

## The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-60

Joan Sangster

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### Article abstract

This article uses a case study of an Ontario factory manufacturing clocks and watches to explore the way in which industrial paternalism was used as an industrial relations strategy by both management and workers. I argue that paternalism, in this case an amalgam of 19th-century traditional paternalism and 20th-century welfare capitalism, was premised on unequal economic relations, and on the ideological hegemony of management, but it was also, very importantly, a negotiated process in which workers participated in order to secure better working conditions and wages, respect and dignity.

Westclox used benefit plans, sports teams, a company paper, as well as flexibility in work supervision and internal promotions to garner the loyalty of its workers. Paternalism was also gendered: it was justified with reference to the sexual division of labour and with metaphors of a male-headed family. Though attractive to some workers, paternalism also had its weaknesses; both men and women questioned paternalism when management failed to live up to its side of a negotiated bargain.

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# The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-60

Joan Sangster

I always said that we didn't need a union there because we were treated so well. It was a nice place ... I had nice friends ... Plus we were fairly well paid. A lot of today's troubles come from unions.

Management had the whole picture; they knew the situation best.<sup>1</sup>

THESE RETROSPECTIVE OBSERVATIONS of former workers at a Peterborough clock factory reflect common characterizations of this workplace by women who once assembled the minute, inner workings of the famous Westclox alarm clocks and watches. Their favourable memories of Westclox and the view that workers there owed their managers "respect" were repeated by many other former workers in interviews. Their collective characterization of Westclox must be analyzed in the context of the operation of paternalism in the Westclox plant for a period of more than 30 years. Within this small Ontario manufacturing city, no other factory with hundreds of employees could claim so effective a management strategy, or so loyal and respectful a workforce. While this cannot be measured 'objectively' through statistics such as workplace longevity, it can be measured subjectively through the way in which former Westclox workers construct their memories, endorsing the familial metaphor promoted by the Company.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Westclox Interview #18, February 1990, and #1, July 1989. I have deliberately chosen one quote from a blue-collar worker and one from a white-collar worker.

<sup>2</sup>Without access to company records, (which I have been denied) I cannot produce such statistics, though by reading articles and biographies in the company's in-house publication, I could get a sense of how many employees were rewarded for long service. At one company dinner, a manager claimed 40 per cent of those employed in 1931 were still with the company 25 years later. Oral history *can* measure peoples' perceptions that there were many people

It is my intention to examine the rise and decline of paternalism in this factory, exploring both managerial intentions and worker responses, with special emphasis on women's understanding of the workplace hierarchy. A long chronology of varied paternalisms, based on the axes of race, class, and gender, have been documented in North American labour history.<sup>3</sup> While recent studies have argued convincingly for close attention to the historical specificity of time and setting in our analyses of industrial paternalism, local studies may also provide clues to the common processes creating consent in the workplace, and thus also to the seemingly tenacious persistence of class and gender inequalities.

Attention to the material context and economic pressures, as well as the ideological mechanisms sustaining paternalism, are essential if we are to address these broader questions. Westclox's initial success in this small, ethnically homogeneous Ontario city emerged from its overlapping strategies of 19th-century paternalism and 20th-century welfare capitalism, made possible by the distinct material and cultural conditions in this workplace, industry and locale. Secondly, paternalism was a managerial strategy which embodied a gender ideology of male dominance; its operation was intertwined with and aided by a gender hierarchy found in the family, wider community and the workplace, which ultimately supported women's secondary status as daughters in the Westclox family.

Finally, women's own memories of work at Westclox illuminate the way in which workers understood, utilized, negotiated, and eventually repudiated paternalism; their recollections suggest a more complex relationship between manager and worker than mere rebellion against, or sycophantic acceptance of the Company's aims. In trying to map workers' responses to paternalism, oral history is especially useful as a means of probing the subjective areas of experience and feeling.<sup>4</sup> (See Appendix A for description of interviews). The structure of memory and the emphasis, tone, and language of interviews provide insight into how experience and ideology shaped the outlook and choices of women workers, and

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who stayed with the company for a long period of time. Conclusions about the nature of peoples' memories of Westclox were reached after comparing Westclox interviews to those with workers from other companies in the city, particularly the three other largest businesses at this time.

<sup>3</sup>Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York 1976) provides one of the classic arguments for paternalism in race relations. A more recent essay which looks at class, gender, and race and the operation of industrial paternalism is Dolores Janiewski, "Southern Honour, Southern Dishonour: Managerial Ideology and the Construction of Gender, Race, and Class Relations in Southern Industry," in Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a History of American Labor* (Ithaca 1991). This paper primarily makes reference to works on industrial paternalism. See note 8.

<sup>4</sup>On oral history as a methodology see Ronald Grele, *Envelopes of Sound* (Chicago 1975); M. Frisch, "The Memory of History," *Radical History Review*, 24 (1981); or more recently, Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York 1991).

thus how accommodation operated in the factory. If we are to comprehend working-class support for the economic status quo, and attempt to theorize about consent in the workplace,<sup>5</sup> then we must listen to the voices of the workers who embraced or at least tolerated paternalism as part of their daily efforts to survive the difficulties of wage labour.

### *Paternalism and Welfare Capitalism*

OFTEN APPLIED to 19th-century industrial experiments, the term paternalism conjures up images of a single entrepreneur who "ruled his works and his workers directly from some large baronial home overlooking the industrial village."<sup>6</sup> Drawing on previous forms of deference within the church, the community, or especially the household, the owner attempted to incorporate these social relations into the factory regime. British and American historians have explored the way in which an employer, playing a visible role on the factory premises, tried to create the feeling of an "organic community," often by equating the factory with an actual or imagined family. Paternalism was intended to avoid labour unrest, to preserve managerial authority, and to satisfy a patrician sense of philanthropy.<sup>7</sup> While often cloaked in a rationale of obligation, duty or honour, paternalism essentially justified, extended, or at most modified existing power relationships.

<sup>5</sup>As Ava Baron points out, in working-class history "while women's resistance has been documented, their 'consent' to oppression, like that of men, remains undertheorized." Ava Baron, "Gender and Labor History: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future," in Baron, ed., *Work Engendered*, 16.

<sup>6</sup>Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto 1988), 100.

<sup>7</sup>On Britain see Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics* (London 1980), and more recently Judy Lown, *Women and Industrialization* (London 1990) which addresses the question of gender as a central part of her thesis. See also Donald Reid, "Industrial Paternalism: Discourse and Practice in Nineteenth Century French Mining and Metallurgy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 27 (1985); Charles Dellheim, "The Creation of a Company Culture: Cadburys, 1861-1931," *AHR*, 92 (1), February 1987. American studies range from those starting with the mid-19th century textile mills to those extending their focus into the 20th century. See Phillip Scranton, "Varieties of Paternalism: Industrial Structures and the Social Relations of Production in American Textiles," *American Quarterly*, 36 (Summer 1984); Jacqueline Dowd Hall, *Like a Family* (Chapel Hill 1987); Frances Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877-1919* (Albany 1984), chap. 7; Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time* (New York 1982); Stephen Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-21* (New York 1981); Stanley Budner, *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning* (New York 1979). The best recent book is Gerald Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism* (New York 1988).

As Judy Lown points out, paternalism was also a form of patriarchy,<sup>8</sup> for it sustained a hierarchical system in which older men dominated younger men, women and children; it was premised on a conception of "mutual rights and duties connected to the unequal relations of authority ... found in the household."<sup>9</sup> Despite these common themes in 19th-century paternalist experiments, there was also considerable diversity; recent American studies have shown how paternalism was shaped by the material and cultural factors conditioning production and profit in the industry, by distinct local, cultural, and political contexts.<sup>10</sup>

The 20th century supposedly inaugurated a 'professionalization' of paternalism with the introduction of welfare plans and a trained workforce of welfare and personnel specialists.<sup>11</sup> Replacing the fatherly factory head was the corporate practice of organized, efficient welfare capitalism, which still contained some of the basic principles of paternalism: the familial metaphor; the endeavour to create a Company culture of consensus, deference and accommodation; and attempts to maintain a loyal, long-lasting, and of course, un-unionized workforce. American historians have hotly debated the success of welfare capitalism with workers in the 20th century, as well as its chronology of rise and decline, some arguing that workers cynically saw welfare capitalism as patronizing, while others contend that it enjoyed some success until the business cycle curtailed its possibilities. They seldom disagree, however, on its basic aims, sharing a conception of this strategy as a 'top down' attempt to shape and control the workforce,<sup>12</sup> though a more recent

<sup>8</sup>Judy Lown, "Not so much a Factory, More a Form of Patriarchy: Gender and Class during Industrialization," in E. Gamarnikow, ed., *Gender, Class and Work* (London 1985). Lown argues that "paternalism is only one of many and varying forms of legitimation that holders of patriarchal power adopt," 35-6.

<sup>9</sup>Lown, *Women and Industrialization*, 3.

<sup>10</sup>For example, see Philip Scranton's distinction between "formal, familial and fraternal" paternalism in the textile industry in "Varieties of Paternalism." The local context is also stressed in works such as Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: the Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800-85* (Cambridge 1983); Dowd Hall, *Like a Family*; Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*.

<sup>11</sup>Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940* (Chicago 1976); Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920* (Madison 1975); David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York 1980). Nelson, for example, sees paternalism and welfare capitalism as distinct and claims in some situations, traditional paternalism "deterred" the adoption of welfare work, 115.

