

# The Industrial Context of Inequality: Female Participation in Nova Scotia's Paid Labour Force, 1871-1921\*

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## The Industrial Context of Inequality: Female Participation in Nova Scotia's Paid Labour Force, 1871-1921\*

EIGHTEEN YEAR OLD MARIE LEBLANC WAS typical of the largest category of working women of her generation in Nova Scotia.<sup>1</sup> In April 1901 she was employed as a servant in the household of Amherst merchant Samuel Geddes. Like most servants (77 per cent in 1901) Marie came from the countryside. Though a Roman Catholic, she worked in a Methodist household; here, too, her experience proved typical in an era when the middle classes were predominantly Anglo-Protestant and servants often Catholic. Marie reported earnings of \$140 the previous year, which did not include board and was based on twelve months employment. The Geddes' household comprised 43 year old Samuel, his wife Alice, who did not work outside the home, two sons of six and two years and Marie. It was a comparatively small household in 1901, especially in "Busy Amherst" where boarders and working children more than equalled the numbers of householders in the workforce.

In contrast to Marie, yet like numerous other working women in the province, 22 year old Georgina Willard taught grade school in the bustling coal town of Sydney Mines. She lived at home with her parents, three teen-aged sisters and a younger brother, in a large frame house on Oxford Street, in the mine town's fashionable "Upper Town". No servants lived in the Willards' house; however, teen-aged girls were expected to assist with normal housework and the family may have employed help that did not live in, for many servants and cleaning ladies lived at home. As Baptists, the Willards were a minority in the predominantly

\* ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: This study has been assisted by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for the project: "COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION: MARITIME TOWNS AND THE NATIONAL POLICY, 1870-1921". Students in my research seminars at Carleton between 1986 and 1989 helped its early conceptual development as did my colleague Carman Bickerton. Bob MacIntosh created some of the Sydney Mines data bases as part of his PhD thesis on child labour in the coal fields. Carleton and SSHRCC funded research assistants to code and re-code census manuscripts: Kerry Badgley, Barbara Clow, Daniel Yee, Sue Jenkins, Sean Purdy, Mike Bernards, Keith Hodgins, Tom Matheson, Sheila Day, Fulton Rhymes and Dorothy McGrath. Data assembly and initial analysis was assisted by Carleton's Computer and Communications Service Group — Bruce Winer, Greg Morrison, Jane Wilson and Jane Miller. An early version of this paper was presented to the Atlantic Canada Workshop at Saint Mary's University in Halifax in September, 1989. This version has benefitted from the reading and comments of Carman Bickerton, Alison Prentice, Gillian Cleese, Suzanne Morton and by *Acadiensis*' ever vigilant anonymous readers.

1 Pseudonyms are used for all these individuals, who are drawn from the 1901 manuscript census. This census is available to researchers under the provisions of the Access to Information Act.

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Presbyterian, Anglican and, increasingly, Catholic town. But they would not have felt out of place among the town's almost exclusively Anglo-Protestant professional and managerial elite. While Georgina's annual earnings of just under \$200 totalled less than half the mean salary reported by the town's male teachers, her modest income was almost double the average reported by servants, by far the largest group of employed women in Sydney Mines, where there were very few other opportunities for paid employment for women.

Thomas Willard, her father, was a clerk at the offices of the General Mining Association. Fifty-one years old in 1901, he reported an income of \$600, which, while not a management-level salary, was well above the mean income of \$455 reported by miners heading their own households that year in Sydney Mines. Still, the combined family income of father and daughter did not match that of many miners with one or two sons working underground.<sup>2</sup> Enjoyment of a family income for at least parts of a family's life-course was becoming common, as Nova Scotia's bustling urban economy provided a variety of new opportunities for employment.

Surplus rural workers, such as Daisy Miller, also took advantage of these new opportunities. Daisy, who came from the nearby rural community of Hebron, lived in a boarding house on Gardiner Street in north-end Yarmouth and worked in the massive spinning room of the nearby Yarmouth Duck and Yarn Cotton mill. Her experience typified that of yet another large group of young working women whose employment in factories and lives as boarders in households, to which they were not connected by family, marked a new departure for the provincial society. Half of the 150 workers employed in the mill in 1900 were female. Daisy's move to Yarmouth was part of a massive demographic shift occurring throughout rural Nova Scotia. All five of her fellow lodgers were young country-born women who, like 17 year old Daisy, worked as spinners for Yarmouth Duck and Yarn. The six cotton girls shared two large rooms and, in 1901, reported suspiciously identical annual earnings of \$167. While it is unlikely that, given the very high turn-over rate at the mill, all six would have worked the entire previous 12 months, a time-pay book for the previous decade shows that, for six full 10 hour days, spinners and doffers earned wages of \$3.00-\$3.25 per week.<sup>3</sup> Room and board was advertised in Yarmouth that year for between \$2.00 and \$2.50 per week. After paying board, Daisy and her fellow cotton workers may have had little left over. But, as elsewhere, young women were prepared to endure low wages and difficult working conditions to escape the drudgery of household labour.<sup>4</sup>

2 Robert McIntosh, "‘Grotesque Faces and Figures’: Child Labour in the Canadian Coalfields, 1820-1930", Ph.D. Thesis, Carleton University, 1990. Chapter 4.

3 Cosmos Cotton Collection, Paybooks, 1887-1897, Yarmouth County Historical Society.

4 Many such women migrated from rural to urban areas. See Alan Brookes, "Out-Migration from the Maritime Provinces, 1860-1900: Some Preliminary Considerations", *Acadiensis*, V,2

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Lizzie Williams, the 51 year old widow who owned and operated Daisy's boarding house, had yet another earning experience typical of women during that period of transition. She had no children living at home, but cared for her 70 year old mother. From the \$700 she reported as her earnings from rentals that year, Lizzie provided the food and other services that went with maintaining a boarding house, including \$90 paid in wages to her young servant girl.

Though much has been written about the nature, structure and significance of the industrialization of the Maritime provinces, women's participation in the new workforces created in the course of industrialization remains little understood.<sup>5</sup> Scholars dealing with the history of women during the period have highlighted the twin drives for suffrage and educational equality by middle class women, both of which aimed to expand women's sphere of activity in the public realm.<sup>6</sup> While "Working Girls" became objects of enquiries into urban life's potentially

(Spring 1976), pp. 26-55. Patricia Thornton, working from the demographic evidence of those who remained behind, has argued that women were among the most mobile in the migration from the country-side. See "The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look", *Acadiensis*, XV,1 (Autumn 1985), pp. 3-30.

- 5 Useful surveys of recent trends in women's history are Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working-Class History", *Labour/Le travail*, 19 (Spring 1987), pp. 23-43; and Gail Campbell, "Canadian Women's History: A View from Atlantic Canada", *Acadiensis*, XX, 1 (Autumn 1990), pp. 184-99. Most studies deal with the experience of women in larger centres and focus on systemic inequalities faced on entry into the labour force. All focus on increases in participation by women and increased diversity, a process characterized by Marjorie Griffin Cohen as "the modernization of inequality", which failed to change relative positions of men and women in a patriarchal system reinforced under capitalism. See *Women's Work: Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1988), p. 152. Notable as well are B. Bradbury, "Women and Wage Labour in a Period of Transition: Montreal, 1861-1881", *Histoire sociale-Social History*, XVII (May 1984), pp. 115-31; Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto, 1990). Five recent studies centred in the Maritimes are Sheva Medjuck, "Women's Response to Economic and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century: Moncton Parish, 1851 to 1871", *Atlantis*, XI (Fall, 1984), pp.5-19; Ginnette Lafleur "L'industrialization et le travail rémunéré des femmes, Moncton, 1881-1891", in Peta Tancred-Sheriff, ed., *Feminist Research: Prospect and Retrospect* (Kingston, 1988), pp. 127-40; Margaret McCallum, "Separate Spheres: The Organization of Work in a Confectionary Factory, Ganong Bros., Saint Stephen, New Brunswick", *Labour/Le travail*, 24 (Autumn 1989), pp. 69-90; and Shirley Tillotson, "The Operators Along the Coast: A Case Study of the Link Between Gender, Skilled Labour and Social Power, 1900-1930", *Acadiensis*, XX, 1 (Autumn 1990), pp. 72-88, and "'We Will all soon be 'first-class men'": Gender and Skill in Canada's early twentieth century urban telegraph industry", *Labour/Le travail*, 27 (Spring 1991), pp. 97-126.
- 6 Judith Fingard, "College, Career and Community: Dalhousie Coeds, 1881-1921", in Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid, eds., *Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education* (Montreal, 1989), pp. 26-50; E.R. Forbes, "Battles in Another War: Edith Archibald and the Halifax Feminist Movement", in *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton, 1989), pp. 67-89; and John Reid, "The Education of Women at Mount Allison, 1854-1914", *Acadiensis*, XII, 2 (Spring 1983), pp. 3-33.



