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Men and Women
in a Halifax Working-Class Neighbourhood
in the 1920s

by

Suzanne Morton

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
September, 1990

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which "gender ideals" affected men and women in Richmond Heights during the 1920s. Richmond Heights was a respectable working-class neighbourhood in Halifax, Nova Scotia built after the 1917 explosion by the Halifax Relief Commission.

Throughout the thesis, neighbourhood men and women are examined in terms of age and marital status. Importance is placed on how domesticity, gender ideologies, and occupational change shaped the ways in which manliness and femininity were perceived. Gender ideals could embody both change and continuity. But traditional working-class culture, which continued to be removed from the household and reflect a male world view, had great difficulty absorbing the new ideals.
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Location of Richmond Heights on Halifax Peninsula
Men and Women
in a Halifax Working-Class Neighbourhood
in the 1920s

Introduction

A man stands by the front porch of his Kane Place home in September 1923. He wears a straw boater, a dark suit coat, white shirt and straight tie. His face is unclear in the photograph but the caption indicates that Harry Thompson, a carpenter at the military hospital, has just won the Richmond Heights' neighbourhood garden prize. He is surrounded by the results of his after-hour labour. The narrow and short front yard is bordered by a low wooden latticed fence, and except for a path and a flag pole with the Red Ensign hanging limp in the still air, the lot is completely filled with flowering dahlia and roses, with flower boxes on the windows and vines clinging to the porch supports.¹

¹ Evening Mail (Halifax), September 1923. All surnames of neighbourhood residents in this study are fictitious except Florence Murray who created a public identity for herself as the result of the publication of her autobiography and Robert Daw, Ward Six Alderman and Labour politician. The actual surnames of individuals who did not live in the neighbourhood and whose public activities such as politics, law or religion are a matter of public record are left unchanged.
In another photograph, taken five years later, an elderly woman stands by the porch of her Livingstone Place residence in May 1928. Her hands folded across her stomach, she wears a dark, unfashionable button-down dress which reaches her boots, with a touch of modern style - a fox fur collar. Mrs Fleck, who lives with her widowed daughter and her family, is the recent winner of a local newspaper's Mother's Day contest. She is understandably proud of her achievement of being the forebear of 105 grandchildren.2

The images of a proud gardener or grandmother are at first difficult to integrate with other visual representations of the Canadian working class during the 1920s. A number of other visual images first come to mind: the overturned street cars at Winnipeg, the new assemblyline workers in Oshawa or Windsor, the foreign-born radical in isolated lumber or mining camps, or a shop girl strutting along Sunnyside in Toronto. Perhaps the most enduring of these images is the haunting woodcut done by Lawren Harris in 1923 depicting the wife of a Glace Bay miner and her two children against a background of dreary company housing during one of the famous strikes involving Cape Breton coal miners in the first half of that decade. Surely, it is significant that one of the ways in which the struggle by the most masculinist of Canadian trade unions against monopoly capital is remembered today is through

2 Evening Mail, 14 May 1928.
the woodcut of a woman and her children. In fact, the few
Canadian historians who have examined the experience of the
working class in the 1920s have also been struck by the
importance of home and family in the period. This domestic
orientation created by the images of the spouse of the Glace
Bay miner, the well-dressed home-improver or the extraordinary
grandmother, redirects the attention of the historian from the
workplace and the union hall to the household and the home in
the hope of understanding change in the Canadian working class
in the early part of the twentieth century.

The 1920s is an interesting period for examining change
in the Canadian working class for the dramatic rise and
collapse of the labour movement after the First World War
created the impression of a sharp break with the past. The
abruptness of any transformation was deceptive, since the
Canadian working class had been gradually undergoing change
over the first two decades of this century. Changes within
the working class were accompanied by larger changes within
society and many North American historians have considered
the 1920s to have been a time during which North American

3 Jean Barman, "Knowledge is Essential for Universal
Progress but Fatal to Class Privilege: Working People and
the Schools of Vancouver During the 1920s," Labour/ Le
Travail, 22 (Fall 1988), 9-66; Craig Heron, "Working-Class
Hamilton, 1895-1930," Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University,
culture was remade.4

The 'new' working class which took form after 1920 has usually been explained in terms of a combination of factors. Emphasis has been placed on the homogenizing power of mass culture and consumption, the fragmentation of the working class by ethnic and racial divisions, and the impact of monopoly capitalism, particularly new management techniques supported by the state.5 In the most famous community study of the twenties, Middletown: A Study of Contemporary American Culture, Robert and Helen Lynd investigated Muncie, Indiana and settled upon the importance of consumption and mass culture.6 Recent historians, such as Bryan Palmer have


regarded consumption and mass culture as a characteristic or a symptom which resulted from the entrenchment of monopoly capitalism. Despite the very real differences between these two sorts of analyses, a common point between them is the relatively little attention both give to gender and the role it played. Images of new types of women and men pervade our historical consciousness of the 1920s in North America. Even so this important factor has not as yet been integrated into our understanding of class formation. An important exception has been Susan Porter Benson who noted in a 1987 review article that the 1920s was a watershed with regard to women's waged employment, and gender must be central to the way in which historians of the working class approach the decade.

As a result of real changes in the way local economies were organized with the onset of monopoly capital, men and women had to find new ways of defining themselves and negotiating the boundaries of gender as it affected their lives. This study seeks to examine this phenomenon in the

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8 Susan Porter Benson, "The 1920s Through the Looking Glass of Gender: A Response to David Montgomery," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 32 (Fall 1987), 31-38. Palmer in *Working-Class Experience* also mentions the sexual division as one factor which fostered the fragmentation of labour. pp. 182-183.
Halifax working-class neighbourhood of Richmond Heights during the 1920s. To paraphrase the words and ideas of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, the thesis attempts to "give the neglected dimension of gender its full weight and complexity in the shaping and structuring of [working class] social relations in this period."9

For the purposes of this study, it is useful to view class, gender and age not only as real and interconnected relationships but also as lenses made available for the historian to see the past clearly. Because these modes of analysis must converge in specific individuals at a stated time and place, details are magnified and astigmatism corrected to present a much clearer and simplified representation of reality than may actually have been the case. While these particular myopic lenses allow one to focus on intra-class behaviour and approach the relationship between men and women, this perspective rarely specifically addresses the importance of class conflict and male domination.

Class, gender and age are not only inanimate and unchanging spectacles but they are also historically specific, socially constructed, hierarchical relationships grounded in the material or social relations of production, biology or family. These relationships are not necessarily polar but

rather compose continua, where within the working class or masculinity, there are degrees of difference. The definition of class to be used here is determined by the broader historical questions raised by this study. For the purposes of this thesis, working-class corresponds in the most general way to occupation, the decision to live in what was recognized as a working-class neighbourhood, and includes all members of neighbourhood households. "Gender" is used rather than "sex" to emphasize the historical and social construction rather than biological differences between men and women.