<sup>12</sup>Brandes and Couvares suggest workers were suspicious of welfarism, but Brody claims it was having some successes until the Depression revealed its inherent problems. Sanford Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1890-1945* (New York 1985) suggests that interest in welfare capitalism was waning by the late 1920s.

interpretation presents welfare capitalism as a negotiated relationship between Capital and Labour.<sup>13</sup>

Canadian case studies, while few in number, have argued that some businesses in the early and mid-twentieth century achieved limited successes with welfare capitalist strategies to "manufacture consent"<sup>14</sup> in the workplace. Welfare capitalism, they also caution, usually offered workers the "velvet glove," combining coercion with "the carrot" of welfare benefits; moreover, many of these benefits offered little of real material "substance"<sup>15</sup> to improve workers lives. Unfortunately, some of the overviews of Canadian welfare capitalism either have concentrated on the picture from perspective of the employers<sup>16</sup> or assume that Canadian business strategies followed a similar trajectory to American welfarism. Neil Tudiver's overview, for instance, suggests a linear, rigid view of industrial relations history which assumes that companies moved mechanically from scientific management to welfarism to a postwar labour/capital contract.<sup>17</sup> In fact, companies followed a number of distinct paths to and from welfare capitalism which were not "happence"<sup>18</sup> as much as they reflected varying regional, industrial, and political influences. Some of these Canadian experiments failed during the Depression<sup>19</sup> while others, such as the one at Westclox, persisted through the 1930s, the 1940s, and even beyond. Moreover, more than one managerial strategy could be attempted

<sup>13</sup>Zahavi, *Workers Managers and Welfare Capitalism*.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Storey, "Unionization versus Corporate Welfare: The Dofasco Way," *Labour/Le Travail*, 12 (Autumn 1983), 7. See also Bruce Scott, "A Place in the Sun: the Industrial Councils at Massey-Harris, 1919-29," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976); Jim Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging the Social Order in Industrial Ontario, 1914-25* (Toronto 1991), chap. 6; Craig Heron, *Working in Steel*, 98-111; Margaret McCallum, "Corporate Welfarism in Canada," *CHR*, 71 (1990). The one Canadian book which deals with the question of gender and paternalism is Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners* (Toronto 1990). Overviews of Canadian business, such as Michael Bliss, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business* (Toronto 1974) and *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business* (Toronto 1987) are remarkably silent about paternalism and welfare capitalism.

<sup>15</sup>Craig Heron, *Working in Steel*, 110; James Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 177.

<sup>16</sup>Margaret McCallum has offered a useful view of welfare capitalism drawn from *Industrial Canada* and the *Labour Gazette*, but her article does not intend to analyze workers reactions to this managerial strategy.

<sup>17</sup>Neil Tudiver, "Forestalling the Welfare State: The Establishment of Programmes of Corporate Welfare," in A. Moscovitch, Jim Albert, eds., *The Benevolent State* (Toronto 1987).

<sup>18</sup>McCallum, "Corporate Welfarism in Canada," 47.

<sup>19</sup>As Michael Earle pointed out to me, in Sydney, the meagre attempts to attempt paternalist strategies at DOSCO (for example, setting up things like works councils) *did* flounder with the Depression, thus replicating the pattern that some American labour historians have pointed to.

at the same time.<sup>20</sup> In the Westclox case, the introduction of welfare capitalism and modern personnel management did not preclude the persistence of some 19th-century forms of paternalism: the two existed together.

In examining the operation of paternalism (a term I use to include both traditional paternalism and organized welfare capitalism), two interlocking power relationships must be highlighted. First, paternalism was premised on fundamentally unequal economic relations, though there were also possibilities of negotiation and bargaining embedded in these power relations. To see paternalism as only a form of clever managerial social control is to simplify its operation and render the workers in such a system passive, malleable, and without agency. While the labour movement was understandably suspicious of welfare capitalism, some workers were sympathetic to it, and their outlook cannot be dismissed simply as "false consciousness." Not only does this obscure the multilayered and contradictory nature of consciousness (for consent and class consciousness may well coexist), but it also overlooks the fact that struggle between groups with unequal power may proceed on many levels, and that "class conflict may involve those with power avoiding confrontation with those without it,"<sup>21</sup> and those without power bargaining in sporadic, informal, even unconscious ways.

Nonetheless, the subtle, but powerful process of ideological hegemony sustaining paternalism must still be highlighted.<sup>22</sup> In order to interpret their workplace experiences, workers inevitably drew on the ideological resources at their disposal, and the dominant ideology — experienced as lived, habitual practice, interwoven throughout the culture, discerned as "common sense" — justified existing corporate leadership and the 'natural' existence of gender and class stratification.<sup>23</sup> One manifestation of the ideological hegemony of those with social and economic power, paternalism encouraged consent to economic hierarchy as an inevitable part of daily life: in a Gramscian sense, it successfully "universalized ruling class interest with community interest."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>See Daniel Nelson and Stuart Campbell, "Taylorism versus Welfare Work in American Industry: H.L. Gantt and the Bancrofts," *Business History Review*, 46 (Spring 1972).

<sup>21</sup>Genovese paraphrased from Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *AHR*, 90 (June 1985).

<sup>22</sup>Recent writing has shied away from the very word ideology, influenced by post-structuralist critiques of the concept and understandably wary of a very traditional Marxist categorization of "false" or illusory ideology mystifying the "true" picture of society. Instead of jettisoning the concept, it may be useful to use it, in a Gramscian and feminist manner, as one means of understanding how class and gender inequalities become "naturalized" and universalized, in the workplace and in larger society.

<sup>23</sup>My thinking here is indebted to interpretations of Gramsci by both labour historians and social theorists: three examples are Robert Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford 1976); Anna Pollert, *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* (Macmillan 1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (London 1991).

<sup>24</sup>Carl Boggs, *The Two Revolutions: Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism* (Boston 1984), 160.

Paternalism was also a power relationship based on notions of gender difference and structures of gender inequality. Feminist historians have argued persuasively that we need to understand the ways in which the family and the workplace were interlocking hierarchies of dominance and negotiation, with class and gender constructed simultaneously.<sup>25</sup> As Joy Parr's *The Gender of Breadwinners* argues, workplace culture, managerial strategies and workers' own identities were moulded by gender as well as class agendas. This is also vividly exemplified by the way in which gender divisions were integral to the organization of paternalist workplaces.<sup>26</sup> Nineteenth-century paternalism, argues Judy Lown, did not simply draw superficially on familial metaphors; rather, male dominance was an "organizing principle"<sup>27</sup> of paternalist workplace relations. Similarly, the Westclox example demonstrates the centrality of gender ideology to paternalism, and consequently, the need for a feminist analysis of the material and ideological processes behind its operation.

### *Establishing the 'Westclox Way' in Canada*

THE WESTERN CLOCK COMPANY was established in 1895 by entrepreneur F.W. Matthiessen, who located his first clock factory near his zinc smelter in LaSalle, Illinois. Various known as the Western Clock Co, Westclox, and after a number of mergers and takeovers, as General Time Instruments, the enterprise remained a family company until the 1930s when it expanded considerably and began to issue stock on the New York Stock exchange. By the end of the Second World War, it also had branch plants in Canada, Scotland and Brazil. The Canadian company first located in Toronto, and then rented a small building in downtown Peterborough until a new 'model' factory was completed in 1923. Situated in Peterborough's "East City" on Armour Hill, with beautiful grounds overlooking the Trent canal, the Westclox site was chosen because of its distance from the city centre and thus from vibrations and dirt which could harm the making of small timepieces.

The Canadian Westclox plant grew along with the American parent: in 1926, it employed 180, by the late 1930s, approximately 400, and during the Second World War, its payroll hit an all-time high of 800. Although male employees

<sup>25</sup>For workplace studies incorporating this perspective, see, for example, Mary Blewett, *Men, Women and Work: Class, Gender and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry* (Champaign 1988); Patricia Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories* (Urbana 1987); Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London 1983); and Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*.

<sup>26</sup>While American studies noted in passing the special services and moral protection offered women workers by paternalist employers in the Progressive period, they have underestimated the ways in which the paternalist factory regime reinforced gender roles for men and women, and the way in which these patterns *persisted* into the later 20th century.

<sup>27</sup>Judy Lown, "Not so much a Factory, More a Form of Patriarchy: Gender and Class during Industrialization," 34.



outnumbered women in the Company's infancy, women soon became a majority of about 60 per cent (during the war their numbers, as well as their percentage of the workforce, rose even higher). Protected by the Imperial tariff in the 1930s, the Company maintained fairly good health even in the Depression, presumably because it controlled a sizeable section of the Canadian market, as well as a decent export trade, for necessary consumer items. Combining both clock and munitions work proved extremely profitable during World War II, and even in the immediate postwar period, sales of the company's staple consumer product, timepieces, remained strong.<sup>28</sup> Signs of trouble appeared in the American business press by the mid 1950s;<sup>29</sup> consumer sales were sagging and despite attempts to buy new research facilities and move into new fields of computer and missile-timing devices, the Company was not fully recouping its losses. New plants in Mexico and the Virgin Islands, and the transfer of business from the flagship LaSalle factory to Georgia by the early 1960s were the writing on the wall. In a changing international market, the corporation was relocating its large plants into low-wage areas of the U.S. and the world. Competition from abroad, lower wage rates in other areas of the Westclox empire, lower tariffs, the failure to move the Canadian plant into production of new technology, and finally, takeover by Talley — a multinational with many different concerns — all eventually led to massive layoffs by the 1980s.

Until the 1960s, however, Westclox was seen as a stable Peterborough employer which had a "complete manufacturing operation,"<sup>30</sup> including design, industrial engineering, and accounting as well as assembly. One person dominates the history of the Canadian Westclox: its general manager and later president, J.H. Vernor. Originally associated with the export division of the American Westclox, Vernor had given up medical education to work as export manager for Westclox. In 1922, he and his wife (reputedly a member of the Matthiessen extended family) returned to North America from their European posting so that Vernor could oversee the construction of the Canadian branch plant. Until his retirement in 1953, Vernor was the guiding force of Company personnel policy,<sup>31</sup> though Company administration was also strongly influenced by the American parent, which trained many Canadian administrators in managerial exchange programs.

Vernor saw himself in the terms familiar to paternalist enterprise: as the concerned, but disciplinarian father. He was referred to in the community as "Mr. Westclox,"<sup>32</sup> a term he actually promoted. In their recollections, employees repeat

<sup>28</sup> After the war, munitions work was cut back in the Canadian plant. One manager estimated that, in the 1950s and 1960s it only comprised, on average, only 10 per cent of their work.

<sup>29</sup> "What the Clock Watchers Didn't See," *Forbes*, 15 February 1959; "No More Puffs Please," *Forbes*, 15 April 1961; "General Time Ticks Off Swift Earnings Rebound," *Barrons*, 19 February 1962; "On the Uptick," *Barrons*, 16 October 1967.

<sup>30</sup> "The Westclox Story," Company pamphlet, c. 1978, personal copy.

<sup>31</sup> Although financial and production management was guided by others, including long-time manager, Newfoundland-born Herbert Cranford.

<sup>32</sup> "Mr. Westclox Dies," *Peterborough Examiner*, 20 July 1966.

this nickname, and some clearly adopted, at some level, the familial analogy of Vernor watching over his employees like a father. One even mused that because Vernor was childless himself, he invested inordinate interest and energy in his surrogate children, his employees.

