The evolution of the historical literature on land tenure in northern New Spain has closely paralleled general historiographical trends of New Spain’s far northern frontier. For many years, “borderlands” history focused almost exclusively upon the study of those institutions which have been stereotyped as peculiar to the frontier, the mission and the presidio; upon political and administrative history; or upon biographies of notable figures. These studies laid important foundations, but, in general, borderlands historians were slow to adopt the social science methodologies of the new social and economic history which became popular in the 1960s in most fields of historical inquiry. Well after both its Anglo and Hispanic progenitors began to be studied from a perspective which emphasized social and economic structures and relationships, did the geographical area which corresponds to the Provincias Internas (all of today’s border states plus Sinaloa, Durango and Baja California) begin to receive

1 The author would like to thank Donna Guy, Murdo MacLeod, Michael C. Meyer and David Weber for commenting on earlier drafts of this article.

2 Authors of a good many of these studies numbered among the scores of students trained by Herbert E. Bolton, “The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish-American Colonies,” American Historical Review, 23 (October 1917), 42-61. For examples of mission history, see Bolton, The Padre on Horseback (San Francisco, 1932); Maynard Geiger, The Life and Times of Fray Junípero Serra, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1959); John Francis Bannon, S.J., The Mission Frontier in Sonora, 1620-1687 (New York, 1955); and the several histories of Jesuit missions by Peter Masten Dunne, S.J. Works which focus on administrative history include: Max Moorhead, The Presidio: Bastion of Spanish Borderlands (Norman, 1975); Luis Navarro García, Sonora y Sinaloa en el siglo XVII (Seville, 1967) and Don José de Gálvez y la Comandancia General de las Provincias Internas del Norte de Nueva España (Seville, 1964); María del Carmen Velázquez, Establecimiento y pérdida del septentrión de México (México, 1974); Mario Hernández Sánchez Barba, La última expansión española en América (Madrid, 1957); Guillermo Porras Muñoz, Iglesia y estado en Nueva Vizcaya, 1562-1821 (Pamplona, 1966); John L. Kessell, Friars, Soldiers and Reformers: Hispanic Arizona and the Sonora Mission Frontier, 1767-1856 (Tucson, 1976). For a larger sampling, see Oakah L. Jones, Jr., “The Spanish Borderlands: A Selected Reading List,” The Journal of the West, 8 (January 1969), 137-142. One notable exception which did have an economic focus was the study by Robert C. West: The Mining Community in Northern New Spain: The Parral Mining District (Berkeley, 1949).
similar attention. Thus, our understanding of the social and economic history of the region is still rudimentary, and this is nowhere more evident than in the area of landholding patterns and agrarian development.

These lacunae are much less pronounced for the rest of New Spain. The historical literature on colonial land tenure in Mexico has periodically been summarized, most recently and perhaps most perceptively in Eric Van Young’s historiographical article in the *Latin American Research Review*. A solid analytical account of the development of the hacienda in New Spain based on the prodigious scholarship described by Van Young is the essay by Enrique Florescano, just published in the new *Cambridge History of Latin America*.

The first study of the hacienda to use primary sources extensively and to look at factors of production more systematically was that of François Chevalier in 1952. Relying on land records in national and private archives which emphasized title history, Chevalier projected a model which portrayed the hacienda as a very large, self-sufficient, seigneurial estate. The hacienda was undercapitalized and dependent upon a servile labor force working for a *mayordomo* in the absence of the landlord, who lived in Mexico City or some other urban center and engaged in conspicuous consumption.


Chevalier’s characterization of the hacienda as semi-feudal was very much in line with the liberal critiques of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which saw the hacienda as an obstacle to capitalistic agrarian development. Although Chevalier located the impetus for the turning inward of the hacienda in the mining decline of the seventeenth century, his interpretation correlated well with Woodrow Borah’s *New Spain’s Century of Depression*, which focused upon the importance of the Indian demographic decline. The work of Borah and Lesley B. Simpson provided support for Chevalier’s thesis that debt peonage became the most common labor arrangement designed to hold a shrinking labor supply on the estate, and it also clarified the seeming ease with which Spanish landlords could acquire land. These procedures were described in detail by Chevalier as he explained the concentration of land in the hacienda.

