in some form. Recent studies in fact point to a phenomenon of a "U"-shaped curve: high rates of movement for the highly educated and the uneducated. Long's 1960s U.S. data and Åkerman's 1870s–1880s Swedish evidence each show the most frequent movers to be among the highest and lowest in education, but, importantly, the common experience of movement breaks down with the distance of migration. Longer distance migration is much more common for those with greater amounts of schooling.[8] What was the experience of the urban illiterates, most of whom had already made at least one major migration in their lives?

The answer is short and simple: the rate of transiency among illiterates was very high. Both in absolute terms and in relative ones (i.e. relative to literates), the illiterates persisted in each city dramatically less often, over both short and long time periods. Over a 3–4-month period in 1861, one-half of illiterate heads of household were located in the same city, while 80% of literate heads were found in Hamilton. Over a full decade, one-fifth of all illiterates remained, compared with one-third of literates. Differentials in mortality, the possibility of underenumeration, and problems in locating women whose names may change (with marriage or remarriage) make these rates only approximations of reality. Yet the major conclusion is inescapable: illiterates were more mobile, more transient men and women, and the differences stand regardless of ethnicity, age, sex, life cycle, marital status, or economic position. Persisting at rates of about 60% of those of others, their experiences were structured by the same variations and regularities.

Clearly, the uneducated were not trapped in paralytic poverty. Like others in nineteenth-century urban places, they were highly mobile; and illiterates of all types moved, and moved frequently. Illiteracy did not trap them in one place; it did not function so as to narrow visions of opportunity outside the cities. Many undoubtedly were forced by circumstances to pack up and leave while some few were perhaps immobilized. Some learned about possibilities of employment, or nurtured hopes of greater success, elsewhere and took their chances. Even if they tramped, working irregularly or seasonally, illiteracy did not prevent them from learning the ways of the roads and the sources of work and opportunity.

[8] B. Anderson, Long, and Åkerman as cited in Chapter 2, Note 11; Åkerman, Per Gunnar Cassel, and Egil Johansson, "Background Variables of Population Mobility," *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 22 (1974), 32–60. See also, Ronald Freeman and Amos H. Hawley, "Education and Occupation of Migrants in the Depression," *American Journal of Sociology*, 56 (1950), 161–166.

Although we do not know their paths or destinations out of the cities, there is no reason to assume their movements were errant and aimless.[9]

The experience of these men and women supports other findings that uneducated persons, past or present, were (or are) very mobile, contributing to the massive population turnover and moving in response to job opportunities. As elsewhere, they often were among the most frequent movers, and we may well suspect that their travels were more of short distance than long. If unable to settle successfully in one place, illiterates were more likely to respond in physical terms, within a more restricted geographical circumference perhaps—probably within the limits of a regional labor market about which they could readily gain information from others. Although they moved most often, this was still an experience they shared with other poor and unskilled members of disadvantaged groups. Lack of education, we may conclude, did not relate to *non*movement; rather it contributed to specific forms of migration. What they learned in the cities may have aided their searches for security, but as long as we remain ignorant of their destination, we cannot know if these forms of transiency brought greater success.

More-frequent movers, and less persistent, than literates, the illiterates' patterns of movement were not entirely fortuitous, as students of other populations have also found. The variations in persistence and the determinants of the probability of staying or leaving linked their experiences to those of others; illiteracy did not restructure the processes of persistence and transiency. Both short-term and the longer-term movements illustrate the common process. Consider first, the three-month period between the census and assessments of 1861 (Table 3.2). Regardless of attributes and characteristics, achieved or ascribed, the illiterate heads of household were more frequent movers. Persisting at a rate of 50%, they remained with only 60% of the literates' frequency. In spite of this wide differential, sex and the life cycle contributed similarly to each. Women persisted far less often than men, even over a period too brief for many to remarry and change their names; the proportional difference is quite close among the two groups. Women's insecurity continued to be greatest. Variations among those of different marital status show the same parallels and the effects of the life cycle. Single persons moved most frequently. Married ones remained most often, regardless of education—those with family ties being more rooted. The life cycle exerted the largest force, in fact, among the factors that determined

[9] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967); Raphael Samuels, "Comers and Goers," in *The Victorian City*, ed. H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1973), 123–160. Daniel Calhoun, "The City as Teacher," *History of Education Quarterly*, 9 (1969), 312–325 is also suggestive.

Table 3.2
Persistence: Heads of Household, Census 1861—Assessment 1861 (Three Cities Combined)

	Literates		Illiterates	
	N	%	*N*	%
Total	2,551	81.4	332	49.6
A. Ethnicity				
Irish Catholic	399	82.8	189	50.9
Irish Protestant	445	80.7	27	43.5
Scottish Presbyterian	569	82.7	9	39.1
English Protestant	832	82.9	40	64.5
Canadian Protestant	266	80.8	8	36.4
Canadian Catholic	32	71.9	3	42.9
Black	45	93.3	24	45.3
Others	463	76.3	32	45.7
B. Occupation				
Professional/proprietor	207	87.4	1	50.0
Nonmanual	395	85.5	19	57.6
Skilled	870	85.2	60	55.6
Semiskilled	170	77.8	28	43.8
Unskilled	374	77.8	173	54.2
None	535	74.5	51	35.9
C. Age				
20–29	370	74.5	37	43.5
30–39	907	85.2	89	50.9
40–49	675	83.0	79	46.5
50–59	360	79.3	81	57.0
60–69	174	79.1	36	47.4
70+	60	82.2	9	52.9
D. Sex				
Male	2,290	83.6	276	53.9
Female	261	66.1	55	35.3
E. Family size				
0–2	1,425	80.6	190	47.1
3–5	897	82.0	117	53.2
6+	229	84.2	22	51.2
F. Household size				
1–3	641	77.3	100	45.0
4–7	1,437	82.5	190	52.3
8+	473	85.7	42	54.5
G. Marital status				
Single	104	64.2	7	35.0
Married	2,115	84.2	261	54.3
Widowed	331	72.3	64	39.0

migration; its impact was quite distinct and regular among both groups.[10] Marriage and a larger household and family weighed in favor of persistence; this is also reflected in aging's ties to migration, albeit to a smaller and less direct extent. The youngest, in search of their niches and success, were the least likely to remain, but among others there were no major variations. Yet, it is also clear from these data that among the illiterates, many of these factors diminished in significance. Their greater propensity to move reduced the force of these influences. Larger families among the illiterates persisted no more often than middle-sized ones; they could overburden limited resources and not be correlates of success, as we saw in the last chapter.

Ethnicity did not influence persistence as directly. The Irish and the blacks, poorest groups among the literates, persisted no less often than the more advantaged, although the patterns are much less distinct. Among the literates, the English, who fared the best, did remain in the cities most often (65%), far more often than the Irish Catholics (51%). The latter nonetheless ranked second in propensity to remain. Ethnic advantages made some difference, but more-common acquisition of property for members of these groups tied them to the cities. Occupation also made very little difference, especially for illiterates. If some small variations distinguished literates, yet for illiterates occupational ranking simply did not influence persistence. The unskilled, at 54%, remained as frequently as those at nonmanual or skilled positions, 58 and 56% of the time, respectively. Other factors were more important than these in shaping the migration and persistence patterns of the uneducated. With their greater proclivity for moving, the illiterates continued to feel the same forces that shaped movement for others; in these processes, as in others, they remained integrated into the social structure and its functions.