Indeed, it is revealing that many employees have constructed their memories of the Company around a narrative theme that stresses the rise and decline of the family—like an epic saga—at Westclox, which roughly (though not completely accurately) coincides with the Company's financial success and decline.<sup>33</sup> In this narrative theme, the 'family' and the business enterprise have merged, their fate tied to the story of a man whose health and spirit went downhill along with the factory: the economic vigour of the factory and workers' job security clearly help to shape the collective script of their stories. As John Bodnar has pointed out, oral history can illuminate the dominant plots which tell us how and why people's collective memory of their workplaces and communities are created.<sup>34</sup> In the Westclox script, Vernor, the young, dashing executive, popular with most of his employees, ages rapidly in the postwar years as the closely knit family becomes more troubled and stressed, less cohesive and congenial. In some oral accounts, unionization in 1952 symbolized the inauguration of a new era and the rejection of the older family, along with its father. "The union broke Vernor's heart—Westclox was his family," commented one employee.<sup>35</sup>

It was not simply Vernor's use of the familial metaphor, however, which kept Westclox from unionizing until relatively late, prevented any strikes, and produced a paternalistic workplace. First of all, paternalism was necessarily constructed on the edifice of unequal economic power: material constraints should not be minimized in the paternalist equation for they provided the essential backdrop for the factory's authority structure. As Patrick Joyce notes, "power relations are a precondition for [paternalism] ... vulnerability sows the seeds of deference."<sup>36</sup>

The Westclox factory was quite tightly controlled by managerial prerogative: until after World War Two, a number of managers and foreman were influential in hiring and firing, and in assigning work duties. Hiring, remembers some former workers, seemed personal and arbitrary; one worker remembers Vernor talking to

<sup>33</sup>Of the interviews with blue- and white-collar workers, about half made reference to the congenial, family atmosphere. Others, while they did not describe the workplace in familial terms made observations such as: "Westclox was a wonderful place to work when I started ... management and employees got on so well; I could hardly wait to get back to work the next day." Westclox Interview #22, July 1989. A minority certainly saw this simply as a job like any other; these were more often shorter-term employees.

<sup>34</sup>John Bodnar, "Power and Memory in Oral History: Workers and Managers at Studebaker," *Journal of American History*, 75 (March 1989).

<sup>35</sup>Quote from Interview #2, June 1989. Although this was a manager speaking, similar observations were made by other white and blue collar employees, though they did not describe the situation quite so tragically.

<sup>36</sup>P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, 94.

him briefly, "making a few scratchy notes," then saying "you're hired."<sup>37</sup> In 1945, a separate personnel department was set up at the urging of the parent company which feared its unorganized workforce would be stirred by the wave of unionization sweeping North America. Even after this, Vernor and other managers took a personal interest in hiring, with recommendations of family and friends carrying weight in their decisions. As a former manager put it, "there were names that immediately boded well for you, but others that meant instant disaster ... forget this talk about nepotism ... it was just a form of reference."<sup>38</sup>

Securing jobs for kin, keeping a job during the Depression, choosing where one wanted to work within the factory: these were the economic pressures that employees had to consider when interacting with their superiors. Because jobs were often secured through family, women also developed a sense of 'debt' to their employer, particularly during the Depression; as Joy Parr argues in her case study, workers felt "they owed their jobs to their patrons."<sup>39</sup> During the worst of the Depression, the factory reduced the work week and instituted job sharing in order to keep people at least partially employed, a measure which accentuated a sense of obligation to the Company. Indeed, in comparison to the often-cited American example, the Depression could actually give paternalism a new lease on life.

It was not only in hard times, however, that such loyalties were constructed. After World War Two, a well-known trade unionist, blacklisted for years in the city after his role in a 1937 textile strike, was finally employed (personally) by Vernor. Although word "spread like wildfire" when he set foot in the plant, his anticipated union organizing did not materialize<sup>40</sup> as he put organizing aside — some informants claim at Vernor's request, though perhaps because he was simply "relieved to have a job" and as a result, his son remembers, offered his loyalty and "respect to JH."<sup>41</sup> This is perhaps a good example of the way in which velvet glove of paternalism operated, with both subtle coercion and an appearance of mutual gain.<sup>42</sup>

The regulation of the work process also provided clues to the operation of paternalism. At first glance, the work process, especially for the women, appeared tightly controlled. Although some skilled men, like the tool and die makers, exercised considerable authority over their work conditions, women were primarily assigned to repetitive jobs in assembly line work that were often compensated through piece rates or production targets. In the office, women's work was closely

<sup>37</sup>Westclox Interview #9, April 1991.

<sup>38</sup>Westclox Interview #23, July 1989.

<sup>39</sup>Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 35.

<sup>40</sup>Westclox Interview #4, December 1990.

<sup>41</sup>Interview #9, July 1989.

<sup>42</sup>It also indicates what a close watch management kept on who was hired; this may also explain why unionization came relatively late at Westclox. It is clear that companies in the city — often led by the most powerful, CGE — traded information on unions, personnel, and industrial relations.

supervised and their polite demeanour noted when it came to promotions and raises, which were individually assigned as no clear job posting system existed until the 1950s.

Many blue-collar women worked on an assembly line characteristic of the new 'mass industries' of the 20th century: the principle was based on a carefully engineered, continuous flow work process which could mass produce goods relatively cheaply for a growing consumer market.<sup>43</sup> Women's work was characterized by machine pacing of the job, by "indirect assembly"<sup>44</sup> (as opposed to direct servicing of machines), and by the extensive use of some kind of piece or incentive pay. Jobs could be broken down into minute and exact parts which were repeated again and again. Moreover, some of the assembly line work at the plant was extremely fine work, for which women were given finger dexterity and eyesight tests, (though it was also claimed that dexterity and careful attention to detail were inherently-female attributes).

Within this fairly rigid structure, however, there existed a small degree of flexibility which assisted the Company's efforts to "manufacture consent"<sup>45</sup> by mitigating the intrinsic alienation of wage labour. For one thing, the actual number of different jobs (however monotonous each one was) was greater here than in local factories like the textile mill, and because management was sympathetic to mobility within the plant, women could change positions if they really wanted to. Even more important was the degree of autonomy and respect built into the system of supervision. When former women workers describe why they stayed at Westclox, they often emphasize the atmosphere, nature of supervision, and flexibility on the shop floor. Supervision and the practice of paternalism interacted on one another, with the paternalist philosophy of the Company creating the precise shape of authority relations in the workplace. Women, for example, might be allowed to "sneak out" a few minutes early to catch their train home for the weekend, workplace joking and socializing were given fairly elastic boundaries, and the continuous-flow assembly work, though seen as taxing and difficult, was not

<sup>43</sup>Miriam Glucksman argues that women were the primary — and crucial — workforce in many mass production industries making food and small appliances; this resulted not from a de-skilling process, but rather from the initial, conscious decision of management to hire cheaper female labour. See Miriam Glucksman, *Women Assemble: Women Workers and the New Industries in Inter-War Britain* (London 1990).

<sup>44</sup>Miriam Glucksman, *Women Assemble*, 154.

<sup>45</sup>This term is taken from Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago 1979). Burawoy concentrates on the manufacturing of consent on the shop floor through the organization of the labor process — through game-playing, lateral displacement of conflict, and so on. Although some of his conclusions are useful for an analysis of the work process at Westclox, I have chosen to concentrate on other means of manufacturing consent in this paper.

continually and arbitrarily pushed to its limit with speed-ups — at least not in the early years before Westclox's financial problems became visible.<sup>46</sup>

Foremen were also trained to listen and mediate, rather than reject complaints, and especially not to embarrass or humiliate women workers. Almost every female informant commented positively on the manner in which their male foremen dealt with conflict and grievances. "We were taken aside, never embarrassed in front of others on the line," remembers one woman. "I learned *never* to dismiss a complaint," recalls a former manager. "J.H. [Vernor] once took a strip off me for brushing off a complaint ... I listened, even if the complaint didn't seem [justified]."

<sup>47</sup> Some women claimed to prefer this conciliatory method to later union practices, as the latter tended to be more confrontational, drawing attention to the griever as "the union was always looking for an issue to hold over the Company's head."<sup>48</sup> While an analysis of women's work culture indicates that they had their own code of behaviour and sense of solidarity which was not simply equated with Company interest, Westclox labour relations were still compared very favourably to shop-floor relations in other factories — until at least the end of the 1940s. Westclox's "laissez-faire supervision" thus tended to "mystify labour/capital relations";<sup>49</sup> it was also construed by women workers as evidence of the company's familial style of management.

Managers were encouraged to deal with men under them in a somewhat different manner, with an eye to creating a feeling of male partnership, even though the workers knew this to be something of an illusion. In one meeting, a foreman was severely and humiliatingly "chewed out" by a manager in front of his peers. His response was to pull a different kind of rank on the manager — that of moral

<sup>46</sup> After the company's increasing economic problems in the 1960s, however, some long-time blue collar employees found the atmosphere less hospitable in part due to increasing cost cutting and speed ups.

<sup>47</sup> Westclox Interview #6, June 1989; Interview #23, July 1989.

<sup>48</sup> Westclox Interview #6, June 1989. It is possible that women's own methods of conflict resolution learned in the family, or even their different sense of privacy made them appreciate this mediated approach. This is not an ahistorical claim that women are, by nature, conciliatory, but rather a suggestion that, in this time period, women often learned mediating roles in the family and community. While labour historians have documented women's different work cultures and different approaches to resistance, there is less research on women's accommodation in the workplace. More recent feminist literature on women's methods of organizing have suggested that our gendered experience, as well as feminist ideology, produces different methods of organizing. See Jeri Wine and Janice Ristock, eds., *Women and Social Change* (Toronto 1991). It is worth noting that a contemporary study of activist women suggests different conclusions about the relationship between family and work than I do: see Karen Sachs, *Caring by the Hour: Women, Work and Organizing at Duke Medical Centre* (Urbana 1988).