Emphasis upon the historical and social construction of gender is further promoted by the application of "gender ideals". This concept is based on the work of Edward Rotundo who described gender ideals as a "cluster of traits, behaviors, and values that the members of society believe a man or a woman should have." Gender ideals are not exclusionary and a society can have several ideals at the same time.

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10 Edward Anthony Rotundo, "Manhood in America: The Northern Middle Class, 1770-1920," Ph.D. thesis, Brandeis University, 1982, p. 8. Rotundo differentiated "gender ideal" from "sex role" by defining "sex role" as a characteristic typical and/or desirable of a member of a sex. According to Rotundo, "'Ideal' implies a standard of excellence or perfection, as opposed to mere 'ought to' implied by 'norm'. More than that 'norm' sounded like a word that a social scientist would invent - 'ideal' sounded like a goal that any person might have. 'Ideal' suggested an exalted cultural value." The use of ideal corresponds with the work of Jill Matthews who stresses the impossibility of complying with all gender ideals and the inevitable failure. Rotundo, Chapter One, ft. 13, p. 29 and Jill Julius Matthews, Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia (Sydney, 1984).
time for the same gender. Furthermore, gender ideals are created by society and are often class or community specific. For the purposes of this study, gender ideals are informed by heterosexual capitalist assumptions about a "family wage" with a male breadwinner and a dependent wife. While this model remained elusive for much of the working class, the ideal of the breadwinner/housewife dichotomy was embodied notably in union activity and state policy, but also popular perception.11

Gender ideals dictate the way in which society divides up the work between men and women around production, sexuality, and parenting.12 But these divisions were not permanent. Furthermore, gender ideals were so basic to the


12 Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (New York, 1985), p. xii. Mary Poovey has cautioned us about the use of "system" as it implies a set of internally coherent and organized beliefs while any gender system contains contradiction. Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago, 1988), p. 3.
way in which a society operated that they were tied to class formation. It is entirely reasonable to assume, as do Davidoff and Hall, "that gender and class always operate together [and] that the consciousness of class always takes a gendered form."13

This thesis emerges from recent work in the areas of working-class and women's history. Canadian women's history has developed tremendously over the past twenty years, though it remains less so in the Atlantic region.14 In Canada, a history which presents men as other than gender neutral is much more recent and little work has been completed.15 On the other hand, Canadian working-class history is on much firmer ground with a biannual journal, Labour/Le Travail, and a

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13 Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, p. 13.


number of community and interpretative studies. The working-class of Halifax in particular has been well served with the work of Judith Fingard, Ian McKay and Catherine Waite. Although the interaction of gender and class has recently emerged as a dominant theme in international literature, it has hardly evolved within the Canadian context. An important review article by Bettina Bradbury


18 A recent example of this approach in Canadian history is Mark Rosenfeld, "'It was a Hard Life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950," Historical Papers, (Windsor, 1988), 237-279. Working-class women have been the focus of studies by Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (New York, 1986); Elizabeth Ewen, "Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars," Ph.D. thesis, New York at Stony Brook, 1979; Joanne Meyerowitz, Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930 (Chicago, 1988); Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place:
has suggested some directions which Canadian historians might follow such as investigation of family, household economy and the role of marital status in the working class. In this vein, this study seeks to contribute to the general area of Canadian social history by incorporating gender into the question of what happened to the working class in the early twentieth century in the specific location and context of Richmond Heights during the 1920s.

Richmond Heights was situated west of Halifax Harbour, beyond the steep incline of Fort Needham. To its east was undeveloped land, much of it still in use for agricultural production. To its north, above Duffus Street was Longard's Hill where the prison lands separated the built up area from Africville and the Bedford Basin. To its south lay the centre of the city and the open Atlantic. Nestled between Fort Needham, Longard's Hill and the area east of Kempt Road and

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19 Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working-Class History," Labour/Le Travail, 19 (Spring 1987), 23-43.

The actual street boundaries of the neighbourhood were the district bordered by West Young Street to the south, Gottingen Street to the east, Duffus Street to North and Robie Street to the west. For the purposes of this study, the houses were all on the east/west streets with the exception of the twelve apartments above the shops and offices on West Young Street as this thoroughfare was too populous to isolate only the Hydrostone block. The name Richmond Heights was selected by residents of the time in an attempt to replace the less formal and in the end permanent label of "the Hydrostone." Richmond Heights is a historical community that no longer exists in the psyche of the local geography. Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), MG 20, Vol. 526, 2, Halifax Relief Commission (HRC) Minutes, 9 March 1921.

sunshine in Halifax was not measured until 1940 and then ranged between 88 hours in November and 239 hours in July. While the residents of Richmond Heights may have measured time by the number of days of rain or the severity of one winter compared to another, this study imposes the period of a decade on the life of the community. The use of a decade for investigation is arbitrary and can be unsatisfactory as it imposes an artificial marking of time in the lives of individuals. However, in this particular case it proves useful as the decade of the 1920s corresponded with the construction of the housing development as the first tenants moved into their new homes in the fall of 1919. Furthermore, the decade also corresponds to economic cycles as in Halifax the 1920s were encased at either end by a sudden shift from prosperity to depression. By ending before 1930, the study avoids the circumstances surrounding the Great Depression.

Halifax is a particularly interesting city in which to examine the private world of the working class in the 1920s as it did not experience the prosperity of new industrial manufacturing centres nor did it have an immigrant population which needed to be "Americanized". In 1921, nearly 80 per cent of the total population had been born in Nova Scotia and some of the city's residents were proud of its homogeneity and

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the fact that there was "no large mass to be Canadianized, no 'Ghetto' nor 'Little Italy'". Although Halifax had a largely homogeneous population, not all residents of Richmond Heights were born in Nova Scotia. Thirty-six residents were identified by newspaper comments, or obituaries as not being born in the province. Most of the immigrants identified were men who came from England or Ireland with the army or navy. Three men and four women were identified as being born in Newfoundland, two brothers were born in Italy and one man living on Stairs Street was born in France. These few exceptions could be assimilated into the community. More importantly, although Halifax had a large black population, they did not live in Richmond Heights. Immigration and racial tensions were important in the North American context but do little to explain the fragmentation of this relatively


25 Mail-Star (Halifax), 17 March, 2 September 1943, 15 March 1944, 27 April 1956, 3 October 1963; Evening Mail, 23 December 1929; PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.846, R.1405, R.1870. The total number of people who passed through Richmond Heights during the 1920s will probably always be elusive. Even moments of time, captured in the manuscript census or school records, are at present unavailable. Based on leases, the municipal voters' list, telephone listings and city directories the names of 3,443 individuals were encountered. This number is inadequate as it excludes all children, nearly all married women before 1926, many young adults, and most of the aged.

homogeneous Halifax community.