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unwholesome consequences, their working and living experiences remain largely unexplored in the scholarship dealing with the regional transition.<sup>7</sup> Knowledge of the changing patterns of female participation in paid labour remains limited as well.<sup>8</sup> This paper explains the changing nature of women's paid work during Nova Scotia's industrial transition. It contributes to a literature on the gendered dimensions of class formation in the context of the specific realities of given communities. A primarily quantitative probe, this article describes the major trends during the transition, locating women workers within the new workforces in three selected towns: Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney Mines.

Nova Scotia's urban population grew from under 20 per cent of the provincial total in 1871 to just under 50 per cent by 1921.<sup>9</sup> Yet the province's over-all population hardly increased at all. In fact, Nova Scotia's share of Canada's population declined sharply during this period, exacerbating a political crisis that was reducing the Maritime region's political clout in Ottawa.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the unprecedented growth of the Canadian economy involved Maritime towns increasingly in nation-forming exchanges, as the resource enclaves which had characterized the pre-industrial period were replaced by a set of interlocking

- 7 Margaret McCallum, "Keeping Women in their Place: The Minimum Wage in Canada, 1910-25", *Labour/Le travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), pp. 29-58; Janet Guildford "Coping with De-industrialization: The Nova Scotia Department of Technical Education, 1907-1930", *Acadiensis*, XVI, 2 (Spring 1987), pp. 69-84; Christina Simmons, "Helping the Poorer Sisters: The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905-1945", *Acadiensis*, XII, 1 (Autumn 1984), pp. 3-28. An example of women coping in an industrial setting is offered in David Frank, ed., "The Miner's Financier: Women in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917", *Atlantis*, VII (Spring 1983), pp. 137-43.
- 8 Although this study will not focus on participation rates, preliminary evidence seems to confirm hypotheses presented by the more general literature. Prior to the 1920s at least, the general trend was for women to leave the labour force by their mid-20s: dropping from a maximum participation rate of about 40 per cent between the ages of 17 and 25 to less than 15 per cent for those over 25. The basic study of female participation rates in Canada remains Sylvia Ostry, *The Female Worker in Canada* (Ottawa, 1968); more contemporary is Patricia Connelly, *Last Hired, First Fired: Women and the Canadian Workforce* (Toronto, 1978). American women's experience is treated in Lynn Y. Weiner, *From Working Girl to Working Mother* (Chapel Hill, 1985). Some analysis is found in Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921* Volume IV (Ottawa, 1929), Table 5, which depicts high rates at younger age levels and a decline after the mid-20s. Participation rates rose steadily over the past century.
- 9 L.D. McCann, "Staples and the New Industrialism in the Growth of Post-Confederation Halifax", *Acadiensis*, VII, 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 47-79. Definitions of "urban" vary somewhat, but by the end of World War I, a population shift favoured Pictou, Cumberland and Cape Breton counties where the heavier industrial towns absorbed more and more of the population, at the expense of the rural parts of the province. On intra-regional population shifts see Thornton, "The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada"; and Brookes, "Out-Migration from the Maritime Provinces".
- 10 E.R. Forbes, "Never the Twain Did Meet: Prairie-Maritime Relations, 1910-1927", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXI, 1 (March 1978), pp. 18-37.

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dependencies tying the provincial economy to the steam-based technologies that were coming to dominate North American life.<sup>11</sup>

Located at Nova Scotia's southern, northern and eastern extremities, Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney Mines responded to the challenges of an integrated national economy with intensive capitalization and extensive physical growth. New railroad construction linked the three towns to each other and to the rest of the province. Public construction brought the trappings of a modern state, with the establishment of new institutional structures, ranging from post offices and fire halls to a variety of churches and educational institutions. In a spirit of "Boosterism" common to the age, the local governments acquired the technological means to service their rapidly increasing populations. Publicly and privately funded electricity and street railways, telephone exchanges, sewerage and water works proliferated, adding a new dynamic to town growth. To carry out such projects the towns sought incorporation under Nova Scotia's new municipal legislation: Amherst and Sydney Mines incorporated in 1889, Yarmouth in 1890. The established elites controlling these new local governments, sought, through the provision of local services, to attract more industry to their communities.<sup>12</sup>

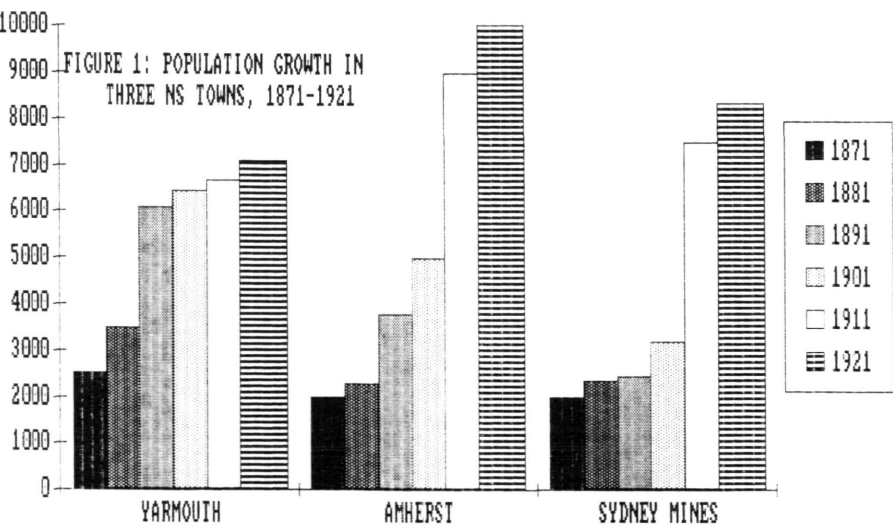
At the beginning of the period, in 1871, Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney Mines ranked as Nova Scotia's second, third and fourth urban centres. By 1921, their populations, which ranged in size from 2,000 to 3,000 in 1871, had climbed to between 7,000 and 10,000. Reflecting various dimensions of the province's social and ethnic construction, each offers a distinctive window into community responses to the challenges of this period of unprecedented growth. Yarmouth's population surge coincided with the massive redeployment of mercantile capital towards manufacturing in the 1880s. Amherst's growth surge occurred in the 1890s and early 1900s; in Sydney Mines, the establishment of a primary steel-making complex in 1902-3 initiated a surge in population growth (see Figure 1). In the three towns taken together, the number of women in the workforce rose from just over 300 (10 per cent) in 1871 to almost 2000 (22 per cent) by 1921, a rate of increase half again as fast as that of the male workforce. But that growth

11 The seminal discussion of the economic transition is T.W. Acheson, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880-1910", in P.A. Buckner and David Frank, eds., *The Acadiensis Reader, Volume II: Atlantic Canada After Confederation* (Fredericton, 1985), pp.176-201. An assessment of recent writing is provided in Eric Sager, "Dependency, Underdevelopment, and the Economic History of the Atlantic Region", *Acadiensis*, XVII, 1 (Autumn 1987), pp 117-36. See also Ian McKay, "The Crisis of Dependent Development: class conflict in the Nova Scotia coal fields, 1872-1876", in Gregory S. Kealey, ed., *Class, Gender, and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology* (Saint John's, 1988), pp. 9-49.

12 D.A. Muise, "The Great Transformation: Changing the Urban Face of Nova Scotia, 1871-1921", *Nova Scotia Historical Review* (Autumn 1991) (forthcoming); and L. Anders Sandberg, "Dependent Development, Labour and the Trenton Steel Works, Nova Scotia, c.1900-1943", *Labour/le travail*, 27 (Spring 1991), pp.127-62.

TABLE 1  
Workforces in Transition, Female/Male Ratios

		1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
	#	F/M	F/M	F/M	F/M	F/M	F/M
Yarmouth		136/1447	93/1200	424/1291	500/1650	709/1752	863/1907
	%	9/91	6/94	25/75	23/77	28/72	31/69
Amherst	#	112/709	144/659	355/1078	322/1516	732/2733	707/2620
	%	13/87	18/82	25/75	18/82	22/78	22/78
Sydney Mines	#	54/581	14/720	14/704	50/950	265/2417	370/2254
	%	9/91	2/98	6/94	5/95	10/90	14/86
Total	#	302/2737	251/2579	793/3073	872/4116	1706/6902	1940/6781
	%	10/90	9/91	21/79	17/83	20/80	22/78



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was unevenly distributed, reflecting significant differences in patterns of development among the three towns (see Table 1).<sup>13</sup>

Yarmouth, metropolitan centre of the southwestern counties for the previous century, had been Nova Scotia's most dynamic "Wood, Wind and Sail" community. Because of its very active mercantile sector, it was often referred to as the province's most "American" town, a view reinforced by the fact that it was made up almost entirely of descendants of pre-Loyalist American migrants to the area.<sup>14</sup> Its merchants, along with those of the Pictou area,<sup>15</sup> were among the province's most astute in responding to opportunities presented by the 1878 National Policy. Two major community-based industries emerged there in the 1880s. Both were connected to the "Wood, Wind and Sail" era and controlled, initially at least, by local entrepreneurs. The expanded and diversified Burrill-Johnson Foundry, which had originated in the 1850s as a supplier of iron knees and fastenings for Yarmouth's large ship-building and outfitting industry, built stoves and other housewares, as well as watermain piping, steam engines and pumps, which were sold regionally, nationally and internationally. In the 1880s the company added a boat-building yard where small steam powered vessels were constructed. At full production, the expanded foundry employed over 150 workers, none of them women. The second industry, Yarmouth Duck and Yarn, was formed following a meeting in 1883 of a few of Yarmouth's most prominent merchants. Importing the necessary technology and managerial skills from neighbouring New England, it quickly developed into a major sailcloth factory. The number of employees grew steadily to over 200 by 1900 and to more than 300 by 1921, almost half of them women. These two factories, along with a woollen mill and a shoe factory on the northern outskirts at Milton, gave Yarmouth the province's most concentrated industrial workforce south of Halifax. Because of the nature of its expansion, Yarmouth offered women the greatest variety of opportunities for paid work. And women responded: the proportion of women in the workforce rose from a low of six per cent in 1881 to a high of 31 per cent by 1921 (see Table 1).