Subsequent studies of central and southern Mexico were the first to challenge the universal validity of Chevalier’s model. Although they found that great estates did exist, historians like Charles Gibson in *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* discerned a wide variety in the size of landholdings in central Mexico as well as a highly commercialized agriculture geared to a large market. Gibson also did not find that debt peonage dominated labor relations. Likewise, the landlords in William Taylor’s work on Oaxaca are almost the antithesis of Chevalier’s “rich and powerful men” of the north. In the center and south, the hacienda is characterized as relatively weak and unstable, burdened by debt, and frequently foiled in its expansion by a resistant Indian society.

Still more recent studies of the Mexican “near north”—the Bajío, Querétaro, Guadalajara, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí—have yielded an incredibly complex mosaic of rural estates, in part because they have looked more closely at factors of production other than land: elements such as labor, technology, capital investment and credit. The methodologies and conclusions of these works provide important insights for study of the far north.

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8 (Berkeley, 1951).
9 *Land and Society*, pp. 267-276.
10 (Stanford, 1964).
The size of landholdings in the near north varied considerably in time and space. Landholding was not static, but in a state of constant change reflected in the relatively rapid turnover of properties at least until the late colonial period. A substantial group of smallholders and tenant farmers coexisted with large estate owners. These rancheros and tenants engaged mostly in maize production, a risky enterprise, while large-scale commercial haciendas tended to shift production to wheat. Haciendas were overwhelmingly market-oriented, and as the market demands and population grew, the tendency toward consolidation of estates increased. Van Young emphasizes increased demographic pressure in the Guadalajara countryside as the major factor in the proliferating seizure of Indian resources by non-Indians in the late eighteenth century.

Estates employed a variety of labor arrangements, ranging from repartimiento drafts to permanent wage laborers and sharecroppers. Debt often functioned as an inducement, rather than as a mechanism to bind the workers. Increasing debt, or more substantial advances in pay, could indicate a greater degree of worker bargaining power. When either an oversupply of labor or the weakened market position of an estate circumscribed this bargaining power, the level of debt tended to drop. Population increase during the eighteenth century created a buyer’s market in labor with negative implications for rural workers.

The market orientation required sizeable capital investments in mills and irrigation; and technology (in irrigation and stock-breeding, for example), although not advanced, was adequate to promise modest profitability. Rather than a closed landowning elite sustaining itself on large estates, historians of the near north have documented a large-scale flow of mercantile and mining capital into land, especially in the eighteenth century, and they have demonstrated the complexity of credit arrangements with the Church and merchants. By the eighteenth century, even the miners could not match the control of credit and capital marshaled by the merchants, making the latter’s control over the primary producers quite complete.

In short, the near north did not conform through all time and space to the seigneurial estate pattern in spite of the fact that this area was included as part of Chevalier’s north. The aspect of the Chevalier thesis most clearly wanting as a universal explanation was the sustained subsistence orientation

14 Van Young, “‘Mexican Rural History,’” p. 23.
of estates. The hacienda, as any form of land tenure, was not static; insularity and self-sufficiency may have characterized the great estate when times were bad, but as markets were created or revived, haciendas opened out to meet the demand. Interestingly, the conditions of peonage Chevalier believed to be entrenched in the seventeenth century were in fact more representative of the eighteenth century and then not as a function of a feudalistic social relationship, but as a result of a concerted effort by land-hungry hacendados to bring the peasantry into the money economy.16

If the Chevalier model has been tested and found incomplete for the near north, few have questioned the applicability of Chevalier’s thesis to the more arid far north where the limited possibilities for irrigated agriculture, the weakness of markets, the insecurity provoked by warring Indians, and the shortage of labor were most propitious to the growth of the huge landed estate. Grazing grants had to be larger because the more arid the climate, the more grassland needed per head of livestock. Here the rich and powerful men of the north, almost always military men or miners, held sway in their mini-fiefdoms.17 The immense rural estates of captains like Rodrigo de Río de Losa, Francisco de Urdiñola, and Diego de Ibarra in Nueva Vizcaya and Nuevo León provided the telling proof. Subsequent studies have certainly not diminished the thesis that extremely large estates were more numerous in the far north, but the way in which they functioned as well as the validity of their absolute dominance has begun to be questioned.18