The same dynamics shaped persistence and transiency over the longer time span of a decade, 1861–1871 (Table 3.3). The propensity for migrating more often and the determining factors remained distinct and constant. Over ten years, a small number of illiterate and literate adults continued residence in the cities; illiterates, however, were again only about 60% as likely to stay as the others: 21% of them were linked, to 33% of all adults in Hamilton. These crude persistence rates are undoubtedly underestimations. If we adjust them, by estimating the effects of women's name-changes (through the sex ratio) and mortality,

[10] See Roger Schofield, "Age-Specific Mobility in an Eighteenth-Century English Parish," *Annales de Demographie Historique* (1970), 261–274. This has been a common feature of mobility studies, and relates of course to marital status; see also, Katz, *People*, Ch. 3, for example.

Table 3.3
Persistence: Illiterates, 1861–1871 (Census to Census)
(Three Cities Combined)

	Illiterates	
	N	%
Total	365	20.5
A. Ethnicity		
Irish Catholic	239	23.4
Irish Protestant	38	19.2
Scottish Presbyterian	5	9.3
English Protestant	25	20.5
Canadian Protestant	4	6.6
Canadian Catholic	4	12.1
Black	21	17.6
Others	29	17.1
B. Age		
20–29	58	14.5
30–39	121	23.2
40–49	91	22.5
50–59	64	24.9
60–69	25	22.9
70+	5	8.5
C. Sex		
Male	167	24.5
Female	198	18.1
D. Marital status		
Single	15	5.9
Married	314	25.4
Widowed	35	12.3
E. Household status		
Head	182	26.8
Wife	154	26.4
Child	2	4.3
Relative	9	7.1
Boarder	12	7.8
Servant	5	5.8
F. Occupation		
Professional/proprietor	1	25.0
Nonmanual	8	20.0
Skilled	34	25.2
Semiskilled	21	10.9
Unskilled	97	23.8
None	6	0.6

we may approximate persistence rates for the illiterates at about 26% and for the total population at 37% (literates should be slightly more persistent).[11] Admitting the limits of approximation, the conclusion is unchanged. Illiterates maintained their greater likelihood of migrating with the same differential when compared with the others. The uneducated were more transient, in their quests for survival and security; few were trapped for a period as long as one decade.

The processes of persistence and transiency continued to be regular, in some of their features, punctuated especially by the life cycle. The life cycle played an even more pronounced role over the course of the decade, inasmuch as it continued to influence the experiences of both literates and illiterates. The youngest illiterate adults, those aged 20–29 in 1861, persisted least often (15%), with aging and families tying more of the others to the cities. The differences, while constant, remained very small among other age cohorts, and less than those of literate adults. Marital and household status also contributed directly. The married were most likely to stay (25%), with few widows (12%) and even fewer single persons (6%). Husbands and wives, at 26%, persisted far more frequently than others. The youngest, the unmarried, those less attached to work, homes, and families were much more transient (and harder to trace) than illiterates with roots and ties, despite the commonality of movement for all types of individuals. Women persisted less frequently than men (25 to 18%), as among literates. On all measures, illiterates remained less often than literates, although their experiences remained shaped by similar processes.

Ethnicity and occupation, as before, contributed less distinctly. No clear pattern differentiates the experience of the ethnic groups, but the poor Irish Catholics persisted most often (23%). Followed by the English (21%) and the Irish Protestants (19%), their success in homeownership tied these groups to the cities, as we will see again. Among the occupational classes, higher rank brought no results in persistence, and the skilled remained no more often than the unskilled (25 and 24%). Neither ethnicity nor occupational status directly influenced persistence and transiency; their (to us) blurred and ambiguous roles were felt among the educated as well as the uneducated. While the life cycle added an independent determinant to the processes that sorted and moved the population, ethnicity and occupation did not.

Data on persisting heads of households, traced from census and assessment rolls at each end of the decade, allow us to explore the process further with regard to wealth and homeownership. The number

[11] See Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians,* Ch. 9; Katz, *People,* Ch. 3, for the problems of comparing persistence rates.

of four-way-linked illiterate persons is, expectedly, quite small: 82 from the three cities, representing a persistence rate of about 25% of the 1861 linked heads of household. As expected, their transiency rate exceeded that of all four-way-linked household heads in Hamilton, who remained at a rate of about 37%, the consistent difference of a ratio of three-fifths to two-thirds remaining. As we should expect, among this group, sex and the life cycle remained major determinants (Table 3.4). Male household heads, at 28%, were more than two and one-half times as likely to persist; many women undoubtedly found it difficult to continue as heads due to economic pressures, but remarried, or became boarders of relatives. Age in fact played no clear role, as the youngest two cohorts of adults remained most frequently, about 30%, but persistence did not increase with age after this point. The effects of aging were felt earlier by illiterates. The married far exceeded the single or widowed in propensity to remain: 28 to 14 and 13%, respectively. Family and household size, as determined at the earlier date, continued to act directly and positively, reflecting the major influence of the life cycle. Rates of persistence increased directly with family size, from 19% for small families to 30 and 33% for middle- and large-sized ones; household size acted similarly. The life course of the household head and his or her family served as major and independent factors.

Wealth and homeownership also played major roles within the processes of persistence and transiency. Homeownership, especially, provided a direct and independent impetus to staying in the cities,[12] as those owning a home in 1861 remained one-third more often than renters. In fact, the power of property was shared by these illiterates to the same extent as among all persisters in Hamilton; 29% of illiterate owners persisted and 30% of all owners. To these persons, whose drive for property has already been noted, persistence followed from the fact of ownership; this tie, a roof in the city and a measure of security, rooted them and certainly marked their success. Homeowning Irish were among the most likely to stay, followed by the English. For others, to be discussed presently, persistence led to increased opportunities for property of their own and the social mobility it represented. Irish Catholics and English Protestants led among persisting owners. Through this action they were most likely to persist among these heads of households, as homeownership played a very large role in influencing ethnic rates of persistence, too.

The influence of wealth on continuing residence, while distinct, was less clear and powerful for illiterates than for literates. Among the

[12] See Katz, *People*, Ch. 3.

latter, persistence increased linearly with wealth, from 29% among the poor to 35% among the middle ranking, to 44% among those in 80th–89th percentile rankings of wealth. Among illiterates (as Table 3.4, Part 5, shows) the probability of remaining did increase with wealth, but far less regularly. This pattern is highly suggestive, nevertheless; once more, it illustrates the limitations eventuating from illiterates' frequent poverty. Thus, it was those just above the poverty line (40th–59th percentiles) and those in the second quintile, with rates of 30 and 33%, who continued. And of course, these were the household heads most likely to purchase homes. With illiterates' disadvantages and their adaptive strategies, wealth's influences became muted; it was a less important determinant of persistence or migration, and a means for subsistence and adaptation within their larger limits. The life course and home-ownership, in part assisted by wealth, are clearly the most important independent influences on illiterates' persistence over the decade; this pattern closely approximated that which bound literates and their households, as common processes integrated these experiences despite the illiterates' greater mobility.