Amherst, located on the edge of the pasturelands of the Tantramar Marsh, also has a rich lumbering and agricultural hinterland in Cumberland County.

13 Figure 1, Table I and all subsequent Figures and Tables are based on data bases created for the "Maritime Communities in Transition" project. They include all census attributes for the entire workforce as recorded in the manuscript census returns for the towns of Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney Mines for each of the six national censuses between 1871 and 1921. Together, all the data files comprise upwards of 40,000 cases. All data for this paper has been analysed using SPSS PC+ and Microsoft Chart.

14 Robert Aitken, "Loyalism and National Identity in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 1830-1870", M.A. Thesis, Trent University, 1975, Chapter 3.

15 L.D. McCann, "The Mercantile-Industrial Transition in the Metal Towns of Pictou County, 1857-1931", *Acadiensis*, VIII, 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 47-79.

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Although disadvantaged by its lack of immediate access to tide water, the town performed most of the usual local metropolitan functions. When the Intercolonial Railway passed through in the 1870s, possibilities for industrial development emerged, especially after Saint John and Amherst based investors succeeded in having a spur line constructed to tap the rich coal resources of nearby Springhill.<sup>16</sup> With a supply of coal assured, Amherst entrepreneurs set out to expand their town's industrial base.<sup>17</sup> Rhodes-Curry began as a construction and manufacturing firm taking advantage of opportunities in public construction and railway expansion. Eventually it successfully contracted to build everything from wooden railway rolling stock and mine cars, supplied in the thousands to both regional and national markets, to housing developments and public buildings. After 1909, however, as steel cars replaced wooden-bodied ones, the massive car plant was gradually shut down. The construction end of the firm's business collapsed with the recession in the region's building boom after 1911, and the firm shut down altogether early in the 1920s. Robb Engineering, the town's second major industry, began when the son of a small local foundry operator returned from New England to expand the family's operations. By the 1890s Robb's manufactured its own line of steam engines and boilers which sold throughout Canada and internationally. Eventually, the firm would assemble railway locomotives as well.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, women would find no opportunities for paid employment in the town's major industries. But Amherst was also home to Hewson's, one of the province's largest woollen mills, and to the huge Amherst Boot and Shoe factory, both of which employed large numbers of women. Women had, in any case, always represented a significant proportion of Amherst's paid workforce, comprising 13 per cent as early as 1871. By 1911, when the town's workforce reached its peak for the period, the proportion of women stood at 22 per cent (see Table 1). Although Amherst's factories collapsed after World War I, for a time they made "Busy Amherst" the region's most intensely developed industrial town of its size, with an integrated capitalist class which coordinated community development.

Following the arrival of the General Mining Association [GMA] in the 1820s, Sydney Mines had come to occupy a central place in Nova Scotia's coal mining

16 Ian McKay, "The Realm of Uncertainty: The Experience of Work in the Cumberland Coal Mines, 1873-1927", *Acadiensis*, XVI, 1 (Autumn, 1986), pp. 3-58.

17 The major study of Amherst's emergence as an industrial community is Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of Class Consciousness in Industrial Nova Scotia: A Study of Amherst, 1891-1925", Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1982, Chapters 1 and 2; and "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919", *Acadiensis*, IX, 2 (Spring 1980), pp. 56-77. See also MacKay, "The Realm of Uncertainty".

18 A survey of the *Amherst Daily News* (1900-1911) revealed the link between the town's rise and the expansion of other Maritime industrial communities. Almost daily its reports included announcements of contracts or orders awarded Rhodes-Curry or Robb Engineering for public

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industry. In 1901 it was probably Nova Scotia's most "British" town, primarily due to its continuing domination by paternalistic Richard H. Brown, whose father had run the GMA's operations in Cape Breton for its first 40 years. The Browns' preference for Scots and English miners helped maintain the dominance of British mining systems, along with the social organization of the community that it implied. The takeover of the GMA, in 1901, by the Pictou and Halifax based Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company, was followed by massive new investment in a primary steel plant.<sup>19</sup> The new owners turned to the United States for their technology, as well as for coal mining machinery and many of the key steel-makers. The bulk of the workers remained local, however, and continued to live in company owned housing and to buy their goods at the company store. With its occupational base narrowly confined to mining and related trades prior to 1902 and commercial opportunities limited by company control over trade, the town lacked the leadership and capital that drove Yarmouth and Amherst to diversify their economic bases. Its expansion was troubled by the uncertain corporate history of the Nova Scotia Steel Company and ended abruptly with its absorption by Dominion Steel and Coal in 1921. Within weeks, the Sydney Mines plant was dismantled and Sydney Mines reverted to its role as a coal town.<sup>20</sup> None of its industries ever employed women, save for a few clerks in the post-1900 period. As a result, women's participation in the paid workforce remained limited: just two per cent of the workforce in 1881, they had risen to 14 per cent by 1921 (see Table 1).

Generally speaking, Nova Scotia's industrial moment was brief. Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney Mines all ceased to grow by 1911 and would contract thereafter. Yet the transformation wrought by the industrial process remained, both in the physical structures put in place to enable towns to deal with their dramatically increased populations and, even more significantly, in the experience and memories of the people who flocked to and through the towns. As Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney Mines responded to their varied industrial opportunities, the size, the sex and the structure of their workforces were

construction, railroad rolling stock, or the supply of equipment to industries and communities throughout the region.

- 19 McCann, "The Mercantile Industrial Transition"; and Kris Inwood, "Local Control, Resources and the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company", Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers* (1986), pp. 254-82.
- 20 D.A. Muise, "The General Mining Association and Nova Scotia's Coal, 1827-1857", *Bulletin of Canadian Studies*, X (1983), pp.23-40; "The Making of an Industrial Community: Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1867-1900", in Brian Tennyson and Don MacGillivray, eds., *Cape Breton Historical Essays* (Sydney, 1980), pp. 76-95; McCann, "The Mercantile-Industrial Transition"; Craig Heron, *Working in Steel* (Toronto, 1988), Chapters I-II; and "The Great War and Nova Scotia Steelworkers", *Acadiensis*, XVI, 2 (Spring 1987) pp. 3-34; and W.J.A. Donald, *The Canadian Iron and Steel Industry: A Study in the Economic History of a Protected Industry* (Boston, 1915).

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transformed. Their new industries depended on thousands of new workers, including hundreds of women, whose arrival dramatically affected the household and social structures of the three communities.

While all three attracted new workers from outside the region and country, they depended on their immediate hinterlands for most of their new recruits.<sup>21</sup> In Amherst a rise in the numbers of New Brunswick born, at least half of whom were Acadian, changed forever the ethnic composition of the town. Yarmouth remained the most uniformly Nova Scotian in terms of its residents' birth-places, but, like Amherst, it acquired a large Acadian minority, most from surrounding rural communities. Sydney Mines remained relatively homogeneous as well, though a small cadre of British born miners and a larger throng of young Newfoundland labourers, clustered at opposite ends of the occupational ladder, helped define the more central place occupied by the Cape Breton majority.<sup>22</sup> All in all, foreigners remained a very small portion of the workforce in all three towns, though some Italians and Poles were recruited to Sydney Mines. Few immigrant women entered the paid workforce during the pre-1920s period, probably because few women accompanied men on the initial voyage to Canada. Large numbers of country-born women did, however, find their way to the jobs becoming available in the towns.