<sup>49</sup> Kate Purcell, "Female Manual Workers: Fatalism and the Reinforcement of Inequalities," in David Robbins, ed., *Inequalities* (London 1982), 49.

superiority and reference to the comradeship preached by the Company. "I might be a farmer's son and you a university grad" he replied, "but you can't treat me that way, and if you do, I'm quitting."<sup>50</sup> The manager backed down, and the foreman's tactics were applauded by his colleagues who had absorbed the Westclox message that position and class differences could not, at least, be flaunted, and that all workers deserved respect. As Gerald Zahavi argues, workers' loyalty could not be extracted without a price; in return for accepting the Company paternalism, male workers manipulated the Company's rhetoric to secure working conditions which they wanted.<sup>51</sup>

While styles of supervision were important to workers, material rewards were also part of the paternalist bargain: Westclox's early attempts to establish good pay and benefits compared to other industries in Peterborough helped create an informal peace treaty with labour. By paying one or two cents more an hour than other factories and providing paid vacations, the Company hoped to procure better-educated workers, increase productivity, and secure a stable workforce. From the outset, the Company also carefully "planned production almost a year in advance in order to regularize employment,"<sup>52</sup> thus creating workers' loyalty. Because this was not a one-company town, Westclox management felt it had to compete for skilled male labour, but they also extended this strategy to include female workers. According to one former manager, when J.H. Vernor first established female wage-rates that were one or two cents more than those of the larger Canadian General Electric, a prominent GE manager "stormed up the hill" to demand a roll-back. Vernor argued that in order to recruit a workforce from scratch, Westclox needed some tangible economic inducements.<sup>53</sup> The Company also persuaded community members of the superiority of its white-collar work. When looking for new secretarial help, the personnel manager would call the head commercial teacher at the local high school and ask him to send over the top three or four women in the graduating class for interviews. The teacher obliged.<sup>54</sup>

Given the relative prosperity of the 1920s, and a measure of tariff protection in the interwar years, it made good business sense to inaugurate a personnel policy which utilized the lure of benefits to secure long-term investment in employee stability — something that was to change with different economic conditions 30 years later. These welfare capitalist policies were also clearly motivated by a desire to avoid unionization, but to young women seeking jobs in the interwar period and even the early 1940s, this goal did not worry them.<sup>55</sup> Time and again, women

<sup>50</sup>Westclox Interview #9, April 1991.

<sup>51</sup>Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*.

<sup>52</sup>Archives of Ontario (AO), Department of Labour, RG 7-57, 3, file: Industrial Relations, pre-1936.

<sup>53</sup>Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.

<sup>54</sup>This practice seemed to persist into the 1950s.

<sup>55</sup>It is also important to note that the city as a whole was largely ununionized until the later 1940s.

remember the sense of competition for the few openings at Westclox. One woman climbed the hill day after day to ask if there was a position; another, lacking a family member there, babysat for a foreman and persuaded him to speak for her.

While many companies assumed women were not interested in benefit plans, women did consider these part of the allure of employment at Westclox.<sup>56</sup> On top of paid vacations, available after five years of service (one of the most attractive benefits), there was also a group insurance plan, instituted from the beginning, which the employer paid. From the 1930s on, employees could also contribute to a jointly-paid sick leave plan, but a pension plan didn't appear until 1940. There was also a number of less costly benefits, though ones which the company loudly advertised, such as a cafeteria with cheap hot meals, tennis courts on the grounds, and an infirmary.

Compared to other large Ontario companies, these were good, but by no means outstanding benefits. A 1927 study done for the Ontario government on the physical, recreational, and financial benefits offered by businesses revealed that many companies offered cheaper benefits like recreation and cafeterias, while fewer offered more costly employer-paid vacations, sickness insurance, pension plans and so on.<sup>57</sup> Later analyses of welfare plans by the Canadian Manufacturing Association (CMA) in the 1930s indicated that, in comparison to large enterprises such as Imperial Oil, Westclox now lagged behind.<sup>58</sup> Still, it is important to compare Westclox to other Peterborough industries;<sup>59</sup> in contrast to the low wages and no benefits offered by the large woollen mill, the longer work week at Quaker Oats, and the notorious authoritarian management style at CGE, Westclox "looked great"<sup>60</sup> to prospective workers. Even after monetary rewards improved elsewhere by the 1950s, Westclox could ride on its existing reputation, aided by its public relations campaign, already successful in the community.

Part of this good public image was centred on the Westclox reputation for safety prevention. J.H. Vernor's long-time leadership in the Accident Prevention

<sup>56</sup>Women's attitudes towards benefits were also shaped by their age and longevity of employment. Still, many industries made generalization about all women workers. For example, General Electric in the US assumed women were interested in "sociability not security." Ronald Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1932-60* (Urbana 1983), 22.

<sup>57</sup>AO. Department of Labour, RG7-57. Miss Finlay's report, 1927. Westclox's paid vacations were the most expensive and attractive of its benefits. In the 1927 study only about one-third of the companies surveyed had paid vacations.

<sup>58</sup>*Industrial Canada*, June 1935; September 1935; October 1935; August 1936.

<sup>59</sup>It also needs to be compared to industries of other size and wealth. Companies like Imperial Oil were much larger and able to sustain expensive benefits. As Nelson points out for the US, only the larger minority of companies ever became really involved in welfare plans; many smaller companies continued to deal with unions in a different way — with active intimidation. See Nelson, *Workers and Managers*, 116.

<sup>60</sup>Westclox Interview #4, December 1990.

Association was often lauded in the local press, as was his creation of plant safety committees. At one CMA convention he illustrated the Westclox model of safety committees, carefully using a language of efficiency and productivity before this audience. The "humanitarian angle" of safety, he argued was only "incidental"; the truly important reason for worker self-organization on this issue was "cost, efficiency and productivity." In order to achieve that efficiency, however, he realized that a *limited* degree of self organization was more astute than absolute control. At Westclox, the safety committee was semiautonomous: it could elect members by secret ballot, set its own agenda, and even criticize foremen. It could also call for the dismissal of fellow workmen; this was quite shrewd politics, for it made workers self-policing and prevented management from looking heartless. When one worker did not report a serious scratch, for instance, it "became infected, and though it was fortunately cured" he was immediately dismissed for failure to report an injury, Vernor announced triumphantly to his business audience.<sup>61</sup> In this case, management's paternalist discretion was not used to overlook an infraction that one suspects might have been ignored if the worker had been a star pitcher on the baseball team. Safety committees, though a small part of plant operation, were sold as examples of worker control over production. Their most significant role, as Craig Heron argues, may have been an ideological one, as safety campaigns provided industry with an opportunity to "show a humanitarian concern for their workers."<sup>62</sup>

While many of these benefits were standard ingredients of welfare capitalism, an important element of the company's paternalism was the personal and discretionary way that benefits were imparted: 19th-century paternalism thus overlapped with 20th-century welfarism. In a confidential survey returned to the Ontario Department of Labour in 1927, the company revealed that in "deserving cases, money was sometimes lent on the quiet for house buying" but at the same time the survey recorded that "Vernor hates anything paternal."<sup>63</sup> While understanding the pejorative connotation of the word, he was still willing to apply its principles.

Until a union contract of 1952, there was no official bereavement leave and pay; before that, management created, on an ad-hoc basis, similar benefits for some employees. One long-time blue collar employee, whom Vernor knew well, remembered the situation when her father died. Not only was she was given time off, but Vernor lent the family his car for the funeral and when he came to pay his respects, he shook hands and discreetly left a 20-dollar bill behind — a personal contribution to the funeral expenses which families sometimes found hard to meet. While most

<sup>61</sup>*Industrial Canada*, July 1937. I find it a bit hard to believe that someone was dismissed for this infraction. Is it possible that Vernor was just displaying the 'tough' side of his management style for his fellow executives?

<sup>62</sup>Heron, *Working in Steel*, 194.

<sup>63</sup>AO, RG 7, Department of Labour, 7-57, 3 File: Industrial Relations, pre-1936. It is revealing that other Peterborough industries listed in the same file indicated similar patterns. Quaker Oats, for instance, said there "was no pension plan but the company takes care of needy and deserving cases. No one is allowed to suffer."



women report similar instances of sympathetic paternalism, a former secretary noted that when her mother died, the company sent for her at the funeral home to come and finish some special typing only she had done in the past; paternalism, in other words, was arbitrarily applied.

These discretionary benefits were important for they reinforced ties of loyalty and obligation between boss and worker, sometimes so successfully that workers began to *interpret* legal rights as personal gifts. Even after a sick benefits plan was introduced, Vernor told a woman office worker to "let him know if she needed time off because there was sickness in the family"<sup>64</sup> so he could arrange it, an incident then translated as evidence of his flexibility and concern. Another blue-collar employee praised Vernor for his concern with the personal safety of his female employees who had to be taxied home after midnight shifts during the war years. Although she was very vaguely aware that this was required by law, she primarily saw Vernor's hand in it: "the taxi driver had to wait until we were in the door ... and if he didn't, we were supposed to notify Mr. Vernor about [it]."<sup>65</sup>

While many Canadian managers claim that the company's benefit schemes emerged from the personal and 'fatherly' concern of the Matthiessen family for their employees,<sup>66</sup> Westclox's paternalism evolved as a more complex amalgam of corporate planning and worker responses. Grounded upon the inescapable material vulnerability of workers, Westclox's paternalism also incorporated flexible styles of supervision within a carefully structured work process, the use of alluring wages, and well-calculated, public presentations of Company benefits to create its distinct pattern of labour relations. A business strategy which reflected both larger corporate aims and the personal touch of the General Manager, this paternalism was also aided by the social structure of this small city in which management's prestige was confirmed by their prominent social status in the "town below." More than one informant pointed to the elite family connections or important community stature that certain managers (or their wives) enjoyed, thus reinforcing patterns of paternalism already forged at work.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup>Westclox Interview #18, February 1990.

<sup>65</sup>Westclox Interview #20, August 1990.

<sup>66</sup>Ralph H. Matthiessen, claims a former manager, also evinced paternal concern for his employees. This manager cited an example, not witnessed, but rather part of oral tradition, that Matthiessen approved wage increases in the Depression, despite falling profits, as a measure of the company's moral debt to its workforce. Interview #21, July 1989.

<sup>67</sup>Even if they didn't actively participate in city government or social organizations, some managers were perceived as 'well-connected,' respected community leaders. In civic politics, Westclox managers in these years were less visible than their GE counterparts. Vernor never became openly involved, perhaps because he was American. His wife, however, was associated with appropriate charities, like the YWCA, and he was involved in fraternal organizations, as was his second in command, Cranford. Evidence of the lasting respect held for some of these managers is well illustrated in the number of times I was asked to turn the tape recorder off rather than reveal any fact which might be interpreted negatively.