With the powerful and independent impact of these major factors, it is hardly surprising that the illiterates' proclivity for migrating had sharply declined, after 10 years of persistence. Over the shorter term, from census to assessments, 1870–1872 (a range of from 3 to 14 months in the cities), the dynamics of frequent movement reversed: 84% of illiterates now persisted. Continued residence over the long-term of a decade almost assured the short-term persistence; if this rate were corrected for the effects of mortality and other biases toward underestimation, virtually all would be accounted, I suspect. As a result of this new stability in their ties to the cities, the influence of most factors was tremendously reduced; neither age, sex, marital status, family or household size, nor occupation or ethnicity contributed directly or importantly. In fact, women were more likely to continue than men (100 to 75%) and the widowed more than the married (96 to 75%). Death of course made the major distinctions now. Long-term residence, with its much greater chances for stability, success, and even social mobility, was indeed possible for the uneducated; the forces which impelled their transiency and frequent movements were dramatically reversed. Their propensity for transiency, which marked short-term experience a decade earlier, and the experience of a decade as well were erased. The disadvantaged and uneducated need not be seen as either rootless or paralytically rooted; more mobile they were, but most likely in structured responses to their environments with their opportunities and inequalities. Regular variations must have influenced and ordered their move-

Table 3.4
Persistence: Illiterate Heads of Household, 1861–1871 (Four-way Linkages)

	N	%		N	%		N	%
1. Ethnicity			4. Home ownership			8. Household Size		
Irish Catholic	54	28.6	Own	30	28.6	Small	15	15.0
Irish Protestant	8	29.6	Rent	42	22.9	Medium	51	26.8
Scottish Presbyterian	0	0.0	No information	1	33.3	Large	16	38.1
English Protestant	11	27.5	5. Wealth—percentiles			9. Marital Status		
Canadian Protestant	2	25.0	0–19	17	18.5	Single	1	14.3
Canadian Catholic	0	0.0	20–39	29	29.6	Married	73	27.9
Black	4	16.7	40–59	11	33.3	Widowed	8	12.5
Others	3	9.4	60–79	4	17.4			
Total	82	24.7	80–89	3	27.3			
2. Age			90–94	0	0.0			
20–29	11	29.7	95–98	0	0.0			
30–39	28	31.5	6. Sex					
40–49	18	22.8	Male	76	27.5			
50–59	17	20.9	Female	6	10.9			
60–69	6	16.7	7. Number of children					
70+	2	22.2	Small (0–2)	36	18.9			
3. Occupation			Medium (3–5)	35	29.9			
Nonmanual	5	26.3	Large (6+)	11	33.3			
Skilled	16	26.7						
Semiskilled	10	35.7						
Unskilled	45	26.0						
Unemployed	6	11.8						

ments much as they ordered the paths of others. The disabilities of their ascriptive characteristics, which reduced their opportunities for educational achievements and left them more often poor and disadvantaged, also contributed to their more common transiency and more regular search for a place in which to settle and survive. Gaining the initial foothold depended on ethnic and class advantages denied to most of them. For those able to persist, however, another path toward greater rewards was open; for if they remained, some success was indeed possible.

II. Literacy and Social Mobility

Central to understanding the meaning of literacy in this society are the experiences of those able to persist across the decade. How did they fare in occupation, wealth, and property? Did they lose whatever progress they had made earlier; did most remain poor; or were opportunities available, in this context, to the illiterate? We have reviewed the sociological expectations for their futures, lacking as they did the skills and other attributes that accompany the acquisition of literacy and the process of education. With society becoming ever more modern, industrial, commercial, and institutionalized, the illiterates who remained should have had, in theory, major obstacles to their progress. If this were true, expectations should have been met and additional documentation for the link between education and mobility found. As the preceding pages have indicated, the actual workings of the social process, even with its firm basis in the dominance of ascription, are far from self-evident: the role of literacy continues to be complex. Illiterates did experience significant opportunities for improvement during this period; the implications of this major discovery will be raised after we review the evidence.

Before proceeding, however, the limitations on this analysis must be noted. We lack information, first, about the futures of the majority of illiterates who did not persist in Hamilton, Kingston, or London. This of course remains the central weakness of all mobility research, which students have thus far proved unable to surmount. Most assume that the least successful are most likely to be transient, thus biasing upward the findings of record-linkage studies. Certainly the common results of persistence studies reinforce this conclusion. Nevertheless, evidence can be located that at least suggests that outmigrants may be more likely to improve their positions than others.[13] Until much more evi-

[13] Knights, *Plain People,* 118; Blau and Duncan, *Structure,* 243–275.

dence is gathered, any conclusions must remain tentative; for the present, we point to the prevalence of mobility among all components of these populations and the general representativeness—in ethnicity, occupation, and wealth—of these persisters as legitimating the following conclusions. The second issue is both conceptual and methodological. A concentration on occupation as the major dependent variable has marked most studies of mobility, especially those set in the nineteenth century. Recent work, especially that of Michael Katz, has revealed the quite basic limitations of this focus: not only do individual occupations or broader occupational strata mask wide ranges of differences in prestige or reward as well as task, but occupational mobility does not correlate well with economic, property, or other kinds of mobility.[14] This study, consequently, assesses movement on the three scales of occupation, wealth, and property and their relationships. We begin with the dimension of occupational changes.

The conclusion is straightforward: over the 10 years, occupational class positions were remarkably stable for persisting adult male illiterates (Table 3.5). In the three urban centers, almost 115 men (80%), did not change rank; 15 moved up at least one level (10%) while 18 (12%) slipped downward. This is very little movement for a decade, and certainly provides no evidence of mass occupational decline due to illiteracy. By 1871, therefore, slightly fewer workers were unskilled and semiskilled than had begun the decade at these lowly levels (66 to 71%); and of those occupationally stable ones, only 74% remained in those ranks. Of those who slipped, only 9, or 26%, fell from skilled positions, as illiterates overwhelmingly maintained that status. Only one person, in fact, dropped from nonmanual status to unskilled, an unambiguous decline. Of those who moved upward in rank, almost all (13 of 15) had started as unskilled laborers; 6 achieved skilled work and 2 rose to nonmanual positions, marking real gains. Overall, the amounts of upward and downward movement were the same in total mobility and in levels gained and lost.

Compared to Hamilton's population, the illiterates were more stable, with fewer changing their occupational rank. Despite this greater movement, similar proportions of the linked population remained within each rank at the end of the decade, as with the illiterates. The likelihood of maintaining unskilled or semiskilled positions was the same: 70% of the total linked work force and 66% of the illiterates. At the skilled level, 84% of the total and 71% of the illiterates remained, and among both groups, most movement was of a short distance. A lack of literacy

[14] See Katz, *People,* Ch. 3, esp. 134–141. Compare with the amount of movement discovered by Katz from 1851 to 1861.