In 1931, the population of Halifax was nearly stagnant at 59,273. The city boasted 122 miles of street, 28 of which were paved and had 54 miles of sewers. Symbols of progress could be deceptive because the 1920s were hard on the Maritimes as a result of lower prices for resources, increased freight rates that made local goods uncompetitive in large central Canadian markets, and in turn the local retail and manufacturing markets were captured by successful central Canadian firms. The city experienced what was coyly described as "economic readjustment". The decade cemented the fact that Halifax was not to be a place where products were made but rather a city where products and services were consumed. The absence of economic success and ethnic

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29 The de-industrialization experience in the Maritimes was not unique in the North American context. Old industries in New England were also closing and relocating and parallels between the two regions remain uninvestigated. For a discussion of de-industrialization in the Maritimes see Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of Class Consciousness in Industrial Nova Scotia: A Study of Amherst, 1891-1925," Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie, 1983. For the New England experience see Judith Smith, Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrants in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900-1940 (Albany, N.Y., 1985); Shelley Herchik, "Yours for the Good Fight: The Effects of Industrial Decline in the Hatting, Textile, and
communities actually throws a stronger light on the issues of gender that may be less visible in larger cosmopolitan urban centres.

Although Halifax was situated on the periphery of the North American continent, it was almost entirely integrated into the continental culture. For example, in September 1923, the Evening Mail claimed that over 1,000 copies of records or sheet music of the song "Yes, we have no bananas," had been sold in the city, the equivalent of one copy to every ten homes.30 Haligonians watched Hollywood movies, tuned into radio signals from the American north east, and had front row seats for viewing the exciting attempts to cross the Atlantic by air. Commercialized sport such as major league baseball and boxing was complemented by a revived commercialized version of local schooner races which featured the Bluenose.31 New forms and choices in entertainment and interests were available but often required a disposable income beyond the consumer capabilities of Richmond Heights residents. A north-end Halifax teacher noted that several girls in her grade


30 Evening Mail, 22 September 1923.

eight class had never been to a movie theatre.  

The neighbourhood was primarily composed of a section of the working class generally considered to have been respectable since most men were employed in skilled or semi-skilled positions with regular employment. The focus upon this neighbourhood acknowledges de facto segregation that was self-imposed as only the well-paid and households that had a number of wage earners could afford the Richmond Heights rents which were slightly higher than other working-class Halifax neighbourhoods. The community can be considered to have been self-selected, since the tenants chose to commit a significant portion of their income to above-average housing. While the residents may have been among the highest paid of the Halifax working class, they were also vulnerable as the result of the introduction of new technologies, and the decline of local manufacturing and transportation. The skilled and semi-skilled working class of the 1920s was in fact aware of what was at stake and had more to lose than the unskilled.

Although this study is based on a neighbourhood, the lens through which the residents are perceived is the household, instead of dominant working-class institutions and actions such as labour politics, unions and strikes. Historians of

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32 *Evening Mail*, 10 January 1924.

the Canadian working class have understandably been attracted to periods of action and crisis when men and women developed a critique of society and participated in movements that might bring about change. Men and women were important actors in the making of their history both inside and beyond the household, but the focus on the household reveals the degree to which they were always vulnerable to forces beyond any possible control. Birth, death, disease, or a cold winter which exhausted limited resources or coal could and did disrupt the delicate balance of their lives. Investigation of domestic life exposes the important role luck could play in the equilibrium between survival and disaster.

Exploration of households has other advantages. Households in Richmond Heights were primarily composed of family, but the term household is preferable for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is the way in which the residents are perceived by the primary record group used in this thesis. At the heart of this study are the records of the Halifax Relief Commission (established 1918) regarding its tenants and, more importantly, the responses and requests of the tenants to the Commission. Usually written by a woman in her role as home manager, sometimes literate and legible and other times barely decipherable, the scraps of paper, pieces of envelopes, pages of children's school scribblers and textbooks permit a usually silenced group of the past to speak in their own words. These pencil scrawls were written on behalf of
households and should be regarded in this context. Other sources such as directories, newspapers, municipal, legal, church and charity records were useful in flushing out individuals who composed the household's membership. Secondly, the household was the economic unit in which people lived. Combined wages or boarders and lodgers were often necessary to maintain the tenancy. Furthermore, the use of household reminds us not to assume the presence of a two-generation nuclear family. Households could include a variety of people, kin or otherwise. Finally, the word family is loaded with emotional overtones and, as Linda Gordon has recently reminded us, can appear to be a homogeneous unit which masks intra-family conflict particularly as those sorts of conflict affect the concerns of women and children.

I have not corrected the spelling or grammar, nor have I adopted the use of [sic.] in these notes. Additional information necessary for comprehension has been included in brackets.

The organization of this thesis attempts to reflect the importance of life course in gender analysis. Gender ideals were experienced differently by distinct age cohorts. The use of a reversed life course as the central organizing concept is meant to emphasize that change was felt by individuals unevenly throughout the community, even within the same household. The thesis begins with the elderly who had experienced the most change in their lifetime and concludes with young women who were experiencing the most rapid change at this particular time. Chapter One sets the stage with a discussion of Richmond Heights and is followed in the second chapter by a discussion of the neighbourhood's dominant values and behaviours. The third chapter focuses on older men and women, while Chapter Four looks at households headed by women who were particularly vulnerable to assumptions of a male "family wage" economy. In the fifth chapter, men and women are examined in their roles as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. Chapter Six explores the impact of the changing economic and occupational structure on Richmond Heights men. Finally, Chapter Seven focuses on young single working women,

the segment of the population where change was most obvious. Although the thesis attempts to stress the importance of generational differences, it does not consider children. Children were not active participants in the creation of gender ideology but rather the subjects socialized to accept its message. Furthermore, the inclusion of children, who composed nearly half of the population, would introduce questions about long-term mobility which are beyond the thesis' longitudinal parameters.

This is a feminist study, and although I appear to hold women responsible for the majority of domestic changes, it is worth keeping in mind that there was nothing idyllic about the industrial working-class culture that these women helped to undermine. Richmond was no "Camelot" for the male artisan and it was certainly not a claim that would have been made by family members. At the same time, the emergence of a new dominant domesticity was also not the answer. The new working-class suburb was indeed marked by overstretched consumption and by a depersonalized mass culture. Change did not begin nor end in the 1920s, but it was apparent by the end of the decade that class-based gender ideals were not so clearly defined and some of the inherent contradictions they contained were more apparent.
Chapter One

Richmond Heights

On the morning of 6 December 1917, in the narrows at the base of the Richmond slope, a munitions ship bound for Europe and packed with 2,600 tons of explosives collided with a relief ship. The resulting explosion killed over 2,000 people, injured 9,000 and totally devastated a large section of the north end of Halifax. Trees and telephone poles snapped into pieces as the wooden houses collapsed onto their hot coal stoves. In the place of what had been the working-class suburb of Richmond lay 325 acres of charred ruins, the result of the largest pre-atomic man-made explosion.1

An observer of the December 1917 events remarked that the explosion had blown Halifax into the twentieth century.2


The image of the city being blown across time is powerful: the explosion changed both the physical environment of much of Halifax and the context in which daily life occurred. In the wake of the explosion, Halifax was besieged by experts on almost every aspect of life ranging from public health and social work to town planning and architecture. The experts brought with them the most modern and scientific methods and theories and, in the vacuum created by the destruction of a working-class community, proceeded to implement their knowledge and fill the empty space.