*Women and Men in the Westclox 'Family'*

WHEN FORMER WORKERS offered positive interpretations of company paternalism, most did not employ a language of worker deference, as much as they used familial metaphors which were intimately connected to the sexual division of labour in the plant, and to notions of female respectability and male breadwinning. Westclox promoted a sexual division of labour that was characterized by women's exclusion from supervisory positions and apprenticeships, and from heavy work in shipping and automatics, along with their concentration in assembly line work, tasks like washing clock faces that approximated domestic labour, some smaller punch-press jobs, and clerical work. Women's relegation to these job ghettos was rationalized on two bases: the male breadwinner ideology and women's 'natural' physical differences, especially their nimble fingers and ability to tolerate fine eye work. While a former manager claimed that the Company simply "hired for the job," he also saw some impermeable gender boundaries: "you wouldn't hire a man to knit would you? his fingers were too big and clumsy .... girls are much more adaptable to assembly work."<sup>68</sup>

Explanations for this sexual division of labour were often interwoven with descriptions of paternalism in the factory; accounts of why and how the sexual division of labour existed are characterized by a familial discourse within which women workers assume the role of daughters and maiden aunts, while men assume the role of sons. The latter role, of course, was constructed in a particularly patriarchal manner, with younger men under the control of older ones, but always with the prospect of advancing themselves into positions of power.

Westclox strongly encouraged internal advancement of its male employees into supervisory and even management positions. J.H. Vernor's keen eye for potential foremen and managers, and his use of corporate training plans to promote them, meant that some men were offered opportunities at Westclox not available elsewhere, ensuring their indebtedness to the firm.

Not only were men promoted internally, but the bonds of male solidarity were also cemented by perks like a club house for foremen and managers on the Westclox property, and by men's social events such as golf stags, poker nights, and Vernor's annual foremen's picnic held at his cottage on Buckhorn Lake. Here, male camaraderie was reinforced with activities like fishing derbies, horseshoes, cards, and, one assumes, drinking as well, as Vernor was not known as an abstainer. Indeed, some of the men whom Vernor came to know well helped to "protect" his public image by buying his scotch for him; after a court appearance for an impaired drinking charge in 1954, however, Vernor's reputation became more public.<sup>69</sup> Male bonding thus temporarily superseded class hierarchy, even though Vernor always made it clear that respect for his title should take precedence within the factory. Fraternal loyalties may also have played a role in cementing these male ties: both

<sup>68</sup>Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.

<sup>69</sup>*Peterborough Examiner*, 1 December 1954.

Vernor and the (later) General Manager Cranford were active Masons, as were some of the workers on the shop floor.

What role did women's labour play in this family? As with domestic labour, women's wage labour sustained the enterprise but was also undervalued, and did not lead to possibilities of significant advancement and power. The distinction between the paternalism directed towards men and women was the way in which sons might prosper in the family, but women could only maintain their secondary roles. As daughters primarily interested in temporary wage work and ultimately marriage, women were presumed to be satisfied with smaller wage packets, a view many women, even some single career women, remember endorsing. The one way that women could use the Company's emphasis on internal promotion and discretionary paternalism was to advance from blue- to white-collar work, which offered better working conditions, more interesting work and higher status, if not better wages. Though this promotion ladder was truncated compared to men's, it was appealing to some working-class women, especially those whose education had been cut short during the Depression.<sup>70</sup>

The hiring of single women only was the policy until World War Two. "My thinking," explained one manager, using a revealing familial metaphor, "was if two girls came up, one married and one single, you should hire the latter for she had been kept, clothed by the family until then, so why not give her a job and take her off her father's hands."<sup>71</sup> Even after the marriage bar had been disrupted by the war, a 'maternity bar' remained in the postwar years, becoming the new rationalization for a family wage for men and secondary salaries for women.

The one group of women who did not fit into this familial model were single, unmarried 'career' women who chose to pursue wage work rather than marry. Interestingly, these women are sometimes described with metaphors which suggest their role as 'spinsters' or maiden aunts — as determined, unusual even eccentric women — or alternatively, as dutiful daughters, who in their own way, were also playing the appropriate familial roles by caring for aging parents. "You *must* talk to "Susan," I was told by one manager, you know she was really a "good girl" ... she worked all her life, lived at home and looked after her mother until she died."<sup>72</sup> This is not to say that all women placidly internalized the familial models of daughters' temporary work and spinsters' self sacrifice: they saw their roles shaped by a more complex web of choices and necessities, and a few identified the discrimination involved in the existing sexual division of labour, though they also saw it as an insurmountable reality.

<sup>70</sup>On department stores' successful use of paternalism, including the encouragement of upward mobility of women into white-collar jobs see Gail Reekie, "Humanizing Industry: Paternalism, Welfarism and Labour Control in Sydney's Big Stores, 1890-1930," *Labour History*, 53 (November 1987).

<sup>71</sup>Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

Even after women were allowed to work after marriage, the paternalism accorded men and women remained a feature of factory life. By rationalizing its hiring decisions and the gendered division of labour with appeals to innate sexual abilities and the male breadwinner ideal,<sup>73</sup> the Company incorporated gender ideology directly into its managerial strategy. These assumptions reinforced the notions that women were less concerned with autonomy and control over their work, were less suited to supervise, and that women's wage work was secondary to domestic duties.

The incorporation of paternal assumptions into the dominant characterization of white-collar work was especially noteworthy; the attributes of a good white-collar worker underlined a paternal relationship between female worker and male supervisor. Good work habits — punctuality, preciseness, politeness, pleasant personality — were essentially seen as 'female' attributes, and as Margery Davies points out, the very language used to describe the ideal secretary — as adaptable, deferential, a good listener, and nice looking — in fact, "cast her in a female role as office daughter/wife."<sup>74</sup>

Such assumptions both reflected and were bolstered by prevailing gender ideology. Women workers recall accepting the 'natural' placement of men over women on the job, and the characterization of men's work as important, women's as less important. Blue- and white-collar women alike spoke of the need to respect male supervisors because of their greater experience, skill, and knowledge. "My manager," recalled one woman "said we really didn't know half of what went on" and how the workplace operated, and "I guess he [was right]."<sup>75</sup> Women's accommodation to the gendered hierarchy at work was reproduced not only through the daily practice of a sexual division of labour, but also through the notions of masculinity and femininity, and the gendered meanings of experience, skill, and the right to work which women absorbed from the wider cultural context. Gender ideology thus assisted the acceptance of male authority as 'natural' and inevitable, and helped create the paternal — and patriarchal — workplace.

Earlier research has argued that both male and female workers were "rendered childlike" by paternalism, which also "undermined [men's] sense of identity as

<sup>73</sup>As other authors have noted, company promotion of the ideal of a family wage also provided ideological and economic reinforcement for women's role in unpaid domestic labour. See Martha May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage: The Ford Motor Company and the Five Dollar Day," *Feminist Studies*, 8 (Summer 1982). See also Linda Frankel, "Southern Textile Women's Generations of Survival and Struggle," in Karen Sachs, ed., *My Troubles Are Going to Have Trouble With Me: The Everyday Trials and Triumphs of Women Workers* (New Brunswick, NJ 1980), for the argument that "paternalism ... depended on women's continued responsibility for domestic life," 46.

<sup>74</sup>Margery Davies, *Woman's Place is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia 1982), 155.

<sup>75</sup>Westclox Interview #13, August 1989.

breadwinners,"<sup>76</sup> but this obscures paternalism's inherent rationalization of gender divisions within the factory. As in a patriarchal family, some men could assume control, at least in theory, over women. The same was true for Westclox sons, but obviously not for its daughters.

There were other differences between the treatment of sons and daughters; for example, the moral protection of women, not men, was a concern of the Company. It is often assumed that such moral paternalism did not persist past the Progressive-era schemes of employers to emphasize feminine skills and moral protection in their welfare plans for women; yet, at Westclox, quite the opposite was true.<sup>77</sup> Although the image of what a respectable working girl's social life was like did change after 1920, with activities like dancing increasingly taken for granted, anxiety about sexual morality and marriageability remained a subtext of concern. Many veiled references to sexual respectability, to the "better class" of girl who was hired in the 1930s and 1940s, especially before the company went downhill by the 1960s, indicates how the theme of sexual propriety of the daughters was also tied into the narrative theme of family decline. Other local factories were contrasted to the Westclox: the textile mill which employed many women was referred to as "tough, you know, you had a tough name if you worked there. My wife lived near there, but her father wouldn't let her get a job there."<sup>78</sup> The way that the word nice was used made it clear that moral respectability was at issue. As one manager commented: "We hired very nice girls [at Westclox]. We were careful about that, to hire good girls, respectable girls. You could be a preacher's daughter and work at Westclox, you know."<sup>79</sup> Former workers made the same connection, implying that it drew in a more educated, and thus respectable class of women: "We took the cream of the crop ... we even had schoolteachers there .... But after the war, it was harder to find people and we had to take some we didn't really want."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup>Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*, 140.

<sup>77</sup>From the chaperoned boarding houses of Lowell to lessons in culture at Heinz, employers utilized various tactics to create the impression that under their tutelage, working-class women would be better able to maintain their pure character, and thus become respectable and sought-after wives. On distinct programs for women see Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers*. On 19th century paternalism and the protection of women's respectability see Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, chap. 2. In *Workers, Manager and Welfare Capitalism*, Zahavi argues that Endicott Johnson defended the morality and respectability of wage earning mothers, primarily because these women's labour was needed in his factory — indicating the malleability of paternalism according to the needs of capital. In the context of the Peterborough labour market, married women were not a crucial necessity to the company (at least until the war years) and so the company could endorse the family wage and ignore the issue of wage-earning mothers.

<sup>78</sup>Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>Westclox Interview #1, July 1989.

Although personnel policies were primarily designed to hire loyal and hard working-employees, for some managers this aim was explained with reference to gendered authority patterns. Hiring girls from the surrounding rural areas was an established practice. It was assumed that farm girls were well acquainted with hard labour, but also that they would respect authority as they did in their own family business: "There was no way for a lazy kid on the farm, you see, but some girls from town wouldn't even help their mother with the dishes,"<sup>81</sup> one manager explained to me.