Table 3.5
Illiterate Occupational Mobility, 1861–1871 (Males) (Three Cities Combined)

	1871					
1861	Non-manual	Skilled	Semi-skilled	Unskilled	None	*N*
Professional/proprietor						
N	—	—	—	1	—	1
%	—	—	—	100.0	—	0.6
Nonmanual						
N	4	2	—	1	1	8
%	50.0	25.0	—	12.5	12.5	4.8
Skilled						
N	1	24	1	5	3	34
%	2.9	70.6	2.9	14.7	8.8	20.4
Semiskilled						
N	—	1	10	8	2	21
%	—	4.8	47.6	38.1	9.5	12.6
Unskilled						
N	2	6	5	77	7	97
%	2.1	6.2	5.2	79.4	7.2	58.1
None						
N	—	2	—	3	1	6
%	—	33.3	—	50.0	16.7	3.6
Total						
N	7	35	16	95	14	167
%	4.2	20.9	9.6	56.9	8.4	

Mobility summary (with occupations, 1861, 1871)

	N	%
Stable	115	77.7
Upward	15	10.1
Number of ranks	25	
Downward	18	12.2
Number of ranks	24	

had no pronounced impact in differentiating the groups' occupational experience over this decade; stability was most frequent, regardless of education, and illiterates could hope for some small gains. Importantly, of course, they did not plummet downward from earlier attainments of nonmanual or skilled occupations, although they did not have quite the hold that literates had. Illiteracy, in the context of a society industrializing and modernizing, proved itself no insurmountable barrier to main-

taining position or even to gaining. Persistence and adaptation surely were more important. By this time—at least, for these workers—there was little truth in Charles Clarke's stereotypical claim that "the uneducated are sinking, more rapidly and certainly than ever, into the position of mere 'hewers of wood and drawers of water,' socially, mentally and politically. To be more condemned to the galleys for life, to sink into the mud which clings to the wheels of progress and to be at a disadvantage, at every turn, in whatever the world finds for man to do." [15] The uneducated who remained in these cities did not succumb to such pressures; without the promised benefits of education, they did not sink. The upper ranks remained restricted to them, with their origins and lack of literacy skills; their decade-long experience, nevertheless, was far from a negative one, comparing favorably with that of others.

Aging paralleled adjustment, as most movement took place among the youngest cohort of adults. For most workers in this society, the twenties were a period of searching for careers. Almost one-half (44%) of illiterates aged 20–29 in 1861 changed occupational rank, consequently, with more able to rise (25%) than fall (18%) in position. For others, stability was dominant. Ethnic ascription made no more difference than age in these slight variations in occupational rank. Stability was shared by each of the major groups, including the advantaged English Protestants and the disadvantaged Irish Catholics. These Irish held on to their few higher-ranking positions, as downward mobility equalled but did not exceed upward (10%). Blacks were stable as well. Small distinctions due to age or ethnicity were quite minimal in the face of stability. If anything, ethnicity's links with stratification were slightly reduced, as the English, for example, suffered some small downward movement (20%) and no corresponding gains. Small numbers limit this analysis of intragroup differences, however, but do not preclude the conclusion that there was stability and maintenance of position at all levels, and some rises over the decade. Illiteracy, while undoubtedly limiting the attainments of many, did not mean loss of skilled or higher-ranking attainments or no improvement; conversely, for many others, literacy did not guarantee upward mobility.

Occupation, we now recognize, is only one dimension of mobility, and not the most revealing one. Other measures, such as servants, property, and wealth, provide necessary and significant perspectives, which supplement and broaden understanding. To consider wealth, or measures of economic standing, is a more precise and sensitive way of estimating change. In respect of wealth, illiterates displayed much more

[15] Clarke, *Teachers and Teaching (and) Then and Now* (Elora, Ont., 1880), 1.

movement, as did literates too. More importantly, much of their mobility was upward in direction. The base for the discussion of wealth and property mobility narrows to the small group of four-way-linked heads of households from the three cities. With such small numbers, conclusions can only be tentative and suggestive. The total assessed population of Hamilton serves as a control group and as the basis for the percentile ranking of the wealth-holders.[16]

In sharp contrast to stability in occupational rank, upward economic mobility was the dominant experience of the urban illiterates. In Hamilton and Kingston (recall the lack of a comparable category in London in 1861), *almost 60%* of the linked heads of household (38 of 64) moved upward in standing (Table 3.6). Of these mobile but uneducated persons, 18 rose one level, 15 two levels, and 5 three levels. Only 7 household heads, 11%, suffered downward mobility over the span of the decade 1861–1871; 30% remained the same. Not only is this a great deal of movement, but it is an impressive accomplishment for any group, especially for those who lacked education and who had often suffered from other disadvantages as well. Clearly and unambiguously, persisting illiterate heads of households progressed economically over this period, providing important evidence that their lack of literacy did not depress their status as the society changed. The representativeness of these persons is not certain, and their very persistence was probably biased in the direction of increasing wealth, but the improvement is too definite to require qualification. Only 34% of the illiterates who persisted remained poor, but over 70% of them had begun the decade in poverty. The top ranges of wealth (80th–99th percentiles) remained largely closed to the uneducated, as had the top of the occupational hierarchy. Within these limits, though, upward mobility came to the majority of persisters, and downward to a small number. Illiteracy neither resulted in mass decline nor precluded significant progress; undoubtedly illiterates were greatly assisted by their time in the city and their ability to adjust to its ways.[17]

The illiterates' mobility compared favorably with the experience of the linked population of Hamilton. Of those who started poor, 43% remained poor; 57% of the total population who started the decade in poverty were immobile. The proportion of the poor among the entire

[16] The assessment of wealth changed its basis from 1861 to 1871 as well. *Total value,* rather than *total annual value,* became the most inclusive category; this is a larger sum of course, but comparable across the cities. Percentile rankings, and not absolute amounts, form the basis of analysis.

[17] A fascinating analysis of "reading" a city is provided by Steven Marcus, "Reading the Illegible," in *The Victorian City,* ed. Dyos and Wolff, 257–276; see also Daniel Calhoun, "The City as Teacher."

Table 3.6

Illiterates: Economic Mobility, Four-way Linked Heads of Household (1861–1871) (Percentiles, Total Annual Value, 1861—Percentiles, Total Value, 1871)

	1871						
1861	0–19	20–39	40–59	60–79	80–89	90–94	*N*
0–19							
N	2	6	6	3	—	—	17
%	11.8	35.3	35.3	17.6	—	—	25.6
20–39							
N	2	10	9	8	—	—	29
%	6.9	34.5	31.0	27.6	—	—	45.3
40–59							
N	—	2	6	2	1	—	11
%	—	18.2	54.5	18.2	9.1	—	17.2
60–79							
N	—	—	2	1	—	1	4
%	—	—	50.0	25.0	—	25.0	6.3
80–89							
N	—	—	1	—	1	1	3
%	—	—	33.3	—	33.3	33.3	4.7
Total							
N	4	18	24	14	2	2	64
%	6.3	28.1	39.1	21.9	3.1	3.1	

Economic mobility summary

	N	%
Stable	19	29.7
Upward	38	59.4
Number of levels	63	
Downward	7	10.9
Number of levels	8	

linked population fell from 28 to 24%; among illiterates it fell from 71 to 34%. In the middle ranges of wealth (40th–79th percentiles), illiterates increased their standing from 24 to 61%; the total Hamilton group fell from 48 to 40%. Some small movement was possible at the top for the larger group, to which of course only the most exceptional and tiny number of uneducated persons could realistically aspire. Nevertheless, the persisting illiterates proved a special group; less stable than others, they made, relatively, much greater gains. Considering their beginnings, this was no small achievement.