But in fact, Richmond was not a clean slate; for although the houses, schools and factories were gone, many of the survivors returned to rebuild their homes and former lives. These men and women, boys and girls, provided a measure of continuity with the past. They had been there before the catastrophe and the mix of old and new produced, at times, confusing results.

The intervention of outside experts was complemented by the intrusion of the state for post-explosion Halifax was beleaguered by many forms of government intervention. The now-vacant land along the waterfront was expropriated by the Minister of Marine who, concerned about the shortage of Canadian ocean tonnage during the war, entered into an agreement with Roy Wolvin, President of the Montreal Transportation Company. In exchange for the establishment of the Halifax Shipyards Limited, the government offered the
graving dock, sufficient space for a plant and four government contracts for ships. In June 1918, Roy Wolvin and J.W. Norcross, President of Canada Steamship Lines, organized Halifax Shipyards Limited, the first block in what would become the British Empire Steel Corporation empire.3

The most obvious intervention by a government body was the creation of the Halifax Relief Commission (HRC). The voluntary organization of local citizens which responded to the emergency was replaced in late January 1918 by a government-appointed, state-supported, three-man agency.4 The HRC was given further legal jurisdiction by the Nova Scotia legislature under the provincial HRC Act. The Commission was responsible for investigating losses, damages, and injuries, for awarding compensation, and, most importantly for the purpose of this study, the Commission was empowered within a defined area of 325 acres to expropriate land, create zoning regulations, rebuild, and carry out a town planning scheme.5 The HRC's responsibilities for compensation and

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reconstruction were integrated through a plan that proposed to have the rent of newly rebuilt homes finance future pension payments. Hence, the HRC had a public mandate to create the first public housing project in Canada. This quasi-governmental agency therefore served as the primary landlord in Richmond Heights from the fall of 1919 until well into the 1950s.

The explosion and its devastation made possible a form of urban planning which had already been discussed in theoretical terms for a number of years. The explosion then functioned as something of a catalyst - albeit a fortuitous one - for a grand urban experiment in a real Canadian situation in which the need for some measure of urban planning was unquestioned. The HRC desired to make Richmond Heights "one of the best residential portions of the city for persons of moderate means." Single family detached dwellings on the slope would form the "most desirable residential area", while west of North Creighton Street frame wooden houses of "a somewhat cheap type" were to erected "for the poorer classes." Between the two developments there would be a "screen" or "buffer" to separate the desirable homes on the

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7 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1715.8, Town Planning Scheme for Devastated Area; Evening Mail, 27 September 1918; PANS, MG 20, Vol. 526, 1, HRC Minutes, 21 June 1918, p. 346.
slope and the "inferior district of the west."\(^8\) The screen took the form of a group development for the families of skilled workmen and created the most enduring reminder of the explosion, a housing project known as the Hydrostone.\(^9\)

The Hydrostone was built on ten short parallel streets running east-west. In the centre of eight of the streets was a large boulevard of communal green space, a grassy island which was supposed to serve as a play area for children. These islands were surrounded by narrow streets designed to restrict traffic by permitting only single directional flow. The 86 buildings contained three offices, thirteen stores, and 324 dwellings and were arranged in short rows consisting of two, four, and six dwelling units. The terraced houses faced boulevards with parallel service lanes in the rear. Indeed, the development reflected a moment in time; had it been built even five years later, it might have looked completely different. Within the design, there was no provision for private automobiles and the back service lanes for tradesmen and delivery reflected a pre "cash and carry" way of shopping.

The design and appearance of the Hydrostone also reflected early twentieth century concern about working-class housing and the emergence of the garden suburbs in England.

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\(^9\) MG 36, HRC, R.1723, Progress Report Halifax Rehousing, October 1918.
Working-class housing before the explosion was generally poor, and with the exception of building material was similar to housing in the late Victorian city in England. As in England, there were to be few tenement blocks. Most of the housing consisted of flats and single family dwellings, sometimes shared among several families. The narrow frontage and single room depth resulted in limited light and ventilation. Hugh MacLennan in *Barometer Rising* described the north end houses as "cracker boxes standing in rows on a shelf" and then went on to paint a picture in words that described its miseries.

In some cases the foundations were so cockeyed it looked as though the houses they supported might tip over and sprawl into the streets. Their cracked timbers were painted chocolate brown or cocoa-brown, and these drab colours absorbed all the light that entered the streets, and made them seem even narrower and dirtier than they actually were.¹⁰

Concern for the morality of the working class and the general health of the population made some reformers draw connections between these inner-city slums and overcrowding, poverty, crime and high mortality.¹¹ In Halifax, the link between poor housing and public health and morality issues was being made by progressives such as Robert McConnell Hattie

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and his Civic Improvement League.\textsuperscript{12} At the same time, the advent and decline in the cost of public transportation created working-class suburbs on the periphery of the city where land values were lower and the household could supplement wages with home-based production such as gardening and small-scale animal husbandry. These peripheral communities did not produce marked improvements in public health since municipal by-laws or sanitary facilities did not extend to the environs. A tacit policy of decentralization was not enough.\textsuperscript{13} Richmond may not have fit the conventional image of a slum but it was definitely \textit{iy}; and the lack of full municipal sewer and water service did not create a healthy working-class population.

In an effort to improve the physical environment of the urban working class, and control peripheral development, in

\begin{itemize}

\item \textsuperscript{13} Anthony Sutcliffe, Towards the Planned City: Germany, Britain, the United States and France (New York, 1981), p. 68. An example of an unplanned working-class suburb which developed just outside Halifax in the 1920s was Kline Heights. Advertisements for land noted that the area was close to the tram line, free of rent and city taxes, with sufficient land to grow vegetables, plant fruit trees, raise poultry and keep a cow. \textit{Evening Mail}, 8 September 1919.
\end{itemize}
other parts of the Commonwealth an earlier generation of housing reformers, British industrialists George Cadbury and William Lever had initiated social experiments in planned rural company villages of Bournville near Birmingham in 1879 and Port Sunlight just outside Liverpool in 1888. Urban reformers who blamed environmental factors for the high incidence of disease, infant mortality and a physically unfit labour force believed that small, self-contained houses, gardens, and public open spaces would help to produce a healthier and happier labour force and with it, would perhaps attain the ideal society.  