At the same time, it was assumed that a "good" female worker also meant one who was above moral reproach. Extremely revealing is the incident involving a woman who had already been interviewed and offered a job in the postwar period only to be phoned back and told there were no openings available; a male worker who had witnessed part of the interview had informed a manager that she was living immorally with a married man. Notwithstanding the many implications of this episode — including the gender solidarity evidenced and how easily small-town gossip can ruin a woman's reputation — the message was quite clear: she was promiscuous and therefore should be denied the job. "If you hire a few like that," one male interviewee commented, then "all the girls are tainted with the same brush."<sup>82</sup> Maintaining the image of respectability within the plant was also the concern of some managers. During the postwar period, one correspondent for the in-house newspaper was told in no uncertain terms that the paper would not print a gossip item which implied a married man had been parking "up on a hill" with another woman from work: "[that] had to [be] edited out; we had to be careful about what went in [the paper] after all, that would have caused him trouble at home [if his family had read that]."<sup>83</sup>

Respectability was a particular concern of the factory patriarch, J.H. Vernor. While many interviewees are circumspect, it is clear that Vernor enjoyed playing moral protector of his female workforce. One remembers a lecture he delivered on the state of the woman's washroom (which he had apparently inspected after hours); another recalls his admonishments on 'ladylike' dress. A softball story highlights his self-designation as paternal overseer of his daughters' decency. After one out-of-town game, some of the players went into a bar for a drink. Others, who still saw bars as a place where women were "picked up," went elsewhere. When Vernor found out, the coach was reprimanded for letting the players be seen in a bar. It was never to happen again. "We had to be ladies, you see ... he insisted on that,"<sup>84</sup> explained a former team member.

Personal protection of women's respectability in the community was also displayed in a situation in which a manager became involved in a women's debt

<sup>81</sup>Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.

<sup>82</sup>Westclox Interview #23, July 1989.

<sup>83</sup>Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.

<sup>84</sup>Westclox Interview #20, August 1990.

problems. A local merchant, exasperated with one particular employee, who was a "clothes horse" and was always running up debts, asked a Company manager if he could "do something"<sup>85</sup> about the problem. Officially, the Company said it would not keep employees on who needed to have their wages garnisheered. In order to keep the woman from descending into an unenviable situation, another manager decided he would personally budget for her for a year, allotting her an allowance after her bills were paid. When she was given her full salary again and the problem recurred, a manager finally gave the local store owner the most sensible advice: stop extending credit. Such personal supervision was facilitated in a small city, where company managers and local merchants knew each other well, and in a plant where women, encouraged to see managers as paternal and concerned, might even accept personal help with their budgeting.

The company's attempt to champion the morality and respectability of its women workers was not entirely unwelcome among female employees in the 1930s and 1940s. This dimension of paternalism offered women, especially those in the plant, some reciprocal psychological benefits, by countering a prevailing image of the "tough" factory girl which many women workers resented. Women who worked in other heavier industries in the city like General Electric and Outboard Marine lamented that factory women were viewed as less feminine or refined: tough and rough were the two words commonly used. Apprehension about blue-collar work was symbolized in the references to cleanliness and dress; the sight of coveralls, even during World War Two, carried with it fears of endangered femininity. Women who worked at Westclox, on the other hand, constantly cited their clean workplace and the fact that they could wear what they wanted as evidence of their better class of employment, especially in comparison to the "dirty, dark"<sup>86</sup> General Electric. It is noteworthy that one of the few women who worked in a dirtier area of Westclox, automatics, sometimes felt slighted by the girls on the upper floors who she thought believed themselves superior to her. Other historians have pointed to the symbolic importance of dress for working women as signs of their "orderly,"<sup>87</sup> successful, or respectable character; for Westclox women, dress, cleanliness and an impeccable reputation offered them a modicum of respectability which they felt was denied them by prevailing images of factory workers.

The appeal to a sense of respectability may have also been shaped by ethnic homogeneity and exclusivity as well. Like the city itself, the plant was pre-

<sup>85</sup>Westclox Interview #23, July 1989.

<sup>86</sup>Westclox Interview #4, December 1990.

<sup>87</sup>For discussion of how dress, image, and gesture were used to express gender identity for working-class women, see J. Dowd Hall, "Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South," *Journal of American History*, 73 (Summer 1986), and Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in turn-of-the-century New York* (Philadelphia 1986).

dominantly Anglo/Celtic in character.<sup>88</sup> Although there was occasional Catholic/Protestant rivalry in the plant, women were ultimately drawn together more from a sense of being upright and respectable than they were separated by religious differences. Those religious differences which did occasionally surface were tempered by the company's conscious personnel strategy of hiring Catholics in proportion to their numbers in the city and opening up skilled positions "elsewhere under control of the Masons" to Catholic men. "I remember our priest saying out how good [Vernor] was to East City" remembers a male worker. "He praised J.H. up and down for hiring Catholics."<sup>89</sup> By carefully attending to religious tensions, Vernor was able, again, to bolster his image as fair-minded and generous to the local community.

### *Company Sports and Newspapers*

IT WAS NOT ONLY THROUGH THE PROVISION of material benefits and support for notions of respectability that Westclox sustained its paternalism. The company's on-site clubhouse and tennis courts as well as its careful maintenance of extensive gardens and lawns (and its advertisement of its civic awards for the best kept industrial workplace) all were designed to create a 'homelike' atmosphere. Company rituals, especially those geared to Westclox children, such as picnics and Christmas parties, and those geared to long service, such as retirement dinners and the Quarter Century Club events, were also very important. Many who attended the Quarter Century Club and retirement dinners characterize these events as lavish affairs, which they see as evidence of the company's magnanimity. One employee proudly repeated, in her interview, word for word, the acceptance poem she delivered when she received her 25-year award.

Other initiatives were probably more important: one of these was the encouragement of recreation and athletics for employees. J.H. Vernor supported the creation of industrial league teams for both men and women and donated money to rent the YWCA for team sports, sometimes personally passing on the cheque through an employee. Westclox's community name, however, was best known for its women's softball team. When I began to interview employees, I was repeatedly urged to seek out the women ballplayers; Westclox's name was still intimately associated with sports in many former employees' minds.

<sup>88</sup>Census material from 1921 to 1941 confirms this characterization. For example: Canada, *Census* of 1921, vol. 1, Table 28 shows those listing British racial origins to be 92 per cent of the city's population. Canada, *Census* of 1931, Vol. 2, Table 34 shows 91 per cent of the population listing British racial origins. Table 47 showed that 80 per cent of the population was born in Canada and 16 per cent were born in the British Isles. Canada, *Census* of 1941, Vol. 1, Table 34 indicates 90 per cent listed British origins; Table 45 indicates that 83 per cent were Canadian born and 12 per cent were born in Britain. This was a stable, and predominantly Anglo city.

<sup>89</sup>Westclox Interview #9, April 1991.



Women workers were sometimes ballplayers scouted out by coaches concerned more with team than with manpower needs in the plant. One woman remembers that even before she finished high school "they were hot and heavy after me to play softball for them ... but my mother put her foot down as she wanted me to finish my business training."<sup>90</sup> When another teenager was approached by the coaches before her sixteenth birthday, her parents were also consulted, a sign not only of her youth, but also of company scruples against interfering with traditional family authority. One woman was recruited by her sister, already a Westclox athlete: "I went there to play in the sports. I think you'll find a lot of the girls did the same thing. They got jobs to play softball, basketball. My sister got the job first, then Mr. Vernor, who was the president needed another player [so I was hired]."<sup>91</sup>

Women on the Westclox team practised regularly, competed fiercely, and did well: in 1945 they were runner-up for the provincial championship. The company outfitted the women with uniforms, paid for buses to transport them across the province, and, although the women were not supposed to get extra perks at work, some lateness might occasionally be accepted when they were playing for championships out of town. When one ballplayer sprained her ankle, Vernor sent a truck to pick her up every day so that she could make it to work.

Sports were meant to create a sense of company loyalty, suggesting competition with the outside, but team effort inside; they were supposed to create a loyal, disciplined, and committed workforce that strove to give its best performance on and off the job. Anxious to cash in on the popularity of amateur sports in the interwar years,<sup>92</sup> the company also saw sports teams as a good source of advertising: they made the Westclox name known outside of Peterborough, and reinforced a positive view of the company in the town. Nor did this end with the war; if anything, an emphasis on sports increased in the 1940s.<sup>93</sup>

U.S. historians have documented how early paternalist experiments like Pullman utilized organized sport as a means of keeping skilled workers and building "character" amongst its employees, especially the "middle class values

<sup>90</sup>Westclox Interview #12, July 1989.

<sup>91</sup>Westclox Interview #7, September 1989.

<sup>92</sup>Carle Betke, "The Social Significance of Sport in the City," in A.R. McCormack and I. Macpherson, eds., *Cities in the West* (Ottawa 1975). American sports historians point to the commercialization of sports in this period, but his was not so visible in a smaller community. See Mark Dyreson, "The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s," *Journal of Sport History*, 16 (3), Winter 1989.

<sup>93</sup>On the increasing use of recreation programs by companies during World War Two, see "Industrial Recreation, Canadian Style," *Recreation*, December 1944. For a revisionist view which suggests that US companies renewed their interest in welfare capitalism during World War Two, see Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, "Industrial Recreation, the Second World War and the Revival of Welfare Capitalism, 1934-60," *Business History Review*, 69 (Summer 1986).

of sobriety, thrift and industriousness."<sup>94</sup> Stephen Gelber even argues that baseball specifically was promoted by business because it reinforced values congruent with capitalism such as competition, discipline, and team work.<sup>95</sup> Many of these studies, however, focus on the inculcation of 'manly' attributes through sport.<sup>96</sup> Feminist analyses of women's sports in the interwar period, on the other hand, have been critical of the ways in which sport was moulded by male medical and educational experts intent on controlling women's bodies and preserving traditional notions of female physical weakness. The women's teams which became popular with spectators during World War Two, it is suggested, were often marketed in a voyeuristic way as attractive entertainment.<sup>97</sup>

Listening to women's subjective memories of industrial sports suggests a different perspective. As one recent critic of Gelber notes, the actual meaning sports had for players might differ from the intentions of team promoters.<sup>98</sup> Women who played on Westclox teams enjoyed the physical competition and public visibility involved. When a woman from the Westclox basketball team remembered her exhibition game with the famous Edmonton Grads, she noted how exhilarating it was to play, by boys' rules, and to a large crowd, if only to lose to such competitive, top-notch players. Ballplayers recall with pride the spectators, especially other Westclox employees, who filled the stands; there was no mistaking the sense of public presence articulated by one woman who told me "that [baseball diamond] at [Riverside park] belonged to us girls ... then later, the men took it over."<sup>99</sup> "Years later," a star player remembered nostalgically, "someone would come up to me on the street downtown and say, 'I remember you pitching for Westclox!'"<sup>100</sup>

Women's teams drew together a "specially bonded"<sup>101</sup> female community, and at Westclox united office and plant workers, who rarely socialized in other companies. Teams also became a way for married women to continue work and

<sup>94</sup>Wilma Pesavento, "Sport and Recreation in the Pullman Experiment, 1880-1900," *Journal of Sport History*, 9 (Summer 1982). See also John Schleppi, "'It Pays': John Patterson and Industrial Recreation at the National Cash Register Company," *Journal of Sport History*, 6 (Winter 1979).