Economic progress, not surprisingly, was shared by virtually all ethnic groups. The Irish Catholic illiterates, in contrast to those in the total population, moved clearly ahead from their earlier positions. Sixty-three percent of them increased their economic standing (11 individuals by two levels, 3 by three); only 4% fell. Fewer than one-third of these persisters remained poor after one decade. The English Protestants also fared very well, although they were now few in number. Of the eight who were four-way linked across the decade, six (86%) improved (three by two levels, two by three), only one declined in economic rank, and only one remained poor. The total extent of their gains was greatest; their ethnic advantages were hardly erased. More importantly though, other groups, especially the Irish, also progressed. Disabilities—of ascription and achievement—were undoubtedly reduced for these illiterates with time, experience, adaptation, and social changes. Persisting illiterates adapted well in this changing society, dominated as it was by the literate and by a social structure still rooted in inequality and in ascription. Their improvement in the context of moderately decreasing economic mobility for the total population and continuing structural rigidity is impressive; it also contradicts common expectations about the roles of literacy and education in economic success. On the one hand, experience and stability in continuing residence obviously attenuated limitations of education and origins, as contemporary studies report.[18] This is important. The nature of their progress, with upward mobility for the majority and departure from poverty, especially compared with the greater stability among the total population, strikes against notions of both the relative and absolute importance of schooling for mobility. Without that achievement, these illiterates still rose, often with small steps, over the decade. Limitations of schooling were surmountable.

In the achievement of economic mobility, aging made remarkably little difference. Proportions remaining poor decreased very gradually with aging, from one-third of those aged 20–29 to 21% of those 50–59, rising again after that point. Mobility and improved position came to household heads of all ages, as persistence and adjustment assisted their progress.

Stability in occupational rank and upward mobility in economic standing were the dominant experiences of the illiterates who persisted in each of the cities from 1861 to 1871. Occupational change, as we have noted, is far less precise an indicator of mobility than change in economic position; measures of their association among the entire population of Hamilton, for example, show little correlation. Katz found that

[18] For example, see Blau and Duncan, *Structure*, 187.

from 1851 to 1861 the relationship between occupational and economic mobility was quite low: phi coefficient (ϕ) = .10; from 1861 to 1871, it was virtually unchanged.[19] Other indicators show that while a knowledge of occupation aids little in predicting economic rank, they were generally close to each other but did not always change together or in the same direction. Among the illiterates there was no necessary connection, or causal link, between economic and occupational mobility (this is illustrated in Table 3.7A). With common economic gains but

Table 3.7
Occupational and Economic Mobility, 1861–1871—Heads (Only Employed)

	All illiterates		Hamilton		Kingston	
A.						
Stable occupationally						
Rise economically	22		14		8	
Stable economically	15		10		5	
Fall economically	4		1		3	
Rise occupationally						
Rise economically	6		4		2	
Stable economically	1		—		1	
Fall economically	—		—		—	
Fall occupationally						
Rise economically	4		2		2	
Stable economically	3		2		1	
Fall economically	1		1		—	
Total	56		34		22	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
B. Frequencies						
Upward	45	60.0	23	57.5	12	48.0
Stable	20	26.7	12	30.0	8	32.0
Downward	10	13.3	5	12.5	5	20.0

Scoring system (to calculate cumulative upward and downward mobility frequencies)

	Stable	Moves up 1 rank	Moves up 2 or more	Moves down 1 rank	Moves down 2 or more
Occupational	0	2	4	–2	–4
Economic	0	3	6	–3	–6

[19] Katz, *People,* 149–160. The scale employed below was suggested to me by Michael B. Katz.

occupational stability, this is hardly surprising, and also reinforces the need of moving beyond occupation as the sole measure of mobility. Nevertheless, gains in occupation were most clearly related to economic improvement: six of seven rising in job level also increased in wealth rank; a loss in occupational level, conversely, led to less likelihood of gaining economically. With a simple additive scale, we may examine these relationships between occupation and economic change, as summarized in Table 3.7B. Examined in this way, we find slightly more stability (27%) with upward mobility for 60% of these illiterates. Few of them (13%) fell. Notwithstanding no clear aggregate mobility in occupations, upward social mobility remains the major experience (and the substance of a general conclusion) when the joint effects from these two dimensions are combined. Mobility is undoubtedly a cumulative and complex process, tied to the structural context, as perceptive students have discovered. Different dimensions and joint effects must be considered; in this perspective, the rise of persisting illiterates is unambiguous.

Home or property ownership constitutes a third dimension of social mobility, one of special significance to the uneducated urban residents, as we discovered in the preceding chapter, and one closely related to their very persistence. This dimension is somewhat independent of other forms of movement, involving choices in the use of resources, adaptive strategies, and cultural traditions. In this dimension, as in economic standing, the illiterates who remained in the cities made solid gains, in Hamilton and Kingston, as well as in London. Among persisters, home-ownership was an important tie; and over the decade, 77% of them retained their holdings or owned other property (Table 3.8). This compares very favorably with the 86% stability in ownership among Hamilton's total linked household heads. A substantial number of others (38%) who began the decade as renters advanced to ownership by 1871, and less than 25% lost their property and became renters. Once again, illiterates compared well with the larger population, of which 34% gained property and 14% lost. Considering that despite their economic gains their resources remained well below those with literacy and ethnic advantages, they stand well indeed. Overall, their rate of ownership in 1871, at 51%, equalled that among all household heads, now 53%. In the context of their earlier success in acquiring property, this is not at all surprising; in the context of the structural and personal disadvantages they confronted, this level of ownership represents a significant accomplishment.

Maintaining ownership or securing property was a central aspect of the mobility experiences of these urban illiterates, whose emphasis on and struggle for property can not be disputed. As part of the manner

Table 3.8
Homeownership–Property Mobility, 1861–1871 (Four-way Linked Heads) (Three Cities Combined)

	1871			
1861	Own	Rent	No data	Total
Own				
N	23	7	—	30
%	76.7	23.3	—	36.6
Rent				
N	19	28	3	50
%	38.0	56.0	6.0	60.9
No data				
N	—	2	—	2
%	—	100.0	—	2.4
Total				
N	42	37	3	82
%	51.2	45.1	3.7	

Property summary

	N	%
Stable	51	66.2
Gaining	19	25.7
Losing	7	9.1

in which they confronted the city and faced its threats to their survival, purchasing homes signified success in adaptive strategies and a path to further mobility, as well as a major achievement in its own right. This was particularly true of the Irish, whose relatively high rate of ownership was noted by 1861. They in fact were the only ethnic group to increase substantially their proportions owning homes over the decade; their cultural emphasis, which others have discovered among Irish laborers, continued over the period, propelling their rates of ownership.[20] Fourteen of the Irish Catholics gained property, while only four lost and two-thirds were stable; their gains parallel those of other Irish.

[20] Katz, *People*, comes to the same conclusion. See also Ch. 2, above; Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress;* Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); K. N. Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1976); D. R. Esslinger, *Immigrants in the City* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975); M. P. Weber, *Social Change in an Industrial Town* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976); Hershberg *et al.*, "Occupations and Ethnicity in Five Nineteenth-Century Cities," *Historical Methods Newsletter,* 7 (1974), 174–216.

Illiterates joined in this Irish drive, seizing an important and visible sign of settlement, adaptation, and success. Irish Catholics, as in other dimensions of mobility, made relatively the greatest progress in this decade; homeownership was a major object within their grasp.