The experiences of Marie, Georgina, Daisy and Lizzie represent aspects of the impact of the industrial transition on women's opportunities for paid work. Although Nova Scotian women had long participated in the household economies of fishing and farming, their contributions were subsumed within the male dominated family unit and characterized as supplementary or incidental to the production of staples.<sup>23</sup> Most women working for remuneration had been concentrated in jobs associated with home-making and child rearing, chiefly as servants in middle and upper class households, or as producers of goods or services for other women, as milliners or dressmakers. As teachers of very young

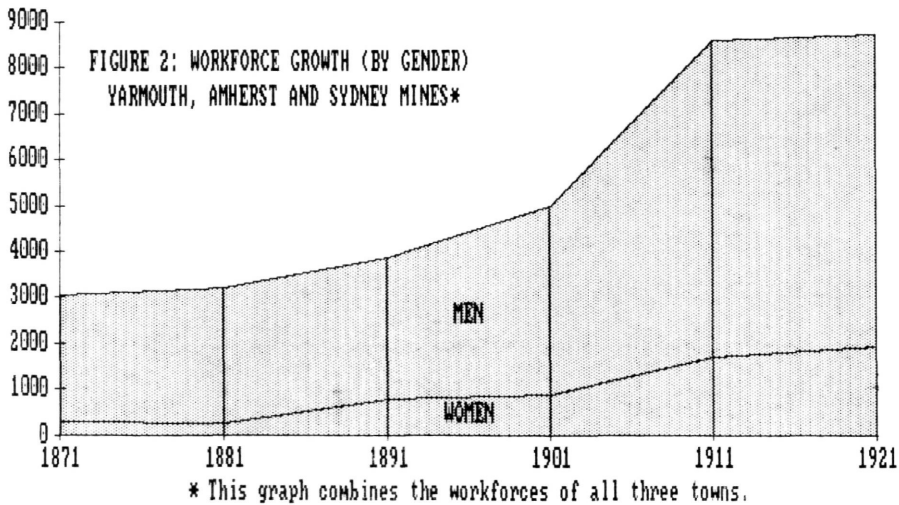
21 In 1901 census takers asked respondents if they had been born in an urban or rural location. While Yarmouth workers and householders were almost even in terms of rural/urban birth, the other two towns were quite different. Immediately prior to the major expansion of the steel industry, 71 per cent of the workers in Sydney Mines were urban born; in contrast, just 32 per cent of Amherst's workers reported urban origin.

22 On the migration of Newfoundlanders to industrial Nova Scotia see Peter Neary, "Canadian Immigration Policy and Newfoundlanders, 1912-1939", *Acadiensis*, XI, 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 69-83; Ron Crawley, "Off to Sydney: Newfoundlanders Emigrate to Industrial Cape Breton, 1890-1914", *Acadiensis*, XVII, 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 27-51; Mary-Jane Lipkin, "Reluctant Recruitment: Nova Scotia Immigration Policy, 1867-1917", M.A. Thesis, Carleton, 1982.

23 See Cohen, *Women's Work* for a discussion of the main contours of the role of rural women in staples producing economies. For the Atlantic region, a broad range of scholarship deals with women as part of a family economic strategy in resource zones like the fishery. See, for example, Marilyn Porter, "She Was Skipper of the Shore Crew: Notes on the History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Newfoundland", *Labour/Le travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), pp. 105-23.

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children in the emerging educational institutions of the pre-Confederation period, numerically they were coming, by the 1870s, to dominate a profession notorious for discriminating against them.<sup>24</sup> Even so, women had been largely absent from waged work before the arrival of cotton and woollen mills and shoe factories. And though they had previously figured hardly at all in clerical occupations, women would also come to dominate this sector after 1900, as towns acquired more complex social and economic structures. By 1900, as never before, women's labour was becoming a factor in the province's economic development. And the number of women in the workforce continued to grow until, by 1921, in Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney Mines at least, women comprised over 20 per cent of paid workers (see Figure 2).



The first striking increase in the numbers and occupational range of women in the paid workforce under review occurred between 1881 and 1891, with the establishment of Yarmouth's cotton mill; then, between 1900 and 1911, the number of women in the workforce almost doubled again, increasing from 872 to 1706 as job opportunities further increased and diversified (see Table 1). But this over-all trend must be understood in the context of the zones of women's employment, for there were sharp contrasts. In the coal and steel centred economy of Sydney Mines, women's participation remained confined to the

24 Janet Guildford, "'Separate Spheres' and the Feminization of Public School Teaching in Nova Scotia, 1838-1880", Unpublished Paper presented to the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, Orono, Me., May, 1990.



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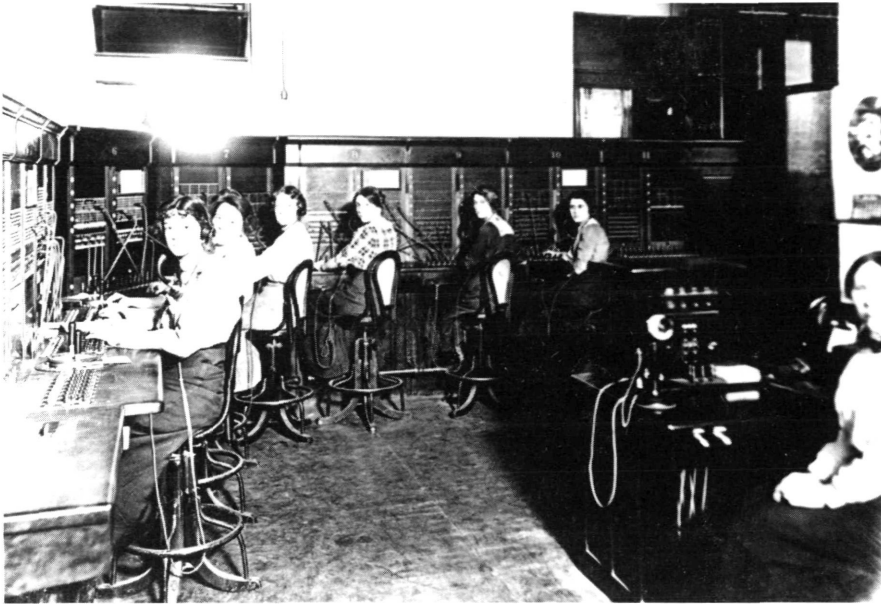
service sector, while in Yarmouth upwards of 20 per cent of the female labour force worked in factories by the turn of the century, and close to a third by the end of World War I. The sharp decline in the number of women factory workers in Amherst following closure of the woollen mill and shoe factory there offers mute testimony to the narrow range of industrial occupations open to women. There, as elsewhere, many women who worked in factories during the war lost their jobs soon afterward. After 1901, stenographic, clerical and secretarial occupations, along with such new trades as telephone and telegraph operators, brought larger numbers of women into new areas of the workforce.<sup>25</sup>



Clerical Staff, Amherst, c. 1911 (Photo courtesy of the Cumberland County Historical Society)

Women, under male office managers, became part of the white collar revolution.

25 Graham S. Lowe, "Women, Work and the Office: The Feminization of Clerical Occupations in Canada", *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 5 (1980), pp. 361-81; "Class, Job and Gender in the Canadian Office", *Labour/Le travail*, 10 (Autumn 1982), pp. 11-37; and "Mechanization, Feminization and Managerial Control in the Early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office", in Craig Heron and Robert Story, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Kingston/Montreal, 1986), pp. 177-209.



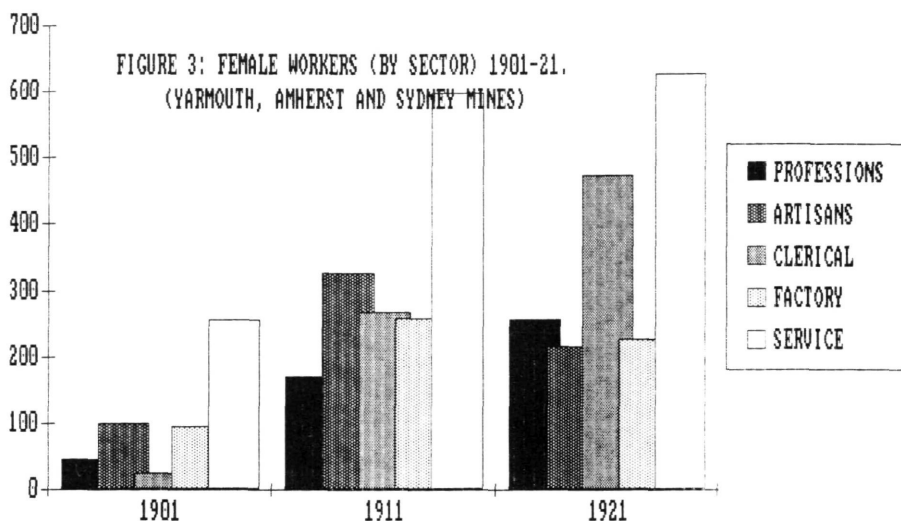
Amherst Telephone Exchange, c. 1909 (Photo courtesy of the Cumberland County Historical Society)

Telephone operators formed the elite of female clerical workers.

Even as the occupational profile of women workers became more complex, the most prominent feature of their participation in paid work continued to be their concentrations in the personal service sector (see Figure 3).<sup>26</sup> Only in Amherst, and then not until 1921, were household servants ever eclipsed in numbers, in that case by the increasingly diversified group of clerical workers. Yet, the places where women did housework for pay changed over the 50 year

26 To assist analysis women's occupations have been divided into five categories: PROFESSIONS (teachers, nurses, etc.); CLERICAL (clerks, stenographers, secretaries and telephone/telegraphic operators); ARTISANS (milliners, dress-makers, seamstresses, etc); FACTORY (spinners, weavers, factory hands etc.); and SERVICE (servants, washerwomen, maids etc). The scale implied by this structuring of workers includes independent producers who may have been a part of the service area and the denigration of women who controlled their own economic destiny, such as the small number of female boarding-house keepers, who were in fact petty-proprietors who often employed servants. It also excludes those involved in various types of household production that may not have been included in the census categories. On the problems inherent in any attempt to build occupational scales see Michael B.Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1982).

period. In 1871, servants were employed mostly in middle class households; after industrialization, servants and those in related occupations, such as washer-women, became more involved in reproducing the labour power of their fellow workers in a wide variety of boarding houses and hotels. At various times, over half of all male and female workers boarded or lived as dependent relatives in houses headed by others. Such a volatile young workforce, as well as contributing to the malleability of households, demanded expansion of boarding-house keeping, an occupation dominated by widows.