<sup>95</sup>Stephen Gelber, "Working at Playing: The Culture of the Workplace and the Rise of Baseball," *Journal of Social History*, (Summer 1983).

<sup>96</sup>Morris Mott, "One Solution to the Urban Crisis: Manly Sports and Winnipeggers, 1900-14," *Urban History Review*, 12 (2), 1983.

<sup>97</sup>Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women Sport and Sexuality* (Toronto 1986). See also her "Femininity First: Sport and Physical Education for Ontario Girls, 1890-1930," in Morris Mott, ed., *Sports in Canada* (Toronto 1989).

<sup>98</sup>Melvin Adilman, "Baseball, Business and the Workplace: Gelber's Thesis Re-examined," *Journal of Social History*, 23 (Winter 1989).

<sup>99</sup>Westclox Interview #20, August 1990.

<sup>100</sup>Westclox Interview #12, July 1989.

<sup>101</sup>*Peterborough Examiner*, undated clipping, 1990. This term was used by a woman interviewed about her memories of war-time industrial softball leagues.

friendly contacts that homemaking denied them after they left the company. One woman, self described as "ball crazy,"<sup>102</sup> continued to play and tour after she left work to have children; she used to take her children to practices and another Westclox friend looked after them. The strong identification of these women with sports may well point to a class dimension missing in the feminist analysis of Canadian sport: Veronica Strong-Boag has suggested that working-class women were perhaps "less intimidated by stereotypical assumptions" about femininity and thus uniquely placed to take advantage of new team opportunities.<sup>103</sup> The early experience of many of these women playing ball in the streets and fields with brothers and friends, and their later, hearty embrace of sports, indicates this to be true.

To the company, of course, promotion of these teams was a form of boosterism, a means of encouraging company loyalty and keeping good workers. Some women ballplayers remained for years with the company; once established there, the existence of benefit and pension plans encouraged one's decision to remain. And while workers who participated in sports may not have directly shared in the company's goals, sports still had a positive influence on their attitude towards their employer: these women's recollections of work and their attitude towards their employer are clearly coloured by their positive experience of sports. Moreover, for some women, excellence in sports seemed to provide a source of personal identification that helped to overcome the limitations of the glass ceiling encountered at work. As one English historian has shown, sport teams could create a sense of harmony in small communities, even temporarily muting class differences.<sup>104</sup> A similar outcome was accomplished here. Women came to identify their enjoyed sport and leisure time with their workplace; as a result, 'the softball solution' did aid the company's effort to manufacture consent in the workplace.

This analysis directly contradicts the sweeping claims of a Canadian sports historian that "by the mid-1920s the employer-established recreational sports ... seemed to have disappeared," abandoned because of serious competition from radical sports groups. This author misrepresents the importance of the industrial-recreational linkage which existed in many small towns and cities.<sup>105</sup> Secondly, working-class women's attitude toward team sport suggests a revision of the argument that the experts were successfully promoting a passive and delicate image of femininity; these women, rather, had a sense that they were blending 'being ladies' on the field (that is, not swearing or drinking) with being excellent, assertive

<sup>102</sup>Westclox Interview #7, September 1990.

<sup>103</sup>Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-39* (Toronto 1988), 31.

<sup>104</sup>Alan Tomlinson, "Good Times, Bad Times and the Politics of Leisure," in Hart Cantelon, et al., eds., *Leisure, Sport and Working Class Culture* (Toronto 1988).

<sup>105</sup>Ronald Melchers, "Sports in the Workplace," in Jean Harvey and Hart Cantelon, eds., *Not Just a Game: Essays in Canadian Sport Sociology* (Ottawa 1988).

ballplayers. As Kathleen McCrone has argued for an earlier period, emancipatory possibilities for women could emerge from even the most limited and male-defined extension of women's sports.<sup>106</sup>

If team sports supplied one glue to cement the Westclox family together, another was the company publication, *Tic Talk*. As Stuart Brandes has argued, company publications were a well-planned strategy to persuade the worker that she had a stake in the company's success, that the company had the economic sense to run the show and also cared about their personal goals and family life.<sup>107</sup> Westclox introduced an all-Canadian version of *Tic Talk* in the late 1930s, when the local CGE plant also inaugurated its own in-house newspaper. Although GE boasted in the *Financial Post* about its success in "spreading the news"<sup>108</sup> through its paper, few GE employees seem to have read it, whereas many Westclox employees wrote for *Tic Talk* and remember reading it, even union activists often offered to lend me copies they had saved.

Like other in-house publications, the Westclox one attempted to create support for company objectives. Basic lessons in economics were standard fare. The hazards of running a profitable business were stressed and concepts like capital formation were made familiar with comparisons to homes and gardens: "capital formation ... is just [the same] as when you set up a garden, you buy the necessary tools, fertilizer.... It is what every company or country needs to provide jobs for *all of us* [my emphasis] in the coming years."<sup>109</sup> The Horatio Alger myth was also a staple theme, as was the company's good will and connections to the community, its commitment to full employment, and especially its concern for health and safety (though accidents, it was stressed, were invariably the result of individual failings). Changes in company structure were rationalized, particularly down-sizing exercises, increasingly accompanied by veiled warnings that the company was "vulnerable" because its "costs of assembly" — especially wages — were too high.<sup>110</sup> Finally, the company's fate, it was stressed, lay in the response of "Joe Customer" to the quality of its product.<sup>111</sup> Workers were simultaneously encouraged to see themselves as consumers, thus making the point that workers were the architects of their own employment fate.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, the theme of consumerism ran throughout

<sup>106</sup> Kathleen McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914* (London 1988).

<sup>107</sup> Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*.

<sup>108</sup> "How GE Spreads Its News," *Financial Post*, 2 April 1955.

<sup>109</sup> *Tic Talk*, June 1954.

<sup>110</sup> By the 1960s these warnings were hardly veiled. In *Tic Talk*, December 1966 the paper asked "Do these names mean anything to you?" It offered names of plants that had gone out of business in Peterborough, then concluded: "The key to job security is in your hands."

<sup>111</sup> *Tic Talk*, December 1956 and December 1962.

<sup>112</sup> At GE, interestingly, it was Mrs. Consumer who was featured in their paper. For a discussion of companies like GE which deliberately pursued promotion of consumerism among its workers, see John Cumbler, *Working Class Community in Industrial America: Work, Leisure and Struggle in Two Industrial Cities, 1880-1930* (Greenwood 1979).

the publication; the company included ads for its own products and gossip columns abounded with notices of workers' consumer purchases: "Ethel ... came in all smiles this morning" noted one writer for *Tic Talk*, "Her hubby has given her a new radio and hi fi. Add to this the new automatic dryer she got recently and she isn't doing badly!"<sup>113</sup> That Ethel's own wages had been used to make these purchases is not noted.

*Tic Talk* also promoted a vision of Westclox as a family, and in doing so, reinforced certain images of women's and men's gendered work and family roles: for instance, women's domestic and mothering duties were lauded approvingly, while biographies of long-time employees often confirmed their status as "good family men." Family ties were often mentioned as a theme underlying plant relationships; as Fathers' Day approached one year, the editor urged everyone to have a very special "Westclox Fathers Day" celebration because so many kids had "followed their dads into the plant."<sup>114</sup> During the war, sections of the company were encouraged to adopt Westclox boys overseas, sending them collective presents. In turn, their letters of thanks were reprinted for the employees (largely female) to read. In one, addressed "Dear Mother," the soldier notes how much the Westclox present meant: "you know it was like being a kid on Christmas morning ... it was like receiving my first toy."<sup>115</sup>

Nowhere are distinct gender roles more clearly accented than in the extensive gossip columns sent in by worker-writers. The births, deaths, and marriages columns were obviously meant to reinforce a sense of community and overcome the impersonal alienation of factory life. But it was the mating and dating game which clearly drew most reader interest. Here, the dominant social prejudices of the period are replicated with little or no critical comment. Women are supposedly consumed with mating impulses and bliss is achieved when a diamond ring appears. Especially after the war years, women came close to being man hunters: "she may not be in the RCMP, but she got her man!"<sup>116</sup> Once mated, a woman was then "out of circulation,"<sup>117</sup> no longer fair game for other interested bachelors. Male reporters were almost as concerned with romance, ridiculing fellow workers who were smitten with the "love bug" and thus would soon lose their manly independence to the trap of marriage.<sup>118</sup> Particular relish is shown for in-house romances, which then become a focus for further teasing. Once official, engagements are followed by a number of rituals: departmental showers, parties and a public gift-giving. With

<sup>113</sup>*Tic Talk*, December 1959.

<sup>114</sup>*Tic Talk*, June 1954.

<sup>115</sup>*Tic Talk*, June 1944.

<sup>116</sup>*Tic Talk*, December 1956.

<sup>117</sup>*Tic Talk*, June 1954.

<sup>118</sup>*Tic Talk*, June 1966. The humour relating to marriage in these columns bears a striking resemblance to themes presented in James Snell, "Marriage Humour and its Social Functions, 1900-39," *Atlantis*, 11 (2), 1986.

marriage, it is assumed that "women will now retire to take up another job, homemaking,"<sup>119</sup> while men will continue to work at the plant. Few references to married working women are made, save for one reporter who notes that the married women are easily noticed by their "weary faces,"<sup>120</sup> a rare comment on the double day. Until the 1960s, one image of the family is made to seem natural and inevitable in these columns: the nuclear, home-owning, mother-at-home, father-at-work family.

The sexes are bound together by dating and mating, and ultimately, "marriage comes highly recommended,"<sup>121</sup> but at the same time, men and women are oceans apart in character and ability — an implicit justification for a division of labour. Women are concerned with beauty and appearance, men with technical knowledge and physical strength. Women's "known" love of shopping is mentioned frequently, while fishing and hunting are clearly pursuits which preoccupy male departments. Cars are a man's joy, but women are "the plague of our highways."<sup>122</sup> While car ownership is clearly offering some women new independence by the 1940s, depictions of women's car trips and vacations often carried a punchline describing mishaps or teasing about the potential perils of female independence.