Bournville and Port Sunlight caught reformers' imagination and were further highlighted by the 1898 publication of Ebenezer Howard's *Tomorrow*. The book promoted garden cities which made use of relatively cheap land and provided the residents with the best aspects of life in both town and country. The success of pilot communities such as Bournville and Port Sunlight combined with the tremendous popularity of *Tomorrow* sparked a garden city movement which realized its ideal in 1903 with the establishment of Letchworth Garden City, thirty miles north of London. Garden cities and the more practical garden suburbs, involved

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14 Sutcliffe, *Towards the Planned City*, p. 57.

the construction of low-density housing, the creation of a trust or company that was responsible for regulating the use of public space and carefully designed layouts of roads so as to reduce the traffic flow. Letchworth provided a concrete model of town planning in action.

The link between the British garden city movement and the reconstruction of Halifax was Thomas Adams. Adams had been born in Edinburgh in 1871 and dabbled in a variety of areas including law school and dairy farming before trying his hand at journalism in London around 1900. Almost immediately, this thirty year old man with no background in housing became founding full-time secretary of the Garden City Association. With development at Letchworth in 1903, Adams was appointed the first city manager. His pragmatic and less-than-utopian views about town planning led him to resign in 1906 and enter a three-year period of private consulting and garden city promotion. After the enactment of the first British town planning act in 1909, Adams was appointed inspector, a position he held until 1914 when he was attracted to the Canadian Commission on Conservation to act as its town planning expert. The Great War generally interfered with his Canadian projects and Halifax was his only real opportunity

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16 Ashworth, *Towards the Planned City*, p. 160.
in Canada to supervise a garden suburb.17

Before the explosion, Adams and the Halifax Civic Improvement League had planned a limited dividend housing project to consist of fifty double cottages on the slope of Fort Needham. These houses were to have the modern conveniences of water, electricity, and indoor toilets, and annual rental costs were to have been no more than $160 a year.18 This contact with Halifax urban reformers meant that Adams was familiar with the city's pre-explosion housing problems and geography, and so he was well-placed to advise the city on reconstruction of this particular area. He proposed a detailed plan for the devastated area which included the group development, parks, and diagonal roads crossing the slope. Adams offered more than "technical expertise." His outlook supposedly reflected the reformist ideas of the British architects behind the British garden suburb movement, what has referred to as a "more humane" perspective than older urban planners who favoured social control and "regulating the lives of the poor."19 This position was complex, for in a 1920 address to the Union of


Nova Scotia Municipalities, Adams appeared to support an environmental argument. Adams argued for improved working-class housing on the basis that it is precisely the man who cares how his wife is housed, and it is precisely the man who cares for the environment in which his children are living that is most worth having in a factory; and again when there comes to be a strike and when the question of more wages or shorter hours comes up for discussion the man who is living in a good home is the more reasonable human.20

It was perhaps impossible to separate the two goals of improving the standard of working-class housing and improving the working class. The Hydrostone was explicitly designed as working-class housing, the prospective tenants described alternatively as skilled workers, craftsmen or just plain workmen.21

The Hydrostone development with its low density of under fourteen dwellings an acre, public green space, traffic management and the grouping of houses with suitable variety bore a strong physical likeness to Letchworth. Moreover, the style and ideas of British architects Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker were apparent in the design; and it is evident that the much praised architect of the Hydrostone, George Ross,


21 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 526, 1, 8 June 1918; PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1715, Statement of Chairman Rogers, 10 September 1918.
replicated earlier British plans.22

Unwin and Parker may have been two of the most important contributors to British working-class housing in the early twentieth century, changing both the physical placement and design of houses. The partners set an ideal density of between ten and twenty dwellings an acre, with houses positioned for maximum privacy and in such a manner that they were not all the same distance from the road. Homes had well-pitched roofs for maximum sunlight on the street, and the general shape of the dwelling changed from rectangle to square, with everything but porches under the same roof.23 They were attracted to the Tudor style which supposedly created the appearance of a cozy worker's cottage. All these principles of design appeared in the Hydrostone project and the false timbering, stuccoed second story and hipped roof reflected similar taste. The concern for privacy in the Hydrostone was seen in the opposite-side entrances to the two-unit buildings.

22 The similarity between the houses of Unwin and Parker and George Ross was understated as "resemblance" in Stanley H. Pickett's, "Hydrostone," Community Planning Review, X, 1/2 (1960), 29-32.

The Hydrostone development laid out 324 dwelling units along protected boulevards and three large buildings for stores and offices along Young Street. The buildings were made of nine by 24 inch blocks of hydraulically compressed concrete with the brand-name hydrostone which provided the development with its most enduring name. There were six different plans for the 35 four-unit buildings, five versions of the 19 six-unit buildings and three different types of the 29 two-unit flats and twelve apartments above the Young Street stores and offices. The houses were designed with small rooms which served specific functions. Within the group development, only four dwellings had four bedrooms, 190 had three bedrooms and 130 had two bedrooms. Three bedroom homes were probably regarded as optimal since this design distributed separate rooms to the parents and to children of each sex.

The interior design incorporated many of the most modern conveniences. All dwellings had electricity, modern bathrooms, kitchen sinks, laundry trays in the basement, and closet space in most bedrooms. Hot water heaters may have been the most appreciated new feature as they partially replaced the triple-purpose coal ranges. The ranges cooked, provided heat which was channelled through the house in hall pipes, and heated water in a back chamber or tank. They were as inconvenient as they were dirty and their operation in the
summer unnecessarily heated the house. At the time of construction, furnaces were not included in the design, but by the end of the decade, they had been installed in 168 of the homes. The outside units were larger than dwellings in the centre and boasted a living room, dining room, kitchen and pantry on the first floor. In the smaller, centre units, the first floor lacked a dining room but off the kitchen had a small kitchenette. The kitchenette was reminiscent of Unwin and Parker's scullery. This design made it possible, by partly screening off an area which included the range, sink, and domestic hot water heater, to leave a large part of the kitchen free to be used as a dining room.

In sharp contrast to the planned development of the Hydrostone was the uneven housing on the extension streets. The area west of North Creighton had been farm land until a large portion was sold to the Halifax Land Company in 1891. Development was slow and scattered in the area and by 1917 included approximately 100 dwellings and Fleming Brothers Foundry. The houses were owned by owner-occupants as well as


25 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1733, Reconstruction: Chimneys and Furnaces.


by a "small landlord class" who tended to live in the
neighbourhood.28

The aspirations of Halifax's working class with regard
to housing appears to have differed from similar households
in other Canadian cities. Richard Harris' study of 1931 home-
ownership patterns in nine Canadian cities found that Halifax
was the sole case where working-class home ownership rates
were lower than among the middle class.29 Harris claimed that
the low rates in Halifax could not be explained in terms of
house affordability and that local factors must have been at
work. While Harris suggested that the local housing market
in 1931 might still have been feeling the long term effects
of the explosion, this explanation is difficult to accept
since there was a high level of vacancy throughout the 1920s
as a result of outmigration.30 Rather, outmigration and the
fragile local economy meant that many working-class
Haligonians would not be around to reap the long-term gains
in home ownership, and decent rental accommodation such as
that available in Richmond Heights provided a popular option.