Yarmouth and Amherst's middle classes had supported large numbers of seamstresses, dressmakers and milliners through the turn of the century; Sydney Mines had always lagged behind in providing opportunities for waged work in traditional women's artisanal areas, a consequence of the absence of many middle class spenders, as well as its proximity to the more developed service and commercial sector in nearby North Sydney, where most of the needs of the tiny group of middle class women could be met. But integration with an emerging consumer-oriented economy and rapid urban development brought dramatic increases in the availability of ready-made clothing, a corollary of which was a decline in artisanal production. As more of the local market was absorbed by the expansion of regionally and nationally organized retail outlets, more women came to work as clerks selling clothing and other consumer goods than were ever employed producing those sorts of items in artisanal shops.<sup>27</sup>

27 Mercedes Steedman, "Skill and Gender in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890-1940", in Heron and Story, eds., *On the Job*, pp. 152-76. An enduring theme in both Amherst and

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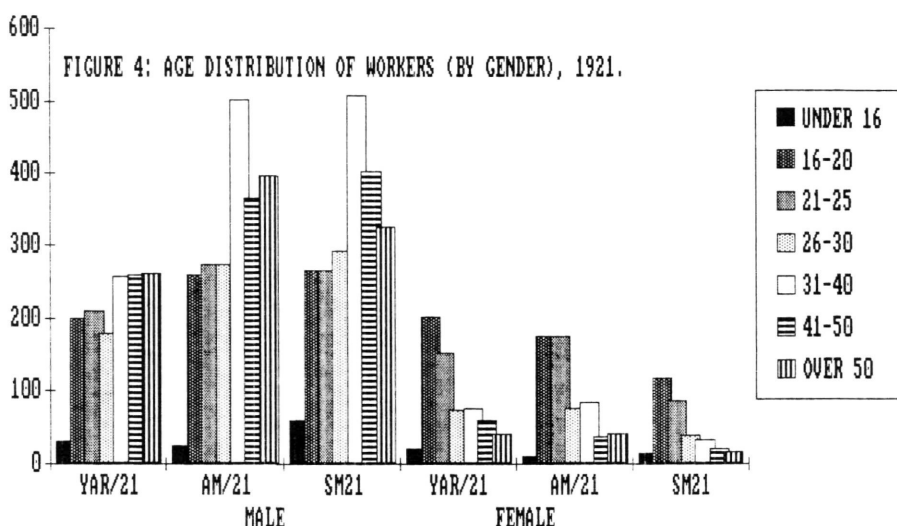
Millinery Department, Vooght Brothers, North Sydney, c. 1910 (Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton)  
New department stores hired women clerks to serve women shoppers.

Studies of the demographic attributes of female workers during the early stages of industrialization focus on their comparative youth and fractional earnings relative to their male counterparts. Relative earnings of male and female workers reflect the basic disparities faced by women, although any comparison of individual earnings or occupational mobility is problematic unless individuals can be linked over time through successive censuses or in some other fashion.<sup>28</sup> Some limited observations are made possible by considering the

Yarmouth newspapers following the turn of the century was the complaint that workers and others were buying goods produced outside their community, particularly from central Canadian chains or mail order houses being established during the period. Maritimers, it was argued, should spend their money where they had earned it so that it could recirculate to prompt more employment. On the extension of Canadian businesses, including some discussion of retail chains to the region see L.D. McCann, "Metropolitanism and Branch Businesses in the Maritimes, 1881-1931", *Acadiensis*, XIII, 1 (Autumn 1983), pp.112-25.

28 Linkages have not yet been attempted with this data, though such a strategy is likely to be more useful when focussing on male workers, who tended to stay in the workforce for more extended periods. Women were seldom in the workforce for a 10 year period, so are difficult to trace in successive censuses.

relationship between age and earnings at 10 year intervals and subjecting the findings to a gendered analysis. Figure 4 provides age profiles for male and female workers in 1921. The downward trend of women in the workforce beyond the age of 21 contrasts significantly with the comparative stability and upward trend among male workers after the age of 30. The relatively short time women spent in the workforce reinforced wage differentials, further inhibiting the achievement of wage parity.<sup>29</sup>



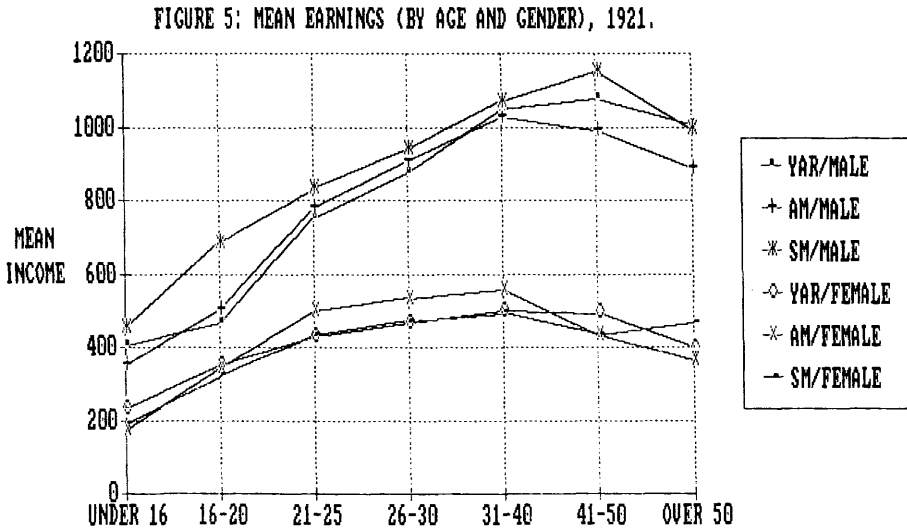
A comparison limited to single workers provides further insight into the changing nature and structure of the workforce. In post-1900 Yarmouth, for instance, single female workers outnumbered single male workers. On average, these women were one to two years older than their male counterparts. Obviously, the presence of a cotton mill with its specific requirements for both male and female youth could have a decisive impact on the demographic composition of the workforce. In Amherst and Sydney Mines, where the proportion of single women *vis à vis* single men was never as large, this relationship was reversed, although the mean ages of single male and female workers remained quite

29 Fluctuations in the age structure of the workforce occurred for a variety of reasons. For example, in 1901 a large in-migration of younger men, many of them day-labourers employed in construction trades, drove the average age of male workers to all-time lows, though their mean age rose gradually to a high of 38.5 by 1921. The mean age of working women tended to be under rather than over 25, but also rose to a new high of 29 by 1921.

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close.<sup>30</sup> Marriage, of course, changed matters significantly, for males were expected to retain their jobs after marriage while women were socially and culturally barred from doing so.

Cultural norms limiting women's participation in paid work to the years between childhood and marriage prevented them from progressing to more responsible, and therefore more lucrative, positions within those sectors they occupied. In the main, earnings were a function of age, which is a rough surrogate for years in the workforce no matter what the area of the economy or the gender of workers (see Figure 5). But most industrial jobs, virtually all skilled trades not specific to women, such as seamstress or milliner, and all management positions, were controlled by males throughout the period. Male earnings rose sharply after 20, peaked between 31 and 40 and, in most instances, declined somewhat after 50. Women's earnings, as well as being far below those of men at all ages, rose more gradually, peaking by about age 30 and generally declining thereafter.



30 In both cases the number of single men employed declined by a third, while the number of single working women remained stable or actually increased. With so many young miners in its workforce, Sydney Mines had a much different profile than the other communities. In 1911 and 1921, single males averaged just over 25 years while females averaged 24.5. In Amherst, men and women both averaged 24.5 years in 1911; the average age of single women had risen to 26 ten years later while that of their male counterparts remained unchanged. Though these increases may not seem dramatic, they reflected the fact that women were remaining spinsters for longer periods and were also remaining in the workforce.

Though primary earning years differed somewhat across communities and for different occupations, the earning curves were remarkably similar in all three towns.<sup>31</sup>

But while the general patterns proved similar, women's actual earnings fluctuated widely from town to town and across occupations. Table 2 captures some of that variation through a comparison of Amherst and Yarmouth in 1911 and 1921.<sup>32</sup> The experience of Sydney Mines was similar, although the numbers and varieties of occupations were much smaller. While professional and new white collar workers generally out-earned their working class sisters, there was significant variation from town to town. In Amherst, rapid expansion in the clerical sector contributed to the comparatively higher average earnings there by 1921, though the strong male labour movement in the town may also have influenced the women's wages. Yarmouth's cotton workers were hierarchically structured, with weavers among the highest paid blue collar workers. The relatively poor performance of artisanal workers, such as tailors, may have reflected a more intermittent involvement in the workforce. But who were the tailors and weavers as opposed to the clerks or teachers?