The published studies relating to land tenure in the far north fall into the categories which Eric Van Young denotes as entrepreneurial (focusing on a single enterprise) or sectoral (analyzing one aspect of rural relationships).19 The most comprehensive work of the entrepreneurial variety is Charles Harris’ study of the Sánchez Navarro family enterprise in Coahuila,20 and it provides a strong case for the stability of hacienda ownership at least from the late colonial period on. The Sánchez Navarro case also conforms to the stereotype in size, consisting of more than 800,000 acres

16 Van Young, Hacienda and Market, p. 344.
17 Chevalier, Land and Society, p. 149ff.
18 Although Chevalier found small independent farmers settled in some areas, he believed that average-sized estates were not the common unit pattern for the north and that ranchos were a phenomenon of the nineteenth century, growing out of sharecropper or tenant arrangements; Land and Society, pp. 149, 226. Because there are so few published studies of land tenure for the northern fringe, the following commentary is preliminary, primarily serving to point out the work which remains to be done and the possible sources to be tapped.
19 “Mexican Rural History,” pp. 31-33. The most complete agrarian studies which analyze the interrelationship of a wide variety of social and economic factors are those which Van Young terms “regional.”
20 A Mexican Family Empire.
by the end of the colonial period, in its extensive employment of debt peonage, in its inefficient use of land, and in its reliance on stockraising and traditional methods of production. Where the stereotype breaks down is in Harris’ demonstration of the business mentality, profit motive, and market orientation of the family enterprise. The study emphatically corroborates one of the salient themes of recent hacienda historiography: the crucial importance of access to capital and credit. The main reason that the Sánchez Navarros prospered in latifundia is found in their liquid assets acquired through commerce.21

The largest latifundio in the north, covering 14 million acres at its peak in eighteenth-century Coahuila and Nuevo León, was the mayorazgo of the Marqueses de Aguayo. Sheep raising dominated the production of this latifundio, although in relative terms it was not nearly as productive as the Sánchez Navarro holdings. The marqueses were not usually in residence on their estates which became severely burdened with debts by the 1760s; the continuing financial difficulties of the family, and financial reform measures of the crown at the turn of the century, resulted in loss of the estates to a group of creditors in the 1820s.22 Apparently, one technique used by the marqueses to hold on to their vast territories, often threatened by Indian raids, was to lease out holdings. Renting did not seem in this case to be a mechanism for drawing income.

In other arid regions, such as Texas and Nuevo Santander (Tamaulipas), stockraising on ranches prevailed. Ranch and its Spanish cognate rancho denote distinct landholding types; there were even several types of ranchos in colonial New Spain. In some areas in the north, particularly in mountainous zones of the sierra like Topia in western Durango and eastern Sinaloa, we find the term used as it was further south23 to describe a small-holding by a farmer who raised livestock or crops, relying upon his own labor.24 Ranchos might be independently owned or rented holdings. In another sense of the term, rancho could mean a medium to large stock farm of the type that apparently characterized Nuevo Santander and other areas of the north in the late eighteenth century.25 One common feature of these size-differentiated ranchos was their low level of capital investment in re-

21 Ibid., 313.
lation to haciendas. Our English term, ranch, was usually denoted as *hacienda* or *sitio* from *sitios de ganado mayor y menor*, the units of measure for grazing grants. The development of the large cattle ranches in Texas has been studied by Sandra Myres. Using a sectoral approach, Myres has explained the origins of ranching in Texas in the mid-eighteenth century. Lack of markets and Indian raids initially inhibited the growth of private ranches, but as security increased, the secularization of the Texas missions in the early nineteenth century provided the catalyst which favored the attempts of ranchers and presidial soldiers to create larger holdings especially in the Río Grande Valley.