28 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 526, 1, HRC Minutes, 21 June 1919;
PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1715, Reconstruction, General Description.

29 Richard Harris, "Working-Class Home Ownership and
Housing Affordability Across Canada in 1931," Histoire
sociale/Social History, XIV, (May 1986), 121-138; Richard
Dennis, "Landlords and Rented Housing in Toronto, 1885-1914,"
Toronto: Centre for Urban Community Studies, No. 162, 1987,
p. 5.

30 Harris, "Working-Class Home Ownership", p. 136.
The impact of the explosion on the pre-explosion homes on the extension streets was uneven. Some houses such as 19 Kane Street were burned to the ground, and many were damaged beyond repair. (See Table 1.1) In the construction which followed the explosion, the area developed indiscriminately to include a wide assortment of homes. The older, wooden, flat roof, two story dwellings typical of Halifax housing co-existed with shacks, flats, new HRC houses and bungalows. The quality of the housing also varied but the highest rating was exclusive to post-explosion construction and was only awarded to 32 of 117 houses graded by the municipal assessor. Facilities also varied as not all houses were connected to sewer, water, or electricity. Heating was provided almost universally by stove, 25 dwellings did not have toilets and 64 did not have baths. Property assessments ranged from $5,000 for a pair of flats at 7 Hennessey Street to $400 for what must have been little more than a shack at 26 Merkel. Some 88 of the 128 assessed properties fell between $1000 and $2,500, with 13 below $1000 and 27 above $2500. Sections of Livingstone, Stairs, Stanley and Kane Streets possessed some of the worst housing conditions in the

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31 The ratings of poor, fair, and good appeared to be at the discretion of the assessor to be used in estimating the value of the property in question. There were no set criteria in the municipal statutes and not all houses were given a rating.

32 PANS, RG 35, 102, City of Halifax, 19, H 9-12, Ward Six Assessment Field Cards. Not all houses were rated.
Table 1.1

Buildings Totally and Partially Destroyed on Extension Streets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street</th>
<th>Destroyed</th>
<th>Partially Destroyed</th>
<th>Total Houses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kane</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livingstone</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stairs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merkel</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabot</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From National Archives of Canada, RG 24, Department of National Defense, Vol. 4273, file 22.1.245, 13 January 1918.
city. In 1931, overcrowding was serious and on Livingstone Street, there were seven houses containing 37 occupants in 29 rooms. Similarly on Stairs Street, 42 occupants resided in 34 rooms among six houses. On Stanley Street, three houses sheltered ten occupants in a total of eight rooms and on Kane Street one house with seven rooms housed ten residents.33

Obviously, the explosion and the advice of experts did not alleviate all local housing problems. From the perspective of the tenants the reaction to the wooden and hydrostone houses was generally positive. Some negative comments were made about the small size of the rooms and the size of the kitchens was of particular concern at a Health Board meeting where Controller Hines criticized the modern design.

Just imagine, kitchens, which was the poor man's principal room being but eight feet square. After a table and a stove were put in there was no room for a flour barrel or groceries. In one instance he knew where they had to store the flour barrel and groceries in the bath room.34

Other critics referred to the homes as "pill boxes" with a "prison-like" appearance or were concerned that with row houses "they did not know the kind of people [who] will be


34 Acadian Recorder (Halifax), 23 January 1919, Evening Mail, 11 February 1919.
sharing the house with them". More important than design to tenants were the wet cellars, the result of much of the development being built on a swamp.

Residents initially objected to undemocratic planning, the result of expert intervention. The idea of the garden suburb and town planning did not meet with original approval and at an April 1918 public meeting when initial plans were discussed, one man argued that "While it might be ideal for a new town, on the prairie, and quite idealist, it is not suitable for conditions as they exist in the North End." Similarly, labour politician Dr. A.C. Hawkins pointed out that it was unjust "that this government should attempt to take money which has been contributed to those people who have lost their all, and expend it for a fanciful town planning scheme. It is a blow for democracy. The people should have a chance to build the homes they want."
The tenants also had mixed feelings about their landlord, the HRC. Feelings ranged from hate to enthusiasm. One man felt particularly bad about falling behind on his rent and wrote "you will get your money as I know the rent is for poor people victims of the explosion and I would not do them out of a cent." In contrast, the housing officer J.M. Hire reported that upon issuing Daniel Bolt with an eviction notice, "He put forward the very much worn plea that the Relief Commission Houses were built for his kind and that the administration was indifferent and living on the 'fat of the land.'"

Richmond Heights was developed for people who had lost their housing in the explosion and to a large extent they formed the core population throughout the 1920s. After the explosion, both railwaymen and their families and the city's Roman Catholics claimed they had been the single most important group in the area affected. A contemporary, Archibald MacMechan of Dalhousie University, chose to

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39 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1446, 12 Stanley Place, 27 November 1929.

40 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1462, 28 Stanley Place, 12 December 1927.


42 NAC, MG 26, Border Papers, H 90, OCA 109, #74803, Edward McCarthy, H 141, OCA 109, #74815, A.R. Mosher, 3 January 1918.
emphasize the respectability of the pre-explosion Richmond working-class in his history of the catastrophe. MacMechan described the Richmond slope as dotted

with the houses of the industrial class, employees in the railway, the Dockyard, the various factories and wharves. Some undoubtedly lived in very poor conditions, but in the main these wage-earners were thrifty, industrious, self-respecting. The schools and churches were well-frequented. Roman Catholic predominated, but there were strong Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian congregations. Many of these people were paying for their dwelling by degrees, and some had completed their payments and owned their home. The buildings were, as a rule, of wood and cheaply constructed.43

The "thrifty, industrious, self-respecting" residents not only had to endure the tragedy of the explosion, the interference of experts and the state, but also the roller coaster of ups and downs in the local economy.

Many neighbourhood residents were old enough to have grown to adulthood in the late nineteenth century, and would have taken part in the complete local cycle of industrialization and de-industrialization. Nowhere in the city would the change in the economic base of the community have been experienced more sharply than in the north end working-class suburb of Richmond. Within Richmond, despite the enormous scope of economic change and the devastating physical impact of the explosion, there remained a remarkably stable community. The 1891 manuscript census, particularly,

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for Ward 6, section 7, the district at the base of the slope around the old Richmond train station, recorded many of the same families who resided in Richmond Heights during the 1920s. Railway families intermarried and sons followed fathers and grandfathers onto the road or into the shops. By the 1920s, in Richmond Heights, there were railway families who could be easily traced back three generations.