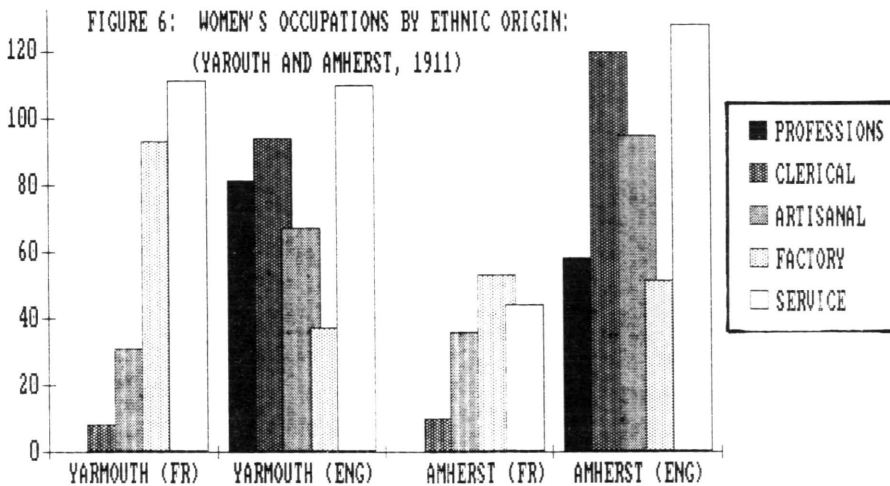
TABLE 2  
Mean Annual Wages for Women in Selected Occupations, 1911-21

	1911		1921	
	Yarmouth	Amherst	Yarmouth	Amherst
TEACHERS	\$412 (31)	\$320 (21)	\$697 (32)	\$656 (48)
NURSES	\$344 (7)	\$345 (10)	\$576 (18)	\$745 (12)
STENOS.	\$304 (32)	\$374 (34)	\$503 (38)	\$604 (85)
CLERKS	\$166 (14)	\$286 (43)	\$430 (23)	\$642 (42)
TELEPH. OP.	\$192 (5)	\$377 (7)	\$510 (9)	\$450 (14)
TAILORS	\$272 (19)	\$250 (23)	\$394 (9)	\$446 (30)
WEAVERS	\$357 (19)	\$354 (11)	\$565 (57)	\$447 (14)
SERVANTS	\$168 (100)	\$235 (136)	\$224 (154)	\$238 (152)

31 Similar curves drawn for 1901 and 1911 reveal identical relationships, with the slightly higher earnings of Amherst women and Sydney Mines men equally apparent. The reason for the former lies with the more diverse nature of its female workers, particularly in the artisanal and later in the clerical areas. Higher earnings for workers in Sydney Mines reflect the concentration of mining and industrial jobs and the general absence of common labourers, whose earnings tended to lower the averages for younger men.

32 The figures in Table 2 include only those who reported earnings of at least \$100, thereby eliminating casual workers. Occupations that were not represented across both censuses were also excluded, as were occupational categories which included fewer than five individuals.

Religion and ethnicity have held a certain primacy in analyses of factors in the formation of Nova Scotia's communities, though their intersection with class formation in the industrial period is less developed in the literature.<sup>33</sup> Yet the convergence of religion, ethnicity and class in shaping both individual and community experience can readily be illustrated through a comparison of British and Acadian workers in Amherst and Yarmouth. Recent arrivals on the urban scene, Acadian workers were the least prepared, either socially or educationally, to compete for those professional or clerical sector jobs where English literacy or higher levels of educational achievement were a precondition of employment. In 1891, for instance, 38 per cent of Yarmouth's Acadian female workers reported that they were unable to read, while only five per cent of non-Acadians were so disadvantaged. Reduced language and literacy skills helped restrict women's employment options in cases where contact with the public or literacy was required. Acadian women, as demonstrated in the 1911 census, were all but excluded from clerical and professional positions in Yarmouth and Amherst. In both towns, over two thirds of Acadian women were employed either as servants or as hands in the shoe or textile factories (see Figure 6).<sup>34</sup>



33 The Scots experience in eastern Nova Scotia is assessed in R.A. MacLean and D. Campbell, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto, 1974). An example dealing with urban formations is Elizabeth Beaton, "Religious Affiliations and Ethnic Identity of West Indians in Whitney Pier", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XX, 3 (1988), pp. 25-45; For a more contemporary analysis asserting a basic equality in French/British attainments see E. Hugh Lautard and Donald J. Loree, "Occupational Differentiation Between British and French in the Atlantic Provinces, 1951-1971", in *Labour in Atlantic Canada: Social Science Monographic Series*, Vol. IV (Saint John, 1981), pp. 32-41.

34 The only group lower on the occupational ladder was the smaller contingent of black women, who were invariably servants.



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Most of these Acadian women were migrants from the countryside, and their experience typified that of other rural migrants. Recruitment of surplus labour from rural communities was a strategy for filling less attractive jobs for women as well as men. In Amherst and Yarmouth, upwards of 80 per cent of all servants were country-born; and in Yarmouth 90 per cent of female cotton mill workers described themselves as rural-born. Clerical workers and teachers, on the other hand, were much more likely to be urban-born and included no appreciable number of Acadians or Catholics in their ranks. Educational opportunities in town were undoubtedly greater than those in the countryside, though probably as important were the contacts established while growing up within the social and cultural milieus that conditioned the transformation of communities.<sup>35</sup>

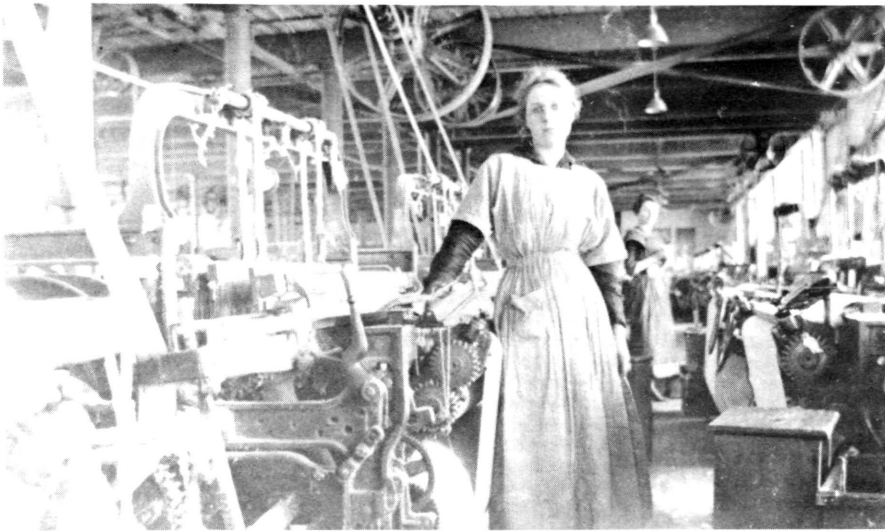
Cross-gender case studies of Yarmouth's cotton workers and of teachers in all three towns further illustrate the relative importance of gender, age, ethnicity and birthplace in understanding women's experience of waged work. From the moment it entered production in 1884, Yarmouth's cotton mill needed a workforce to tend and feed its giant machines; and, in an industry in which success was dependent on exploiting the willingness of younger workers to endure harsh conditions and low wages, the workforce required constant replenishment.<sup>36</sup> While the more technical jobs were filled by experienced New England workers, most production jobs at the new mill could be performed by relatively inexperienced young men and women.<sup>37</sup> By 1901, 20 per cent of Yarmouth's working women were employed at the mill. Unlike Milltown and Marysville in New Brunswick, or the much larger mills of Quebec or New England, neither corporate owned housing nor company sponsored boarding houses were provided in Yarmouth. Most recruits were drawn either from surrounding communities or from within the town itself, and appear to have found accommodation within existing housing stock close by the waterfront location of the plant or in expanding working class districts in the town's burgeoning south end. A small hand-drawn

35 Sydney Mines' small number of female workers were mainly from urban backgrounds (77 per cent), though there, as elsewhere, women workers were almost universally daughters of the working class.

36 A brief qualitative analysis of cotton company time/pay books for the 1880s-1890s period reveals a dramatic turn-over in employees in the basic spinning and weaving jobs, particularly among female employees and among young Acadian workers of both sexes. Cosmos Cotton Collection, Paybooks, vol. I, Yarmouth County Historical Society.