All of these studies which have their locus in northeastern New Spain bear strong resemblances to Chevalier's northern model. Thus it would seem that in these arid regions, less dotted by river valleys and mining settlements, the tendency toward land concentration in less labor-intensive stockraising was more pronounced very soon after initial colonization. In addition, landlords here seemed more likely to have military origins and to exercise considerable political power, explicable in an area of low population density with few competing authorities. This affirmation of the Chevalier model has to be stated with this caveat. The entrepreneurial and sectoral approaches employed in these excellent studies tend to produce a picture that is disaggregated from the whole. They tell us a great deal about northern ranching techniques, management of large estates, livestock production, and social relationships, but we don't necessarily have a comprehensive picture of land tenure. Still, the initial indication is that the very large estate prevailed; at the very least we know that the concentration on stockraising predominated.

On the other hand, in those areas with more irrigable land and access to markets, there seemed to have been a greater variety of landholding patterns. There was also greater conflict over land resources between competing groups of the society, for example, Indians vs. Spanish towns, or missions vs. private non-Indian owners. Michael C. Meyer would characterize this conflict in another way. In his recent book on *Water in the Hispanic Southwest*, he argues that “land disputes in the Hispanic Southwest were almost always based on contention over water.” Although earlier works have recognized the paramount importance of access to water in the arid north, no one else has focused upon the control of water and its

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27 Water in the Hispanic Southwest, p. 47.
implications for power so exclusively. Meyer’s work clarifies the types of land grants and confirmations which carried water rights. Since large quantities of land were readily available in the underpopulated north, it was only the limited amount of land with a reliable water source that was contested. The fact that maize had to be irrigated in many areas of the far north created more competing demands for water compared to other areas of Mexico where maize was grown de temporal. If the thesis that water is central to land conflict is true, then we might expect to discover greater fluctuations in land tenure in those areas which are suited for crop raising as well as more concerted attempts of rancheria and pueblo Indians to hold on to their lands.

In fact this seems to have been the case in New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and more generally in the northwest of New Spain, but even in those fewer areas of the northeast where water was plentiful. Clear examples are provided by the disputes over water between the Jesuit missions and the Urdiñola family at Parras (Coahuila’s fertile southern wine producing area) in the early seventeenth century, and later in the eighteenth century between the Marqueses de Aguayo and the Tlaxcalan Indian colony at the same place.28

The one study of land tenure in a well-watered valley within the Northeast region during the eighteenth century also lends credence to the thesis that instability of ownership and greater variety in size of landholdings was more common in crop raising areas. The evidence presented in Leslie Offutt’s dissertation on the fertile Saltillo valley suggests that the predominant form of land tenure was smallholding in this region of mixed agriculture and livestock raising.29 Although Offutt did identify some larger landholdings that resembled haciendas despite a pattern of multiple ownership in some, she found a much greater number of ranchos. All landholdings diversified their production although smaller holdings tended to concentrate on producing one major market item and boasted very few capital improvements or permanent employees. In general, stockraising was less important than wheat production.

Offutt found a very strong connection between merchant capital and larger landholdings. Saltillo was an important commercial center for the northeast region, and those merchants who invested in land demonstrated

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28 For details of the first case, see Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, (hereinafter AGN), Historia, vol. 20, exp. 9; AGN, Archivo Histórico de Hacienda, Temporalidades, legs. 2009-26,30; 324-13,14; 325-64. Material on both cases is found in David B. Adams, “The Tlaxcalan Colonies of Spanish Coahuila and Nuevo León: An Aspect of the Settlement of Northern Mexico” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 1970).

a greater desire to maximize production through their capital improvements in canals, dams and water storage tanks. The merchants' investment in land seemed to be a function of the growth of the market in the late eighteenth century as Saltillo increasingly supplied parts of Texas, Nuevo León and Nuevo Santander. Offutt hypothesized, on the basis of the Van Young and Brading studies of the near north, that continued growth of the market might have encouraged a tendency toward land consolidation after the end of the colonial period. In terms of labor, she found a combination of resident and day laborers with fairly sizeable concentrations of sirvientes on the large estates. She speculated that the approximately two-thirds of workers who were not Indians and had no communal ties might have preferred the social bonds afforded by estates.