Like the relationship between occupational and economic mobility, the relationship between economic and property mobility was less than perfectly direct. Property represented in large measure an independent path and dimension of mobility. Measures of their association, as Katz has found in Hamilton, were very weak, and change in property status had rather less relation to other factors than had movement in other dimensions.[21] Among the illiterates, there was some tendency for those gaining in wealth to purchase homes, but it was far from universal (Table 3.9A). Nine of those rising in economic position (30%) gained in property. But very few lost their homes, whether they were stable or declining economically, and a few were able to gain property while stable or falling in wealth rank. When the joint influence of these dimensions of mobility are examined (again with the additive system), we find that most illiterates who persisted were able to increase both their economic rank and their chances of ownership (Table 3.9B). Over 60% achieved a net gain, with only 15% losing and 23% stable. The sum of the decade experience was positive.

The mobility of these illiterates may be illustrated by several examples. The Dillon, Daylet, and Lavelle families, all resident in Hamilton in 1861 and 1871, exemplify the processes and progress that marked the illiterates' experience. J. M. Dillon, born in Ireland and brought up as a Roman Catholic, was a 32-year-old laborer in 1861. Residing in a rented frame one-story house, with his wife and four children (two sons, two daughters), he was poor. Ranking in the 20th–39th percentiles (second quintile) of assessed wealth, he was able to send only one child, a son, to school. Ten years later, Dillon was neither a laborer nor poor. Working as a hotelkeeper and its caretaker, he also owned his own house, made of brick, and sent three of the four sons who lived at home to school (only one daughter remained at home). The decade brought real success to the Dillons; they ranked well above the poverty line, being now in the 60th–79th wealth percentiles, and reported real property worth $1000. Clearly, Dillon was an exceptional person, whose illiteracy did not block the possibility of mobility in either occupation or wealth.

The more common process of occupational stability accompanied by gains in wealth and stability or gain in property can be seen in the case of the Daylets. The family head, a 50-year-old Irish Catholic laborer, lived, in 1861, with his wife and two daughters in a one-story brick

[21] Katz, *People*, Ch. 3.

Table 3.9
Economic and Property Mobility, 1861–1871 (Heads)

	All illiterates		Hamilton		Kingston	
A.						
Stable economically						
Gain a home	2		2		—	
Stable	16		8		8	
Lose home	2		1		1	
Rise economically						
Gain a home	9		5		4	
Stable	20		11		9	
Lose home	1		1		—	
Fall economically						
Gain a home	2		1		1	
Stable	8		6		2	
Lose home	1		1		—	
Total	61		36		25	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
B. Frequencies						
Upward	39	62.9	25	67.6	14	56.0
Stable	14	22.5	7	18.9	7	28.0
Downward	9	14.5	5	13.5	4	16.0

Scoring system (to calculate cumulative upward and downward mobility frequencies)

	Stable	Moves up 1 rank	Moves up 2 or more	Moves down 1 rank	Moves down 2 or more
Economic	0	3 Gains	6 Loses	–3	–6
Property	0	2	–2		

house that the family had managed to purchase. The Daylets, who were poor (20th–39th percentiles), not only owned a home but also kept five cows, no doubt using livestock in the manner discussed before. By 1871, Daylet and his wife lived alone in their brick house, their children having left home. He was still a laborer; but the Daylets were no longer poor. They reported property worth $650 and ranked among the 40th–59th percentiles of the assessed population.

The Lavelle family provides a final example. In 1861, Lavelle was a 36-year-old Irish Catholic laborer, who lived in a rented one-story frame house with his family of three boys and four girls. An eighth child,

another daughter, had died within the year. A female relative joined this already large family. The Lavelles, burdened by the size of their household, were desperately poor; they stood within the lowest quintile of the assessed wealthholders, with a total annual worth of $18. By 1871 they owned their own home and reported real property valued at $500 (the family now numbered nine, with two parents and seven children). None of the children attended school in either census year, but the family now owned its place of residence and had also risen above the poverty line. They now ranked among the 40th–59th percentiles of the assessed population.

These three cases, I should add, are not atypical. They represent the common experiences of many persisting illiterate-headed households and suggest the opportunities for progress that time, stability, and adaptation made possible, even for those without education.

In all measures of mobility, the persistent illiterates fared well over the years 1861–1871. These experiences add an important perspective to the role of literacy in the changing society. How significant and requisite were the skills of literacy—reading and writing—when those without them were able to make solid, substantial gains through continuing residence in these cities? What were the benefits of education? Occupationally, the uneducated held their own, not cascading toward the lowest end of the occupational hierarchy as the cities continued their transformation to modern and industrial forms. Less volatile than others whose movement was short-range and limited, they did not lose skilled or nonmanual positions. Economically, they progressed much more frequently, making solid progress toward the middle ranks of the population, and in property ownership they advanced as well. Of these illiterates, the Irish Catholics stand out. Beginning the decade lowest in wealth and position, they advanced the farthest. The English, who started as relatively high-ranking, maintained their status and gained in wealth, notwithstanding that their ascriptive advantages probably diminished. None of the ethnic groups, in fact, can be accurately described as downwardly mobile, as this progress was a shared experience. Persistence undoubtedly contributed strongly to the determination of increased success, but it alone provides insufficient evidence at present to account for the accomplishments of these uneducated persons. We must emphasize, moreover, that this progress occurred in the context of continuing structural inequality, heightening the significance and implications of illiterate progress.[22]

[22] Other evidence exists for social mobility for illiterates. Especially interesting is William H. Sewell, Jr., "Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century European City," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 7 (1976), 217–233. Sewell reports that sons of

The highest ranks of wealth and occupation were closed to illiterates, in 1871 and 1861; there were definite limits on the mobility of those lacking in education, regardless of other characteristics. Larger proprietary, professional, and clerical positions were rarely possible, but skilled and smaller proprietary posts were available to attain and to hold. Similarly, the upper reaches of wealth were largely obstructed. Yet within these broad limits, illiteracy clearly did not prevent these individuals from some success in mid-nineteenth-century urban society, or from improving their places over the decade. Literacy was not a requirement, and certainly many with some schooling fared no better than, if as well as, the unschooled and illiterate. These data demand that some qualifications be applied to the promises of the school promoters and to the dire predictions for the futures of the uneducated. Having explored the limits on literacy extensively in the preceding chapter, we may now add that these limits, largely nonindependently operating ones, were reduced with the passage of time, the ability to adapt, and the experience of urban life. The significance of literacy was not a direct or sufficient one in the processes of success and mobility. For some it undoubtedly contributed; for others it made little difference, as illiterates could certainly improve their places without this achievement, and with other, more substantial disadvantages as well. The rise of ideologies of education took place in the face of this evidence, as the hegemony of the school and its moral bases were ascendant despite the real possibility of continuing social contradictions. Mobility became intertwined with schooling and so persisted inseparably from this era on, developing a

---

peasants, in-migrants to Marseilles at mid-century, were more likely to be illiterate than native-born workers' sons (33 to 21%) but in occupations "bested all categories of workers' sons by margins ranging from 30% for skilled workers' sons to over 250% for unskilled workers' sons," 222–223. Conversely, Michael Sanderson ("Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England," *Past and Present,* 56 [1972], 75–104) shows that literacy by no means guaranteed social mobility or protection from downward movement, either intra- or intergenerationally. Soltow and Stevens ("Economic Aspects of School Participation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century United States," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 8 [1977], 221–243), argue that "it appears unlikely that the common school served as a vehicle for occupational mobility. Although the expectations of common school reformers may have anticipated that school enrollment would eventually result in upward social and economic mobility, it is highly unlikely that such expectations were rewarded," 242. Moreover, they conclude, "The implication is that the common school institution did not alter patterns of economic inequality, but, rather, tended to perpetuate them," 243. For a more normative, and less convincing approach, see Robert Higgs, "Race, Skills, and Earnings: American Immigrants in 1909," *Journal of Economic History,* 31 (1971), 420–428. See also, Chs. 4, 5, below.

life of its own in its reflections of popular ideology and social order.[23] As we have seen, within the perceptions of those throughout the society were sufficient evidences of advancement through achievement of literacy and schooling to lend the required support to secure its domination despite other evidence. It is this other evidence that impels us to look further and to question theoretical relationships rooted first in these perceptions.