As the terminal of the Nova Scotia, and later the Intercolonial, Railway since the 1850s, Richmond had attracted important industries. The Nova Scotia Sugar Refinery, completed in 1881, was located along the waterfront between the railway tracks and the deep harbour. The advantages of rail and water transportation, reinforced by available land and a skilled labour force associated with the railway, attracted many industries to Richmond during the industrial expansion of the National Policy. At the Hillis and Sons foundry, skilled metal workers produced stoves, ranges and furnaces. The Highland Spring Brewery, at the corner of Agricola and Sullivan, brewed and bottled ale and stout. Brandram-Henderson, manufacturers of paint and varnish, opened

44 Paul Erikson, Halifax's North End: An Anthropologist Looks at the City (Hantsport, N.S., 1986)
45 The Novascotian (Halifax), 16 April 1881.
47 Halifax Board of Trade, The City of Halifax, p. 78.
its large site in 1880; and in 1891, the Halifax Graving Dockyard, precursor of the Halifax Shipyards Limited, began large ship repair. The community of Richmond was also dependent upon the Imperial Dockyard, which closed in 1907 and was reorganized in the early 1910s as Canada developed a naval policy.

In the wake of the railway depot came the churches and the schools. Grove Presbyterian Church had its beginnings in 1861 as a Sunday school in the railway station until a building was completed in 1872.48 Kaye Street Methodist Church began in 1864 as a suburban mission with a building opening in 1869.49 Grove Presbyterian and Kaye Street Methodist would join together to form United Memorial after the 1917 explosion. An Anglican church, St Mark's, was erected in 1866.50 St. Joseph's Roman Catholic church was opened in 1867 and the following year the Sisters of Charity opened a school, orphanage and convent adjacent to the sanctuary.51 The vacant land to the north and west, between Richmond and the black community of Africville on the Bedford Basin, became the site of other less prestigious public institutions such as Rockhead prison and the infectious

48 Robert Inglis, United Memorial Church, Kaye Street, Halifax, 1918-1975 (Halifax, 1975), p. 2.
49 Inglis, United Memorial Church, p. 4.
51 Chronicle-Herald, 4 December 1965.
disease hospital in the 1860s. With the development of industry, institutions, transportation facilities, and with land available for further growth, by the end of the nineteenth century Richmond and the area encompassed by Ward 6 was the fastest growing area of the city.

The decline of Richmond as an industrial suburb took much less time than its rise. By the mid 1890s, many Maritime capitalists found it increasingly difficult to compete successfully with Central Canadian enterprises since they did not possess the local structures for the successful transition from industrial capitalism to financial capitalism. As a result, the region found itself in the middle of a three-stage process in which the Maritimes became a branch plant economy, owned and operated by outside interests. The final stage of consolidation completed by World War One brought about the rationalization of national industry, the closure of local factories and mines, and the region's development as a market for goods produced outside.

52 Mail-Star, 18 February 1952.

53 Ward 6 included the area north of North Street to the Bedford Basin, and the Harbour west to the city limits at Dutch Village Road.

What de-industrialization began, the 1917 explosion completed. It removed much physical evidence that industry had ever existed in Richmond. Although some of the railway wharves at Richmond were rebuilt, by the 1920s they had to compete with the rerouted railway to the south end of the city and the newly completed Ocean Terminals near Point Pleasant Park. Important industries did not attempt to rebuild. The cotton mill site on Robie Street, once an important employer of female labour, became a lumber yard; and the demolished North End train station was now obsolete with the completion of the southern extension. The sugar refinery, in an attempt to consolidate production, moved all operations across the harbour to its Woodside operations.

The rise and fall of the north end industrial suburb embittered many workers who had lived through the cycle. In 1926, the Citizen published a piece submitted by a worker signed "Old Timer" which, in the words of the paper, contained "some poetry and a vast amount of truth."

I remember in Halifax, not long ago,
When our boys leaving school had a chance;
They could learn a trade,
And in time, lead a maid
To a home, not a joy ride, or dance.

When the old shops at Richmond
Were going full swing,
With the cotton mill, dry dock and Moirs,
The Acadia refinery, the dockyard and Gunn's,
We had then lots of work for our boys.

Now, I'll tell you a tale that the older folks know,
It's enough to make anyone sob;
And we could have Halifax now on the map,
Only someone fell flat on the job.

Then something else happened, economy stuff,
With the works up in Richmond stripped bare;
There were hundreds of pay cheques just vanished like smoke,
When it gets far enough in the air.

Now the smiling-faced workmen are missed on our streets,
They are happy in some place, you bet;
They can smile at the building that's going on here,
That is, club resolution, and debt.

We can share all the glory, between Liberal and Tory,
For causing industry's fall;
They may call me a Mutt, but we're down in a rut.
It was brains, so-called brains, did it all.55

It was this frustration, the feeling that they had once experienced prosperity and been betrayed, that proved rich soil for the Maritime Rights movement during the 1920s.56 The memory of "old timers" set a standard for what was possible and what had been lost. That this prosperity may have been largely an illusion mattered little by the 1920s. With the passage of time, images of the past grew clearer as non-essential details were stripped and a streamlined version of past life in Richmond was offered.

55 Citizen (Halifax), 5 February 1926.

During the 1920s, the rhythm of Richmond Heights was largely set by the level of activity in the Shipyard. After the Canadian Government reneged on its promise to build a merchant marine, the function of the shipyard became solely for repair. The Shipyard needed a large reserve of skilled labourers who could be called upon when a ship arrived for repair and laid off at the completion of the project. Employment levels experienced sudden and dramatic swings. In the spring of 1920, before the shipyard strike, there were over 2,000 men working on the Canadian Mariner. The number fell to less than 100 in January 1922. (Graph 1.1)57

The railway also had its own rhythm with the local peak between December and March when use of the Port of Halifax was the heaviest.58 Seasonal unemployment reflected the demand for different trades in the government-owned Canadian National Railway (CNR) and the Dominion Atlantic Railway. Maintenance-of-way employees worked from April to October, running trades followed peak traffic, and shop workers were busy from January to July. The number of employees needed

57 Labour Gazette, February 1921, p. 181; Evening Mail, 1 January, 25 March, 4 June 1922, 1 February, 1, 22 March, 3 May, 12 July, 9 August, 6 September, 1 November, 29 December 1923, 14 August 1924, 12 February 1925, 21, 30 December 1926, 6, 13, 20 January, 3, 10, 17, February, 10, 25 March, 26 May, 4 August, 29 September, 13, 20 October, 17 November, 1, 15, December 1927, 19, 26 January, 9, 23 February, 1, 23 March 1928.

Employment Levels at Halifax Shipyards Limited, 1920-1929
varied greatly and in 1928 national monthly employment totals for the CNR and the CPR fluctuated by over 33,000 workers.59

The other important group of tenants among the residents of Richmond Heights was the military. Before the construction of the Hydrostone, military tenants often had difficulty in obtaining rental accommodations as they were unstable tenants subject to sudden transfers.60 The HRC attracted military tenants and added clauses to their leases which allowed cancellation if the tenant was moved or ordered into barracks. Although the HRC willingly accepted military tenants, as post-war operations in Halifax declined and the dockyard was closed, fewer soldiers and sailors were looking for local accommodation.