An interesting aspect of Offutt's work is her analysis of land and water relationships. She found that landholdings were rarely described in terms of linear or areal measurements, but rather in terms of their water apportionments. Although she recognized that it is impossible to estimate the size of a landholding from its water allocation alone, she did use the size of water apportionments as a major indicator. As Meyer's study on water illustrates, water apportionments and adjudications were made on the basis of water availability, competing demands, the intent of the granting agency and the influence of the petitioner and therefore might not be a valid indicator of relative size of the landholding itself.

In the northwest and the center north, the landholding picture becomes even more varied in time and space. Although we know a good deal about Pueblo land grants in New Mexico, we know less about the evolution of non-Indian landholdings. Apparently larger Spanish haciendas existed in the seventeenth century especially in the Albuquerque and Belén valleys, but after their destruction in the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680, small farms or ranchos tended to characterize the settlement patterns of the eighteenth century, perhaps as a result of a declining Indian population and an increased number of Spanish colonists in the Rio Grande Valley. A recent study of New Mexico's colonial society describes a shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture in the 1770s; this development may have indicated a trend toward land consolidation.

31 Water in the Hispanic Southwest, pp. 133-167.
Spaniards were attracted to Sinaloa and Sonora in the seventeenth century by the lure of mining. They followed the Jesuits who had set up missions along the rivers which flow from the western escarpment of the Sierra Madre Occidental to the Pacific coast. The Jesuits quickly monopolized much of the productive land in northern Sinaloa and Sonora. In spite of the attempts by presidial soldiers, miners, and other Spaniards to break this monopoly in the seventeenth century, the Jesuits successfully defended their holdings, not all of which were part of the missions’ fundos legales.\(^{34}\) Missionaries, of course, were great agents of agricultural and ecological transformation by their introduction of plants and animals as well as irrigation and other farming techniques to the Indians. In addition to their control of land, water and labor resources, the Jesuits sold their agricultural surpluses at low prices to try to drive out their competitors. This particular case illustrates the success of the missionaries in protecting Indian lands from Spanish encroachment at least until after the Yaqui and Pima rebellions in 1740 and 1751.

The slow acquisition of land by Spanish settlers (many of them soldiers) in the 1750s and 1760s was markedly accelerated after the Jesuit expulsion in 1767. Haciendas and ranchos for stockraising proliferated, and Spanish immigrants founded commercial establishments in Alamos, San Miguel de Horcasitas, Arizpe and Rosario. These merchants also bought land and joined the ranks of the miners and soldiers who had acquired land before them. Among the Indian groups, the Yaqui and Mayo Indians were more successful in retaining their communal lands, but they provided much of the labor for the new Spanish haciendas.\(^{35}\)

In Arizona, where the Pimería Alta was only effectively opened up in the eighteenth century, settlement was slow in coming. Presidio soldiers began to receive small grazing grants in the 1780s and 1790s, but nearly all Spanish land grants date from the 1820s when a number of Sonoran families moved into the San Pedro and Santa Cruz valleys to ranch.\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) The Jesuits gave a spirited defense against allegations of their stranglehold in Apologético defensorio y puntual manifiesto . . . 1657, in AGN, Historia 316. Charles Polzer, S.J., “The Evolution of the Jesuit Mission System in Northwestern New Spain, 1600-1767” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Arizona, 1972), pp. 170-187, describes how the Jesuits acquired lands through the fictitious Colegio de Mátape. The Jesuits’ ability to undersell their competitors indicates they had large capital reserves. See also Hu-Dehart, Missionaries, Miners and Indians, pp. 41-56.

\(^{35}\) Stuart Voss, On the Periphery of Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Sonora y Sinaloa, 1810-1877 (Tucson, 1982), pp. 6-41. Yaqui Indians had traditionally provided labor in Sonora through repartimiento and voluntary labor. Yaqui workers were often found in Nueva Vizcaya during the 17th and 18th centuries; report of padre visitador Juan Ortiz Zapata, 1678, in Documentos para la historia de México (México, 1853-57), 4th series, vol. III, pp. 314-315.