Another aspect of the experience over the decade is not as positive as what we have seen thus far; this involves changing household and marital status. The pattern is a continuation of the prevalence of widowhood and single-headedness found in 1861, threatening the security and status of female illiterates. In each city, the ratio of household heads to spouses rose, as 13% of wives became heads of households. More than the result of normal aging, most cases of changing household status occurred before the years of greatest mortality: during the thirties (when 17% changed) and the forties (when 13% did). In addition, in each city, a 50% increase in the proportion of illiterates who were widowed took place, with 13% of those married in 1861 becoming widowed by the end of the decade. Here too, it was not only the oldest who suffered such changes, with 11 and 22% becoming widowed in their thirties and forties, respectively. Women were victimized by poverty and the loss of spouses at a rate twice that of men. An excess of women should of course be expected in this population and with the sex differential in mortality, but the effect was to complicate the lives of those so disadvantaged.[24] These changes were hardly unique to illiterates of course, for many others suffered similarly. In spite of overall success, though, these women continued to be plagued with widowhood and greater threats of poverty, alone in a society with little place for their occupational or economic independence.

III. The Illiterates in 1871

A final perspective on the place of these persisting urban illiterates derives from the nature of the aggregate changes in their position in the social structure over the decade. This brief review places their mobility more fully into context; and, while confirming their gains, it reinforces

[23] See Anselm Strauss, *The Contexts of Social Mobility* (Chicago: Aldine, 1971); Katz, "The Origins of Public Education," *History of Education Quarterly,* 16 (1976), 381–407.

[24] See, for two examples, the recent studies of S. L. N. Rao, "On Long-Term Mortality Trends in the United States, 1850–1968," *Demography,* 10 (1973), 405–419; M. R. Haines, "Mortality in Nineteenth-Century America," *Demography,* 14 (1977), 311–332.

Table 3.10
Occupational Status, 1871—Illiterates (Census–Census Linked)[a]

	Total illiterates	1861 Total %	1861 Linked %
Nonmanual			
N	9		
%	5.6	5.1	4.9
Skilled			
N	37		
%	22.8	17.4	21.1
Semiskilled			
N	21		
%	12.9	24.7	13.0
Unskilled			
N	96		
%	59.3	52.3	59.6
Total	162		

[a] Total illiterates refers to 1871 positions; 1861 total refers to positions of all illiterates located in that year; 1861 linked refers to the 1861 standing of persisting illiterates (the latter is used in the text).

our understanding of the restrictions on those without schooling and on the majority with other, ascriptive disadvantages. For despite their important opportunities to rise without benefit of literacy, which belie the contemporary and more recent emphases on the need for education, the structure of inequality persisted, rooted only indirectly on achieved characteristics.

First, consider their occupational distribution. For persisting workers came a slight overall gain in job status, compared with both all illiterates in 1861 and their own ranking in that year (Table 3.10). At the top, among smaller proprietors, virtually the same numbers remained, while the skilled level saw a small but important increase in their representation. Virtually no net change occurred at the lower levels. Gains were made, but they were very small steps, as the net aggregate shift was very slightly upward in the context of overwhelming stability. Of more consequence are the ethnic patterns. Ethnically stratified occupational differentiation, very similar to that of ten years earlier, persisted in 1871.[25] The English Protestants remained high-ranking among the illiterates. Two-thirds of them were skilled (47%) or higher (20%); only one-third were unskilled. This distribution represented no aggregate change,

[25] On the persistence of stratification systems, see Katz, *People*, esp. Ch. 2, and the literature cited there.

however; their gains were made earlier, and their advantages carried them no further. The Irish, in contrast, were able to move slightly forward, as their proportions unskilled slightly decreased (72 to 66%) and skilled or higher increased (15 to 19%). The overall context, then, was one of dominant stability, some small improvements, and the persistence of ascriptively rooted structural inequality. The stratification of the illiterates continued in occupation, as before, as the range began to narrow with industrialization and change.

Wealth provides the second measure, representing of course the dimension of greatest change and most progress for the illiterates. The decade began with over 70%, yet concluded with less than 50% below the poverty line (40th percentile) (Table 3.11). Middle-range status (40th–79th percentiles) was attained by almost 50%, a substantial accomplishment, and four persons stood even higher. As with occupation, ethnic stratification persisted in the distribution of wealth. Not one English Protestant illiterate remained poor now; all reached middle-class economic standing. The Irish Catholics, despite their impressive attainments, continued to be poorer, with 47% now above the poverty line, the others poor. Irish Protestants fared similarly. Female heads of households, who were found more often in the latter year, also improved their economic standing over the period. One-half of these heads escaped from poverty, reducing their overall plight and mediating slightly the hardships of widowhood—and that double disadvantage that uneducated women faced in this sexually-stratified society that allowed them so few opportunities for independence or economic improvement.

Table 3.11
Wealth of Illiterates, 1871 (Census–Assessment Linked Heads) [a]

Percentile	Dollars	Total illiterates		1861 Total	1861 Linked
		N	%	%	%
0–19	0–150	8	5.6	35.5	25.6
20–39	151–400	59	41.5	37.8	45.3
40–59	401–680	45	31.7	12.7	17.2
60–79	681–1,395	26	18.3	8.8	6.3
80–89	1,396–2,480	—	—	4.2	4.7
90–94	2,481–4,550	2	1.4	—	—
95–98	4,551–12,750	1	0.7	—	—
99–100	12,751+	1	0.7	—	—

[a] Total illiterates refers to 1871 positions; 1861 total refers to positions of all illiterates located in that year; 1861 linked refers to the 1861 standing of persisting illiterates (the latter is used in the text).

Even with extensive opportunities and frequent mobility, the social structure of illiteracy remained intact in its rigid structure of inequality. The extent of differentiation by ethnicity did narrow; while ascription remained strong, its impact was reduced. Perhaps achievement would rise in significance as ascription declined. Further inquiries should focus on these relationships.

As in 1861, wealth related to occupation rather imperfectly. All occupational ranks of illiterates improved their economic standing, however. Sixty-one percent of the unskilled were still poor, but most had climbed from the 0–19th into the 20th–30th economic percentiles. Many more scaled poverty's walls than had done so earlier. Of the semiskilled, a small majority (54%) stood above that line in 1871, when most had been poor earlier. Skilled workers advanced the most, moreover. Seventy percent of them ranked among the middle ranges of wealth, and none of the small proprietors were now poor, a testament to their higher occupational status. With time and experience, following from adaptation and continuing residence in the cities, came the kinds of commensurate rewards that had often been denied in 1861. This attainment no doubt came later to many who were uneducated than to those with some schooling; illiteracy, if a handicap, was not an insurmountable obstacle either to economic improvement or to hopes of securing rewards commensurate with work. By the same token, literacy by itself held no guarantees of wealth, mobility, or even fair rewards.

