

Unit 11: Video 1 Transcript

Q5: How did the rural population relate to the political issues of the British administration?

A: How did the rural population relate to the political issues of the —leading up to the 1837 Rebellion for sure. Well, there's a couple of ways to answer that. Number one, they were heavily involved in doing all the fighting, but they were led by middle-class lawyers who had a very different sense of what was wrong. So you read some of the address to the six counties from 1837 and every one of the issues is about how the people looking for jobs in the British administration aren't getting any respect. And the members of the House of Assembly are not getting the ear of the governor. But if you look at the crises that were facing Lower Canada, the countryside, immigration and the spread of cholera, the bad harvests. There were some areas in the 1820s, for example, where the Catholic Church was going around collecting donations to help feed the poor. And you don't get any sense of that in the discontent articulated by the middle-class politicians. So when I looked at Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, there were two people who were involved in the political events of the 1830s. They were both local notaries. So they were educated, the middle class. And I found, I'm not saying they don't — people's discontent didn't exist, but I found no echo of the political controversies in this parish. People were focused on their local affairs. And in farming communities, the number-one issue has to be survival from year to year. And the reality for a lot of people is the growing season is very short. Can't take a lot of time away from your work. The festive season is much longer, but I think people were probably less interested in politics in the festive season, just like now. So I didn't find a great deal of echo back and forth between the political leaders and their concerns. I didn't hear any resonance in the countryside. And even worse, I didn't hear any resonance in the political leaders' debates about the problems of the countryside. It's middle-class nationalism that appealed to members of the middle class I think, more so than the average farmer. Who was it — was it Fernand Ouellette that said, the education system wasn't going anywhere? It was all parlot [ph] of — parlot the chattering of politicians. So I didn't see any evidence of it in my parish, and I didn't see on the larger scale

evidence of it in other parts of rural Lower Canada. In fact the only area that there was actual fighting was some parishes in the Richelieu Valley near Montreal and Saint-Eustache on the other side. Could be that people were intimidated by the British military. When the six counties address was going to take place, they expected thousands more people than actually showed up. So I think people made their own calculations on how much political—the political crisis articulated by their leaders actually meant to them.