The Californias experienced similar patterns of missionary control of arable land (which was scarcely adequate for mission needs in Baja). Father Junípero Serra and the Franciscans who established the Alta California missions worked with royal officials primarily interested in assuring Spain’s hegemony in California in the face of Russian and English encroachments. The Franciscans, nonetheless, were able to control production in Alta California through their monopoly of land and labor. Although small grazing concessions were granted to soldiers from the 1780s on, the lack of markets hindered any large-scale agricultural development. Not until the missions were secularized in the Mexican period (1833) did ranches begin to expand in number and size.37

In contrast to these regions whose markets were not well-developed until after the end of the colonial period, Nueva Vizcaya and especially Durango experienced a more sustained demographic and economic growth. For this area, we have a number of socioeconomic studies.38 The one analysis of land tenure in the Valle de San Bartolomé south of Parral, although conceptually inadequate, presents some interesting data on land and labor.39 A composite of these studies reveals a complex system of crop farming and stock raising in Nueva Vizcaya, a geographical area for the most part more blessed with the distribution of ojos de agua through its grasslands than that of its neighbors in the northeast.40 Mining continually drew settlers from the late sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth although the reales de minas went through boom and bust cycles which were conditioned by the availability of capital for exploiting new discoveries and rejuvenating older mines.

Miners and soldiers were early investors in land and some accumulated large landholdings. Valerio Cortés del Rey, in reward for services to the crown, was able to establish a mayorazgo in the Valle de San Bartolomé in 1689. Estimates of the size of his holdings vary, but at least three large haciendas were part of the entail. The largest of these on the upper Conchos River was dedicated to stockraising.41 In a complaint brought by the pueblo


38 These works include Robert West’s study of Parral’s mining economy, Phillip Hadley’s book on the mining society of Chihuahua, Michael Swann’s primarily demographic work on late colonial Durango, Bradley Benedict’s dissertation on the expropriated properties of the Jesuit Colegio de Chihuahua, and my doctoral thesis on the socioeconomic status of Jesuit missions in mid-eighteenth century Durango, southern Chihuahua, and eastern Sinaloa; see notes 2 and 3 above.


40 Swann, Tierra Adentro, pp. 49-52.

41 Charges of Pedro Domingo de Jugo, Guadalajara, Sept. 28, 1754, Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Sevilla, Audiencia de Guadalajara 120.
of Satevó in the 1660s against Cortés del Rey over the encroachments of livestock from his Hacienda de Conchos on mission lands, the Indians charged that this Spanish vecino already possessed sixty leagues of land north and south of Parral.42 In the eighteenth century, the Cortés del Rey holdings fell on hard times. Apparently neither Valerio nor his son Juan expanded the family’s interests outside of agricultural pursuits and they were forced to borrow sizeable sums of money from Parral merchants from the late seventeenth century in order to weather periods of falling demand and low prices. By mid-eighteenth century, Pedro Domingo de Jugo, whose uncle Cristóbal de Orantia had made the first loans, controlled the income of two haciendas in the mayorazgo.43

Despite the reversals of the Cortés del Rey family, other landholders in the Valle de San Bartolomé, after experiencing hard times in cattle production during the late seventeenth century partly caused by Indian attacks,44 expanded production in wheat during the eighteenth century. Although a few of these haciendas approached 100,000 acres, most ranged from 2,000 to 10,000 acres.45 North of Parral and in the Valle de San Buenaventura in northwestern Chihuahua, there were a number of large livestock estates,46 but Nueva Vizcaya also had many small isolated farmsteads and ranchos.47

Swann’s study of population growth also demonstrates an increased volume of trade in late colonial Durango. An influx of peninsular Spaniards characterized this period, and a systematic study of land tenure may well show a tendency to increased concentration of land in the hands of the growing commercial class. Clergymen were also well-represented among landowners in the eighteenth century.48 Analysis of the socioeconomic evolution of Jesuit missions documents the steady usurpation of Indian lands north of Durango during the first half of the eighteenth century, and illustrates the limitations of Jesuit advocacy in protecting Indian properties.49