Homeownership represented the final dimension in which the illiterates significantly advanced over the decade. This, of course, formed one aspect of change independent of occupational and wealth shifts. In each city, by 1871, we find a net gain in the share of household heads owning their homes: from 37% (of linked heads) in 1861 to 46%. Other gains, especially in wealth, were translated into property as part of the adjustment and subsistence efforts of these illiterates. Women fared well in property acquisition and in confronting their social insecurity and frequent loss of spouses. Their rate of ownership in 1871 slightly exceeded that of male heads of households. Once again, the Irish Catholics led in the move toward more frequent ownership. Forty-three percent now owned, compared with 30% a decade earlier. The English also maintained their standing, largely through their greater economic resources, with 50% owning homes in 1871. As with wealth, though, they did not increase as did the Irish; their improvement could come earlier and presumably with less efforts to reduce disadvantages. Overall, adaptation, persistence, and improvement were possible for many illiterates, and were translated into property acquisition—their approach to security in the changing city.

Table 3.12
Household Summary Data, 1871 (Census Linked Heads) Illiterates

	Hamilton		1861 Link	1861 Total	Kingston		1861 Link	1861 Total	London		1861 Link	1861 Total	Total illiterates		1861 Total	1861 Linked
	N	%	%	%	*N*	%	%	%	*N*	%	%	%	*N*	%	%	%
A. Household size																
Small	30	34.9	26.7	36.0	12	27.3	25.0	31.4	12	30.0	15.6	28.3	54	32.1	68.4	23.1
Medium	38	44.2	51.2	50.3	23	52.3	52.3	59.1	20	50.0	67.5	58.6	81	48.2	54.8	59.8
Large	18	20.9	22.1	13.4	7	15.9	22.7	6.9	8	20.0	17.5	11.8	33	19.6	11.6	17.2
Mean		5.12	5.21	4.7		4.89	5.05	4.4		5.53	5.4	4.6				
B. Family size																
Small	40	46.5	47.7	61.2	23	52.3	50.0	58.5	13	32.5	42.5	61.8	76	44.7	60.7	47.1
Medium	28	32.6	38.4	31.8	15	34.1	45.5	36.5	14	35.0	42.5	31.6	57	33.5	32.9	41.2
Large	18	20.9	14.0	7.0	6	13.6	4.5	5.0	13	32.0	15.0	6.6	37	21.8	6.4	11.8
Mean		3.16	2.84	2.2		2.77	2.57	2.2		3.38	3.10	2.1				
C. Boarders																
None	73	84.9	87.2	80.9	40	90.9	90.9	84.4	37	92.5	85.0	85.5	150	88.8	85.1	86.9
One or more	12	15.1	12.8	20.1	4	9.1	9.1	15.6	3	7.5	15.0	14.5	19	11.2	14.9	13.1

D. Servants																
None	79	90.9	94.2	94.1	43	97.7	97.7	94.1	39	97.5	100.0	100.0	161	94.7	96.3	96.5
One or more	7	9.1	5.8	5.9	1	2.3	2.3	5.9	1	2.5	—	—	9	5.3	3.7	3.5
E. Relatives																
None	85	98.8	83.7	83.5	41	93.2	81.8	88.6	36	90.0	80.0	75.0	162	95.3	83.1	82.3
One or more	1	1.2	16.3	16.5	3	6.8	18.2	11.4	4	10.0	20.0	25.0	8	4.7	16.9	17.7
F. Household status																
Head	102	53.4	48.7	40.8	51	57.3	50.6	31.3 [a]	50	59.5	48.2	41.1	203	55.3	38.2	50.1
Wife	71	37.1	42.9	35.3	30	33.7	38.2	25.5 [a]	30	35.7	44.7	36.8	131	35.7	32.8	42.4
Child	1	0.5	1.0	3.4	1	1.1	—	2.0	—	—	—	1.6	2	0.5	2.6	—
Relative	2	1.1	1.0	6.4	3	3.4	2.2	6.3	3	3.6	5.9	10.2	8	2.2	7.1	2.5
Boarder	16	6.3	4.7	6.9	3	3.4	3.4	15.2	1	1.2	1.2	5.1	20	5.4	4.8	3.6
Servant	2	1.1	1.0	4.1	1	1.1	2.2	5.9	—	—	—	5.1	3	0.8	8.9	1.1
G. Marital status																
Single	4	2.1	3.1	12.5	5	5.6	5.6	17.8	4	4.7	4.7	14.2	13	3.6	14.4	4.1
Married	148	78.5	85.9	69.0	69	77.5	87.6	69.1	62	72.9	84.7	70.7	279	76.9	69.5	86.3
Widowed	37	19.6	10.5	18.3	15	16.9	6.7	12.9	19	22.4	10.6	15.1	71	19.6	16.1	9.6

[a] 13.7% were soldiers and their wives.

The size and structure of illiterate-headed families, finally, changed over this decade, reflecting larger social changes and the progress these persisters made. Families and households headed by illiterates varied principally by virtue of aging and an increase in adolescent-dependency relationships, which marked larger shifts toward more "modern" families (Table 3.12). The mean number of children at home increased in all three cities while the size of the household fell, very few now containing relatives or boarders. Larger families, consistent with other findings of prolonged adolescent dependency, also illustrate the results of adaptation, increased wealth, and more frequent homeownership. Success in these dimensions reduced the need for children to leave home as early as they had in 1861—a major shift in the experience of growing up.[26] As we shall see, there was less dependence on manipulation of the family size for adjustment and survival. Despite continued insecurity and poverty, the pressures on the family diminished with persistence and its consequences.

During a time of change and early industrialization, persisting illiterates experienced a decade of improvement. Stable occupationally, they moved forward and upward in economic standing and purchased homes and property more often than before. Their accomplishments, without the much-bespoken advantages of educational achievement, are important; they force us to recognize that such gains were made by individuals who lacked the skills of literacy and the experience of schooling. Illiterates, at least those able to spend a decade or more in a nineteenth-century city (who were not much wealthier or higher ranking than transients), did not lose earlier occupational gains, were not precluded from gaining more wealth and moving out of poverty, and were not obstructed from acquiring property. Learning to live in these cities and to succeed modestly required the education that comes of experience—of "reading" the city, of adapting and adjusting—more than the education that comes of reading and writing the printed word.

As literacy did not necessarily bring success, its absence did not guarantee failure. The force of ascription was reduced by 1871, but was still substantial, dominating over that of achievement. Illiterates, moreover, did not live in a social or cultural sphere of their own, segregated and isolated; they were strongly influenced by and suffered the inequalities of the urban social structure. Integrated into its processes, they were stratified and differentiated, as were those who were able to acquire more education but fared no better. In "skilful" and competitive times, the uneducated did not "sink"; unable to read or write, they

[26] See Katz, *People*, Ch. 5; Ch. 4, below.

need not "starve outright." Some, to the contrary, moved ahead. The implications for contemporary reformers' school promotion, for their promises of education, and for the historical bases of modern social theory need not be belabored; they are obvious and clear. These findings, based on case studies, raise important questions that challenge our received wisdom and demand its qualification and re-examination. The resolution of these many essential questions sets the stage for the next chapters, and, even more, the stage for further comparative inquiries.