37 For a comparative perspective on the employment of young women in cotton mills, see Peter deLottinville, "Trouble in the Hives of Industry: The Cotton Industry Comes to Milltown, N.B., 1879-1892", *CHA Historical Papers* (1980), pp. 100-15; Gail Cuthbert-Brandt, "Weaving it Together: Life Cycle and the Industrial Experience of Female Cotton Workers in Quebec, 1910-1950", *Labour/Le travail*, 7 (Spring 1981), pp. 113-26. The more family centred practices of some American mill towns does not seem to have been the norm in Yarmouth. See Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship Between Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

sample of those mill girls who lived at home indicates that they were members of working class families; most were daughters of men who worked either in the cotton mill or at the nearby iron foundry.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, the need for a family wage was an element in the decision taken by numerous young women to go to work in the mill. But the large numbers of boarders among women mill workers indicates that country girls were also attracted on an individual basis by the chance for waged employment and limited 'independence'.



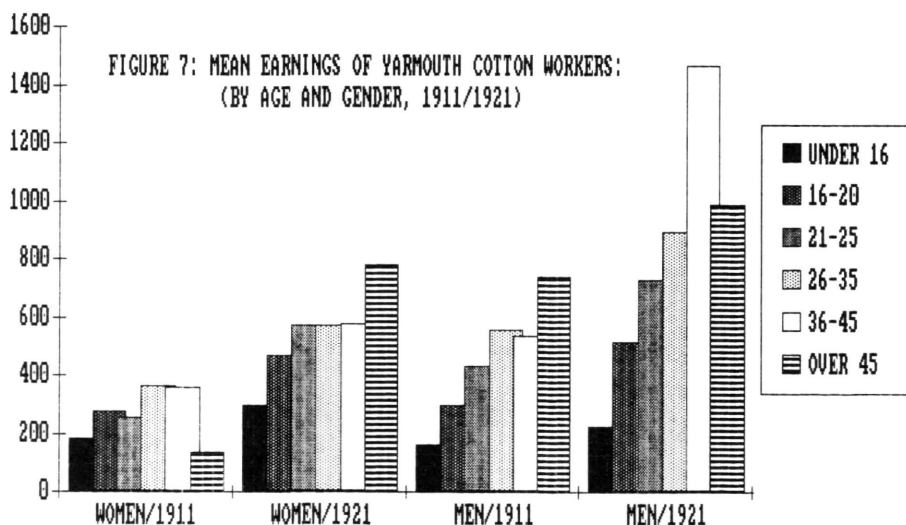
Cosmos Cotton Mill Worker, c. 1900 (Photo courtesy of the Yarmouth County Historical Society's Museum and Research Library)

Young women cotton mill workers spent 10 to 11 hours a day in an atmosphere of noise, air borne fibres and humidity.

Cotton mill workers can be readily identified in the 1911 and 1921 censuses, since individuals were required to report their places of employment. In 1911, 108 men (47 per cent) and 124 women (53 per cent), from the manager down to the lowest ranking operative, identified the cotton mill as their place of employment. The vast majority of women employees were under 25, with over half concentrated in the 16-20 age cohort. Male workers, more evenly spread across the age

38 One of the strategies of capitalists during this period was to blend the industrial formations within communities to provide employment for a variety of different types of workers in order to encourage development of a family wage among the numbers of operatives within the town and thereby ensure a wider series of opportunities for workers of either sex and at various stages of their working lives.

spectrum, were also older on average (28), more likely to be of British origin (65 per cent) and more highly paid (\$449 per annum). Women were younger (20 on average), more likely to be Acadian (70 per cent) and less well paid (\$267 per annum). Though comprising just 23 per cent of Yarmouth's population, Acadians made up 54 per cent of all cotton mill employees in 1911. Acadian women earned marginally less than English women (\$256 vs. \$275), but they were also younger on average (19 vs. 25). Like their sisters, Acadian males, the third largest group after Acadian females and English males, tended to be younger than male anglophone workers (23 on average vs. 30) and were more likely to be single. They reported mean earnings of \$343 as compared to an average of \$509 for their anglophone counterparts. Most single Acadian males at the mill worked alongside their sisters in production areas. The more skilled and higher paying loom-fixing or supervisory roles were invariably occupied by married English males. Multi-variate analysis of declared earnings suggests the link between gender, age and ethnicity in determining wage rates. Those reporting yearly earnings above \$300 were concentrated in the over-20 group confined mostly to males (see Figure 7). There was little gendered distinction in earnings between workers under the age of 20 doing the same jobs.



The mill's workforce grew by 40 per cent between 1911 and 1921 (from 232 to 372 workers). The male-female ratio reversed: 221 (60 per cent) males to 151 (40 per cent) females; the proportion of single workers fell to 56 per cent of all workers as compared to 72 per cent in 1911. The number of Acadian women remained virtually the same as in 1911 (88); English women increased from 29 to 51. The mean age of single women workers was a full two years higher than that

of single males (22 vs. 20). Overall, males averaged 32 years in 1921, females 23, a significant increase in both cases. Although women's mean earnings had risen to \$539 by 1921, mean earnings for men had risen to \$859. Married males averaged \$1995, single men \$573, and single women \$532; single Acadian men averaged \$569 and single Acadian women \$525. As in 1911, Acadian males proved much more likely to be single and, like Acadian women, continued to be ghettoized in weaving, spinning, spooling and carding jobs on the shop floor. British males, who tended, on average, to be older, continued to hold down the most lucrative and responsible jobs. Age, gender and ethnicity continued to play a significant role in determining earnings and job hierarchy. The gap in earnings between women and men, Acadians and British, and married and single workers had not narrowed appreciably, even though men were now performing many jobs previously done by women. Discrepancies are most clearly illustrated in the earning curves for men and women workers. By 1921 women had caught up with the earning levels of men in 1911. But by 1921, men above the age of 25 were earning far more than any woman (see Figure 7).

Throughout the period, Yarmouth Duck and Yarn recruited a high proportion of its workers from among rural youth displaced by the over-population of subsistence farms. In earlier periods such surplus workers might have left the province in search of employment. But now, given an opportunity to remain in Nova Scotia, some, at least, chose to accept work closer to home, despite harsh conditions and low wages. For young single women, the promise of a pay packet almost as large as that earned by their unmarried brothers (93 per cent of male counterparts' in the 16-25 age cohorts in 1921) may have made mill employment especially attractive. These young recruits contributed to the formation of a broad new urban proletariat, regularly replenished from the countryside in a situation that saw a constant turnover among operational staff, while management and those highly skilled workers who maintained or repaired the machines remained relatively stable.

The case of the Yarmouth cotton mill provides a concrete illustration of the significant intersection of gender, class and culture; the relatively low status of women and Acadians was critical to the restructuring of the town's workforce. The cotton industry initiated into waged labour young women and men who might not otherwise have had the opportunity for waged work locally. But significant disparities between women's and men's earnings persisted and were reflected in job ghettoization based on gender, ethnicity and age. If female workers sometimes reported earnings as high as those achieved by male workers performing the same or similar tasks, the men in question were often young Acadians, who, like their female counterparts, found fewer opportunities for advancement within the industry. Like Acadian males, women were denied the prospects for upward mobility accorded to non-Acadian males. Resistance to the inequities imposed by the industry did occur and, during the war, when the demand for labour was high and rich war contracts resulted in increased

production, workers' committees succeeded in negotiating a number of wage increases.

Not all women workers were as immediately affected by the process of urbanization and industrialization as the new class of factory girls. But the changes brought by urbanization revolutionized community life and no worker could completely escape their impact. To some extent, each town's approach to the provision of public education was a function of its socio-cultural profile. Yarmouth and Amherst had very active local middle classes committed to the commercial and industrial advancement of their communities. They took pride in providing their children with extensive educational opportunities at public expense and borrowed heavily to construct new school buildings, which were discussed in glowing terms in the local press. Sydney Mines' less notable educational accomplishments reflected the coal industry's failure to value universal literacy for its workforce. But the coal town, which sent its sons into the workforce at earlier ages than was common elsewhere, had almost no resident middle class to push for the implementation of educational reforms.<sup>39</sup> And because the coal company owned the majority of homes, the proportion of privately owned property was too small to provide a tax base to support the school system. Hence, town incorporation in 1889 brought little change.

Whatever different attitudes toward provision of educational facilities may have prevailed within each community, gender balances among teachers proved remarkably similar as feminization rose from just under 70 per cent in 1871, to over 90 per cent by 1921.<sup>40</sup> School boards composed of middle aged, largely middle class men hired young women as teachers because they were readily available. In the process, women experienced a type of ghettoization similar to that of their sisters in the cotton mill, even though their ethnic and religious traits differed sharply. A tendency to British Protestant dominance and underrepresentation of Catholics reflected a bias against full access to education for minority groups and the lack of higher Academies in rural areas where most Catholics had lived prior to industrial transformation. Daughters of the middle and lower middle classes for the most part, these young women worked for much

39 Robert MacIntosh, "The Boys in the Nova Scotia Coal Mines, 1873-1923", *Acadiensis*, XVI, 2 (Spring 1987), pp. 35-50; Kate and John Currie, "A History of Education in Sydney Mines, 1828-1900", Unpublished Paper, Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton, 1980.