42 Various autos in this case, February 21-27, 1667, Archivo de Hidalgo de Parral, University of Arizona Microfilm (hereinafter AHP), reel 1724B, fr. 731-756.
43 See note 41.
44 West, The Mining Community, pp. 61-66.
46 See the composiciones de tierra, 1730-1750, in AGI, Guadalajara 119 and 120.
47 Chevalier has argued that small creole or mestizo landholders were at the particular mercy of large landholders in the seventeenth century if they had no links to towns whose statutes could afford legal protection. (Land and Society, pp. 220-226), but the continued existence of smaller landholdings from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries has also been documented; see Pedro Tamarón y Romeral, Demostración del vastísimo obispado de la Nueva Vizcaya, 1765, ed. by Vito Alessio Robles (México, 1937); and Deeds, “Rendering unto Caesar,” pp. 163-204.
48 Informe de los curas y demás eclesiásticos del Obispado de Durango en la provincia de N. Vizcaya, July 3, 1755, AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara 547.
This process effectively marginalized the remaining Indian population, which was growing proportionally smaller, by the end of the century. The Indians in both Jesuit and Franciscan missions who had been subject to excessive repartimiento drafts from the early seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century tended increasingly to elect residence on the estates. The mission system served to strengthen and to perpetuate repartimiento in the far north despite the Indian population decline by congregating the Indians and facilitating their organization into labor gangs. As the non-Indian population grew and production increased, repartimiento became inadequate to meet labor needs, and this resulted in the creation of permanent sirvente class of resident workers, primarily mestizo and mulatto. Voluntary labor characterized the mining labor force from the seventeenth century on.  

Clearly, much work remains to be done in the areas of land tenure, internal functioning of estates, and the relationship of all landholdings to markets. For the regional socioeconomic history of Nueva Vizcaya there is an abundance of material although for quantitative purposes it is uneven. In the notarial records of Parral and Durango (most of Chihuahua’s were destroyed in a 1941 fire), there are some hacienda account books with data on production, costs, wages and prices. As has proven true in other areas of Mexico, the best runs of account books are those of the Jesuit haciendas owned by the Colegio de Durango, the Residencia of Parral and the Colegio de Chihuahua in the Archivo Histórico de Hacienda of the AGN. The Archivo de Instrumentos Públicos in Guadalajara and the Archivo General de Indias have lists of land compositions. The notarial records contain inventories and instruments of sale as well as information on mortgages. Tithe records in the cathedral archive in Durango would yield information on agricultural production. Judicial records contain litigation over land and business arrangements. One of the crucial problems with the sources is that they tend to provide more information on elites and not enough on the rural middlemen and peones. Focus upon the hacienda or large estate alone provides us with too narrow a lens for understanding the complex interrelationships of rural life. This forces us to look at the widest variety of documentation possible at the local or regional level and to be creative in finding sources of popular history and culture to fill in the gaps.

If nothing else, this description of the historical literature has shown us

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50 In addition to the sources mentioned on page 19, see Ignacio del Río, “Sobre la aparición y desarrollo del trabajo libre asalariado en el norte de Nueva España (siglos XVI y XVII),” in Frost et al., El trabajo, pp. 92-111.

51 Although I am not familiar with particular archives in other areas, presumably similar documentation is available.

that we really know very little about land tenure patterns and even less about all the factors of agricultural production in the far north.

What do we know? In answering this question, it may be helpful to look at the agrarian history of colonial Mexico as a process which seems to repeat fixed or similar evolutionary stages as certain conjunctures of economic and demographic factors are achieved in a given place.\textsuperscript{53} The timing of this process can be altered by such nonstructural factors as ecology or administrative decisions.