*Tic Talk's* use of graphics and pictures also exhibited the familial theme; not only were company events, showing workers and managers happily leisuring together profiled, but many employees sent in their own pictures of family and fellow Westclox friends. Again, the contrast with the GE publication is stark: while GE pictures were often posed for plant photographers, the Westclox ones were submitted by the workers themselves. Pictures were off-centre, sometimes ill-focused, and completely homegrown; it is this lack of professionalism, ironically, that characterized *Tic Talk's* success for a feeling of active involvement rather than Company manipulation was created, consciously or not, by this 'family album' approach. Moreover, while both Companies used the publication to promote things like pension plans, GE once used its paper to denounce the union, a mistake Westclox never made.

Although *Tic Talk* columns were occasionally edited, they were also the product of shopfloor banter which many workers clearly enjoyed. One of the ways in which workers cope with the workplace, Louise Lamphere argues, is to create their own social networks which celebrate life rituals, offer mutual support, and break down the anonymity of the factory.<sup>123</sup> These social networks may be particularly important to women because they reproduced care-giving roles learned in the family and because women's wage work, which was characterized by little

<sup>119</sup> *Tic Talk*, December 1966.

<sup>120</sup> *Tic Talk*, July 1966.

<sup>121</sup> *Tic Talk*, September 1959.

<sup>122</sup> *Tic Talk*, September 1959.

<sup>123</sup> Louise Lamphere, "Bringing the Family to Work: Women's Culture on the Shop Floor," *Feminist Studies*, 11 (Fall 1985).

control and autonomy, needed a strong antidote of sociability on the shop floor. By integrating these social networks into its own publication, Westclox was able to promote the image of a humane workplace concerned with workers lives outside the factory. While the company calculated this as a means of securing worker satisfaction and loyalty, workers participated for different reasons: to alleviate boredom, engage in daily gossip (surely one of the most important social staples of our lives), and connect with other people. Women who were asked in interviews about the *conditions* of work often quickly moved into discussions of these *social networks*; the connection in their memories says much about the way in which women wanted to 'socialize' the workplace to make it as liveable and human as possible. At the same time, by participating in the company magazine, by endorsing images of male breadwinner and female dependent, male competence and female technical scatterbrain, workers were also legitimizing the division of labour and the existing hierarchy in the factory and in the household. While trying to make the workplace liveable, they were unconsciously reproducing its gendered hierarchy.

#### *Conclusion: Paternalism in Decline*

WESTCLOX'S PATERNALISM was, from the very beginning, part of a conscious strategy to avoid unionization, but the company was ultimately unable to defeat a powerful postwar trend, and in 1952, after more than one union attempt, the plant chose the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE) as their bargaining agent. Still, the office workers consistently resisted unionization, the plant never went on strike, and the union was considered 'moderate' by others in the vicinity.

Plant workers became sympathetic to unionization when they saw the material benefits of paternalism seriously eroding. As other major Peterborough plants secured good benefit packages, Westclox's former generosity began to look deficient. Once the gap between the promise of paternalism and the reality became quite wide, disappointment set in, perhaps even more strongly because of previously raised hopes of fair dealing on the company's part. With more economic pressure on the company, the shop floor also became more pressured by the 1960s, and the previous bargain of flexibility in work relations deteriorated. Unionization was perceived as a necessary (and by some, even unfortunate) last resort to defend the benefits initiated by the company in earlier decades. Finally, as the parent company restructured and eventually threatened to move (to low-wage Nova Scotia), the union was seen as a means of protection in the face of the company's disintegration.

Unionization was an indication that the negotiated partnership and paternalist bargain fostered from the 1920s to the 1940s had begun to erode. As Gerald Zahavi points out, workers tried to use paternalism for their own ends, extracting certain economic and moral obligations from the employer in return for their loyalty.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>124</sup>Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*.

Women and men at the Westclox plant used the rhetoric of paternalism, and obtained their own rewards, as much as possible, from the company. Men could benefit from a degree of autonomy on the shop floor, hope of upward mobility, a sense of male privilege and camaraderie, and reinforced identification with the image of the masculine breadwinner. Women could also try to use paternalism to make their working conditions humane and flexible; to provide mobility within female job ghettos; and also to reinforce a sense of dignity secured through their status as moral working women. For some individuals, like the favoured softball players, there were other sources of pride and compensation. But decent benefits and wages were always part of the 'deal' that the company fashioned with its workers. If the company let down its part of the bargain, workers felt justified in shifting their allegiance as well.

Though on the surface paternalism seemed to symbolize deference to one's employer, a more-negotiated accommodation was involved. While the paternalist bargain meant acquiescence, at least to some extent, to economic inequality and acceptance of a gendered hierarchy at work, a distinct notion of *dignity owed* to workers and the respectability of their aspirations and lives — though differently defined for men and women — was promoted and defended by the workers themselves.

Nonetheless, the resilience of paternalism at Westclox well into 1900s must still be explained; its strength derived from specific material conditions, the economic pressures encouraging conformity in the workplace and the influence of powerful, dominant ideologies which offered a meaningful rationale for the 'natural' hierarchy and justice of paternalism.

For many years, Westclox successfully synthesized favourable local and international economic conditions with a policy of moderate benefits and discretionary paternalism. Unlike the local textile firms employing women, the clock factory was able to pay slightly higher wages and remain competitive. Nor was it encumbered, as the much larger GE was, with a historically authoritarian rule and distant management, or with a 'rough' image. As an astute executor of Westclox's management strategy, J.H. Vernor's apparently charismatic and convincing role as patriarch should also be noted. Thus, Westclox's overlapping tactics of 19th-century paternalism and 20th-century welfarism, in an economic climate which supported the development of semiskilled manufacturing labour, and in a small, ethnically-homogeneous city thus succeeded — at least until the corporate rules of the game changed, making southern U.S. and third world labour more attractive.

The company's paternalist strategy was perhaps more easily realized in the small-town atmosphere of Peterborough. The geographical proximity of worker and manager in some neighbourhoods and churches, close knowledge of family networks, and a stable social hierarchy bolstered the ideological hegemony operating within the factory, creating the illusion of an "organic community" in which class and community interest were one and the same. Earlier work has suggested that class consciousness could be "reinforced by the community solidarity of small



towns with stable, homogeneous and familiar populations."<sup>125</sup> The Westclox example, however, indicates that the social relations of small cities might also inhibit class conflict. Furthermore, Peterborough's distinct labour history, in particular the failure of an industrial strike in textiles in 1937, and the inability of industrial unions to make significant inroads until the later 1940s, also meant that workers did not have at hand institutional or ideological alternatives to the paternalist bargain.

Finally, the resilience of paternalism must also be explained by the ideological creation of consent. Already-existing dominant notions of 'natural' economic hierarchy and inevitable gender differences were diffused through daily workplace practices, company symbols, and rituals. Gender was not peripheral, but rather central to this ideological hegemony. Paternalism was sustained by its assimilation and reproduction of a gender ideology which reinforced an image of female transience and marriageability, male independence and camaraderie, and female obedience and male authority. The workplace hierarchy was fused with gender roles supposedly found in the household and given strong sanction by society. A familial language justified *both* the gendered division of labour in the plant *and* the paternal placement of male managers over female workers; notions of sexual difference explained why males might go from being sons to fathers, while women remained forever daughters.

Significantly, when the company called for a wage roll-back in 1969, it targeted *only* the women workers. When the union appeared to waver on the issue, one female union executive had to write an indignant letter to the union negotiator warning him that women workers were upset about reported "secret negotiations" between the (male) union and management, and that women would not tolerate union leaders making a backroom deal to sell out the women.<sup>126</sup> When the General Time Empire began to fold in Canada, Westclox women were first asked to pay the price and become even more dependent on the "father" with lower wages. The fact that the women refused indicates that the paternalist bargain, while appealing, always had its limits.

<sup>125</sup>Craig Heron and George DeZwaan, "Industrial Unionism in Eastern Ontario: Ganonoque, 1918-21," *Ontario History*, September 1985. It is important to note that many of the businesses (except for GE) in this city were, like Westclox, small enough to facilitate the cultivation of paternalism.

<sup>126</sup>National Archives of Canada, IUE Collection, 28-I-264, Vol. 83. P. Drysdale to George Hutchens, President, Canadian IUE, 15 September 1969. This issue is taken up by other women outside the factory who write to the Ontario Women's Bureau complaining that such a roll back would be "discriminatory." AO, RG7, Department of Labour, Women's Bureau Correspondence, Series 8, Box 1.

*Appendix A: Note on Methodology.*

THIS ARTICLE IS PART of a much larger study of working women in Peterborough, 1920-1960. Although government documents, newspapers, and manuscript collections have been used as research tools, I have also used oral histories of former workers and managers as a basis for my conclusions. This was particularly important in the Westclox case as the Company denied me access to any of their records.

From the larger sample of Peterborough interviews, those with former Westclox employees number 29. 21 of these were with female white and blue collar workers, and the remaining were male managers, workers, and foremen. While the blue-collar women made up roughly two-thirds of the female group, it is difficult to characterize women precisely by occupation as there was quite a bit of movement from the factory floor into the office.

The interviews were usually two or more hours in length, and sometimes were followed by phone conversations to clarify issues. The interview sample was a "snowball" sample; many of the women and men were referred to me or called me after an article in the local newspaper described my research. Some responded to flyers posted in the local library and museum, or were referred by family, neighbours, or members of the labour movement who eventually heard of my work.

All of the women interviewed began work at Westclox in a 20-year period between 1933 and 1953; 50 per cent began before World War Two and 50 per cent began after 1940. Approximately half, again, were long-time employees, working at Westclox more than ten years, with the other half shorter-term employees, working under ten years (with about one-quarter of the women very short-term employees, working approximately three to four years). The majority of the men were longer-term employees.

This sample thus favours longer-term employees, although Westclox also claimed that it was particularly successful in keeping workers and offered some statistics to prove this (see note 3). The observations of the longer-term employees were also important, for these workers often periodized the history of the company: many referred to the "early years," which usually meant the period up until the immediate post war years, and the "later years," which meant the period from the 1950s, and especially the 1960s on.

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