40 Central Canada as well as New Brunswick underwent a similar shift during this period. Alison Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching in British North America and Canada, 1845-1875", *Social History/ Histoire Sociale*, 8 (1975), pp. 5-20; Marta Danylewycz, Beth Light and Alison Prentice, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching: A Nineteenth Century Ontario and Quebec Case Study", *Social History/ Histoire Sociale*, 16 (1983), pp. 81-109; and Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Teacher's Work: Changing Patterns and Perceptions in the Emerging School Systems of Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Central Canada", *Labour/ Le travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), pp. 59-82. For the Nova Scotia experience see Janet Guildford, "Separate Spheres".

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lower wages than their male colleagues, or even than their female counterparts in factories or offices. They did so because they could afford to and because they shared a missionary attitude towards their profession that permitted them to accept low wages, even while remaining in the workforce for longer and longer periods.

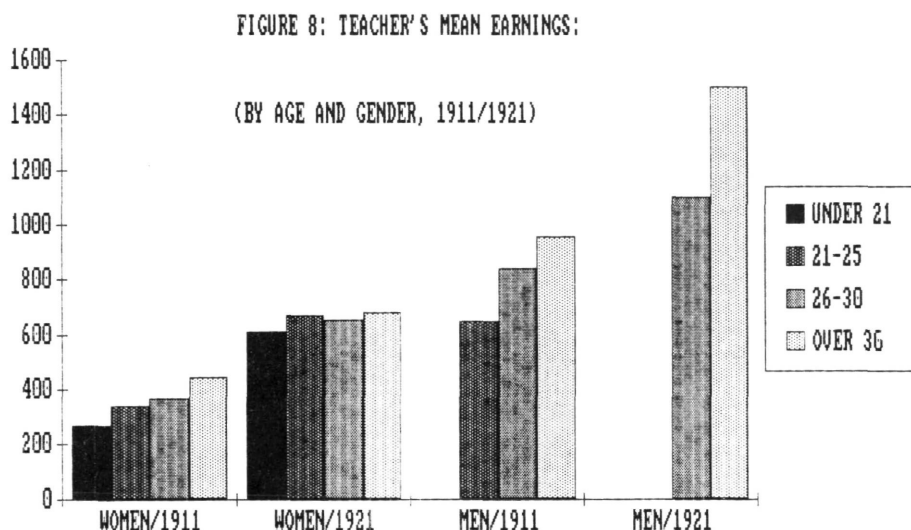


Mamie Crosby's Pupils, Yarmouth, 1892 (Photo courtesy of the Yarmouth County Historical Society's Museum and Research Library) Teachers such as Mamie Crosby might control their immediate work environment but remained subject to male school boards and principals.

Women teachers were older, on average, than other groups of female workers but they were still significantly younger than their male colleagues. In 1901 the mean age for women teachers was less than 23, while the mean age for men and women taken together was 25. In 1911, only three of the 19 male teachers, as compared to 51 of the 77 female teachers, were under 25. In 1921, all 10 male teachers were over 25, but the largest number of women (47) were over 30 and less than half were under 25. By that time, the overall mean age had risen to 33 (44 for males and 31 for females). As in the cotton mill, age variance reflected a bias against employing married women. But the rise in the mean age of women teachers between 1901 and 1921 indicates that women were remaining spinsters and in the workforce for longer periods.

Jarring discrepancies typified earnings of male and female teachers. In 1921, for example, male teachers averaged over \$1200 per annum, compared to women's mean earnings of \$667. Moreover, the earning curve for female teachers

remained flat, while that for males rose sharply with age (see Figure 8). Gendered bias in teachers' salaries reflected the notion that married male teachers with families to support required higher salaries than did single women living at home. To some extent, this perception was accurate. Virtually all male teachers headed their own households, while over 90 per cent of female teachers were single, living at home or as boarders in households headed by others. Even so, the few widowed women who headed their own households were unable, either by virtue of their status as family heads or their longer experience, to earn what might have been considered a 'family wage' of the sort that male teachers were able to command. Gender based licensing systems reinforced these inequalities.



Although the number of teachers rose dramatically as local school boards expanded their services, the increase, from just 50 in 1871 to 133 by 1921, did not match the rate of population growth in the towns. Student/teacher ratios increased over the period as the schools adopted a strict grade system and increased the numbers in each classroom. With the division of students into age specific grades, female teachers became ghettoized in the lower grade levels. In classrooms, the introduction of industrial-like modes of organization led to a division of labour similar to that of the factory. As in factories, males dominated all supervisory positions, which were thought to require higher qualifications and the male qualities of leadership and discipline. Prior to World War I, the jobs available in the new high schools, except for a few home economics teachers, were invariably staffed by men. There, men commanded higher salaries while instructing fewer students, a system that would not change very much over the following half century.

Until further investigation into women's direct experience of paid work in Nova Scotia has been completed, any conclusions concerning the impact of industrialization or women's part in the transformation of communities must remain tentative. However, this analysis of their involvement in paid work provides the basis for a number of observations. Women workers tended to be younger, almost invariably unmarried, and to stay in the work-force for shorter periods than their male counterparts. While this general pattern persisted throughout the period, significant changes did occur between 1911 and 1921, probably as a consequence of the war. Though the most common field of employment for women continued to be the service sector, the places where servants worked came to vary considerably over time. And, like their male counterparts, women faced discrimination based on their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Thus, servants were often Catholics and factory workers often Acadian. And both groups were drawn largely from the countryside. In contrast, jobs requiring literacy or communication skills, such as teaching and clerking, went mainly to British-stock Protestant women emerging from the lower middle classes within the towns.

While men and women may have experienced migration somewhat differently, new women workers, either by themselves or in the company of kin, participated actively in labour force expansion. Paralleling the diversification of work opportunities was a change in the ethnic composition of urban Nova Scotia, the result of large scale migrations of Acadians, rural Scots and Newfoundlanders from the countryside into towns. In Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney Mines, Roman Catholics who came to dominate the lower rungs of the occupational ladder transformed predominantly Protestant towns. At this stage we can only speculate on the cultural impact of this major shift on institutions and social structure.

Everywhere, the most striking characteristic of women workers was their youth relative both to male workmates and to the remainder of the adult female community. Women's participation in the workforce was effectively limited to the years between childhood and marriage. Culturally determined responsibility for child rearing and household maintenance precluded continuing participation in the labour force by married women. Those widows not dependent on earnings of kin were generally confined to menial occupations, although those who owned property could convert their homes into boarding houses. Those with skills, such as teachers, could occasionally re-enter the workforce, but not usually at a level appropriate to their age or experience. It is quite likely that many married women participated in hidden economies of production not recorded by the census taker and it is evident that artisanal production specifically directed towards serving the needs of other women continued for some time and was probably dominated by women in the older age ranges.

Wherever they worked and whatever their backgrounds, women earned less than their male counterparts, though in some cases that may have been as much



a function of the relatively short time they spent in the workforce as of their gender. The more diverse a town's economic base, the wider the choices for prospective women workers. After 1891, Yarmouth and Amherst provided many new opportunities in industrial and commercial sectors, including clerical jobs in stores and businesses, which Sydney Mines only began to match by 1921. Disappearance of the female equivalent of the honest artisan, who might have controlled some of her own means of production and regulated work processes in her own home, was as pronounced for women as it was for men during the same period. Indeed, in many ways, Nova Scotia women's experience of work degradation mirrored that of their male counterparts.

Although conclusions remain speculative, understanding how women experienced capitalism can also shed light on community economic development through these years when manufacturing and urban development reoriented the regional economy. Women in the forefront of that transition were subject to all the frustrations of working in factories controlled by machines and processes foreign to any of their prior experiences. Yarmouth and Amherst, which attracted the largest and most diverse group of women workers, were exposed to the vicissitudes of the new competitive system into which the region had been thrust following Confederation. When deindustrialization replaced the expansiveness of the 1880-1910 period, women, as well as men, faced enormous dislocations as consolidation of production resulted in over-production. The only way to make machines pay for themselves was to eliminate interruptions. The cut-throat competition, in which Maritime producers were disadvantaged by distance and concentrations of capital, made the region particularly vulnerable to the inroads of central Canadian companies determined to eliminate them. Such competition not only suppressed earnings but also threatened the very existence of the region's industrial base and the urban structures dependent upon it.

In the end, women became as marginalized as men by the new dependence on capitalist consumer-oriented economies; deindustrialization threatened their new jobs as much as it did those of male workers. Those unskilled and semi-skilled women who remained in the workforce, finding their job options reduced or eliminated, were trapped in dependent relationships, often as servants of those middle class groups who were managing this latest process of transformation. Teachers and nurses remained ghettoized at the bottom of systems unable or unwilling to meet their expectations, and continued to receive very low pay despite their demonstrably higher educational attainments. Ironically, a dramatic rise in opportunities for women in clerical work, where they were often employed by some of the same central Canadian businesses that were engineering the consumer-oriented revolution overtaking the region, reflected a broader social submission to a central Canada dominated economy. Nova Scotia's passage from colonial dependence on staple exports, through capitalist transformation, industrialization and urbanization to dependence and deindustrialization

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was as much a female as a male experience. Women's place in the process can begin to be understood now that we are coming to know more about who they were, where they worked and some dimensions of their labour and their lives.