One phase, which occurs late in the evolutionary progression, is set in motion when population growth combines with certain factors of production to create profitable market conditions. Then the goal of maximizing production results in the increased appropriation of peasant resources, both land and labor.\textsuperscript{54} A concomitant process seems to have been the accumulation of large reserves of capital by merchants who provided the liquid capital for producers to buy more land or make improvements.\textsuperscript{55} Because population growth was at least one key element in the creation of regional markets, the far north, which was effectively settled much later than the center, south, and near north, would reach this stage at a correspondingly later time. Therefore, no area of the north created an important regional market until the late eighteenth century, i.e., Saltillo and Durango, and for most of the far north this phenomenon did not occur until the nineteenth century. In some areas, dynamic markets, regional or other, were never established, and to this day, there are regions like the mountainous area of Topia in western Durango in which a ranchero economy of small producers has predominated. It is clear that in the case of the far north, the colonial-national periodization is not a natural watershed in agrarian history.\textsuperscript{56}

In the far north, non-structural factors upset the evolutionary process in a number of ways. The geography and ecology of the region and the \textit{ecol\textsuperscript{tur}ation} process described by Meyer determined that the \textit{widespread} shift from livestock to grain production that occurred in the center and near north did not occur in the far north. Nonetheless, this transition did take place in those areas of the north which had more water. Equally important, the

\textsuperscript{53} The idea of fixed stages of a maturation process occurring at different times in center and fringe areas is used in James Lockhart and Stuart Schwartz, \textit{Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America} (Cambridge, 1983).

\textsuperscript{54} The population factor is most strongly argued by Van Young in his book on Guadalajara; see also “Mexican Rural History,” pp. 27-28.

\textsuperscript{55} A good summary of this process is found in Florescano, “Foundation and Economic Structure,” pp. 182-188.

\textsuperscript{56} The periodization has of course been questioned for other areas of Mexico as well; Van Young, “Mexican Rural History,” pp. 5-8.
process resulted in the fiercest struggles between Indians and non-Indians. The greater variation in land tenure which characterized the areas with more water in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflected the degree to which Indians and other smallholders were able to resist the expansion of larger hacendados who had not yet marshaled all their resources in a market-oriented economy.

The pace of the structural process could also be altered by administrative decisions. The Bourbon reforms represent one example. Although the reforms for the north did not bring about immediate large-scale economic improvements, they did influence further agricultural development in several ways. First, the expulsion of the Jesuits accelerated the process of land acquisition by non-Indians. Although the missionaries had not been very successful in stopping this process in Nueva Vizcaya, they were more effective in the fertile Yaqui and Mayo river valleys of Sonora. As long as the crown had to rely heavily upon the missions as an administrative mechanism, the orders could more easily thwart the economic growth of Spanish secular society. This was true in the Franciscan missions of Alta California as well. In both cases, when the missions were secularized, the non-Indian society accelerated its acquisition of land.

The creation of the Comandancia General also had an impact upon further development through its efforts to contain the widespread depredations of hostile Indians like the Apaches. Even in the late eighteenth century, Indian raids were occurring as far south as Durango, wreaking economic havoc in a region which had seemingly achieved considerable economic security and stability earlier.

This economic insecurity resulting from the Indian problem was a third factor which skewed the process of agricultural development in the north, because it retarded settlement and effective control of the land for agricultural purposes. Its resolution only in the nineteenth century increased the time lag in areas like Sonora, Arizona, Texas and Chihuahua.

If Mexican colonial agriculture was intrinsically incapable of yielding sufficient profits to cover costs and produce a cash surplus for savings or investment, as Enrique Florescano and others have argued, the social dimensions of landownership and the value system of the dominant Spanish society assume increased importance. Except for Charles Harris’ work we know very little about the significance of landownership for social prestige and power in the far north.

Perhaps further study will yield conclusions about land ownership similar to those for other areas of Mexico, but this does not mean that we should
not repeat the exercise of asking the questions for the far north. Factors disruptive to the structural process may have produced different patterns of regional socioeconomic development or the time lag itself may have resulted in unique combinations of social and economic variables. The identification of a distinct pattern of socioeconomic development for the far north may help to explain why the Mexican Revolution found its driving force in the north. Up to now historians have focused upon the nineteenth century to find those distinguishing features, but a closer examination of late colonial development in the far north may yield information crucial to an understanding of the process which culminated in the Revolution.

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