Unstable employment opportunities were reflected in the high level of vacancies and occupant turnover in the Hydrostone. Names in the city directory indicate that only 5.2 per cent of all tenancies in the ten year period lasted nine or ten years, while three times as many or 17.5 per cent lasted only one year. (Graph 1.2) During the winter of 1922-23, the Commission estimated that 1,000 families passed through their hands and practically all were in arrears with

59 Rountree, Railway Worker, pp. 67-70; 312.
60 PANS, MG 36, HRC, C.40.13, Community Chest, Halifax, 1927-1942, clipping n.d. "no military tenants".
Graph 1.2

Length of Tenancies in Hydrostone

- VACANT: 5.20%
- 1 YR: 16.50%
- 2 YRS: 17.50%
- 3 YRS: 18.60%
- 4 YRS: 9.50%
- 5 YRS: 6.10%
- 6 YRS: 4.20%
- 7 or 8 YRS: 7.40%
- 9 or 10 YRS: 15.00%
their rent. Of the 725 leases available, 128 extended beyond January 1930 and were thus artificially interrupted in this analysis. Over half of these tenancies or 426 were held for less than eighteen months and only 34 lasted longer than five years. Although the turnover of leases was undoubtedly large, the number of short-term tenancies might exaggerate the passage of people through the neighbourhood and the instability of the community, since many families held serial leases at different addresses. Nearly 150 people took out two leases in the same name; 23 were identified with three separate leases at different addresses, and two individuals had four and five leases respectively. Recognition of multiple-lease tenants continues to underestimate the number of times the same people moved within the neighbourhood. Different individual members within the same household, such as wives, in-laws, and adult children, who undertook leases for the same household group were not considered.

Although the leases suggest a high level of residential turnover, they also indicate that many moves were internal as households moved within the neighbourhood. The primary advantage of renting accommodation was the flexibility it permitted, since accommodation could be found to meet the family's financial and spatial needs. Residents of Richmond Heights used this flexibility in renting to achieve these

61 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 526, 2, HRC Minutes, 9 September 1923.
goals and so obtained the best housing possible within their means. The overall number of vacancies in the neighbourhood corresponded in a general manner to economic conditions. For example, in relatively good times, such as summer 1929, there were no vacancies.62

The tenancy pattern between residents of the Hydrostone and those on the extension streets was strikingly different. Residents on the extension streets were more likely to be owner-occupants who held property before 1917 and tended to reside in the same homes throughout the 1920s. Over half of the tenancies in the wooden houses lasted for nine or ten years and only 7.71 per cent were listed for a single year.(Graph 1.3) The city directory also suggests a relatively low level of vacancy, although empty houses on Livingstone Street were noted as a fire hazard.63 The low level of vacancies might be explained by the poor condition of some of the housing and the cheaper rent that was the result. Home owners had a permanent commitment to the community and were less likely to leave Halifax despite its limited economic opportunities.

Different types of tenancies, ownership or renting, created different residential patterns. Moving around the neighbourhood or leaving the city were two forms of lessening

62 Evening Mail, 3 October 1929.

63 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 526, 2, HRC Minutes, 20 April 1925; Evening Mail, 20 April 1925.
Graph 1.3

Length of Tenancies on Extension Streets

- 52.15%
- 11.31%
- 7.71%
- 8.21%
- 4.90%
- 4.80%
- 4.20%
- 2.20%
pressure on the family economy. Life in the Hydrostone was similar to that described in the tenement districts of New York in the same period: "nomadic, they move from tenement to tenement, drifting from poorer to better quarters and back again according to the rises and falls in their fortunes". May Day was the traditional moving day in Halifax, an urban adaptation of an older rural holiday. The ambiguity around who was ultimately responsible for household decisions was reflected in the names in which leases were held. A number of leases were either solely in the wife's name or were jointly signed by husband and wife. Despite the fact that the built environment was the result of modern theory and ideas, traditional tenancy patterns were unaffected. Residents continued to use mobility as an important family survival strategy. The variance in lease-holding patterns also suggested the diverse decisions which could be made within every household. Perhaps some households were male or female dominated, while in other families housing decisions were undertaken jointly.

The dual impact of the explosion and reconstruction

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65 For example see PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.224; R.229; R.252; R.254; R.256; R.260; R.264 and R.276.
planted the community firmly within the context of the twentieth century, but it is important to note the large extent to which older ideas and ways of life co-existed with the new. Before the explosion, many of the lots in Richmond had been unusually large allowing semi-rural domestic production. Many families kept animals and had extensive gardens for food production. Although the households in the Hydrostone had very little property, the neighbourhood remained close to the market gardens and farms on the perimeter of the city. Within Ward 6 most of the area west of Kempt Road continued to be operated as farms. Those who lived in the wooden houses on the extension streets had more property and continued to meld an urban and rural lifestyle. In 1919 and 1921, new barns were built at 20 and 22 Kane Street and in 1928 Fred Oliver of 24 Livingstone Street built a hen house in his backyard.

In an attempt to establish public health standards which existed in most urban centres, the city moved to restrict animals within its limits. In 1922, Halifax forbade pig keeping in the city except by permit. However, it was noted in 1927 that there were several piggeries in the outlying areas of Ward 6 and that there were "more pigs in their Ward

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66 Kitz, Shattered City, p. 12.

67 PANS, RG 35, 102, City of Halifax, 39, I, City Engineer Building Permits.
than in the other five wards put together."68 Hens were kept by families in the wooden houses of Richmond Heights and in one unidentified police case, stolen hens were recovered on Kane Street.69 Hens ran loose on the busy thoroughfares of North Creighton and Gottingen Streets and throughout Richmond Heights, while wandering cows created a more serious menace on Robie Street. In 1926 a resident reported that two children had had "a narrow escape from being killed last Saturday by cows rushing pell mell down the street."70 In the fall, complaints increased as cows entered people's yards, tipped garbage cans and ate the contents.71

Municipal authorities had little success in eliminating the semi-rural aspects of life in the North End. They had even less success in regulating the use of public space. Street sellers were a particular source of tension as they violated the general trend towards neutralized public space where areas were sharply defined for appropriate activities.72 One example of the delineated use of public space was the incorporation of grass boulevards into the Hydrostone design with the intention of keeping children off the streets.

68 Evening Mail, 7 June 1927.
69 Evening Mail, 8 May 1922.
70 Evening Mail, 20 May 1926.
71 Evening Mail, 1 November 1922.
72 Daunton, House and Home, p. 268.
Despite bylaws against door to door selling, strawberries and mackerel were sold in the streets by farmers and fishermen who eliminated any middlemen. According to the weekly column, "North End Notes" peddlers with fresh fish disturbed Richmond Heights residents at late hours by shouting at the top of the voice what kind of fish they have for sale and the price. The fish pedlars, however, are not to be compared with the strawberry hawkers who will soon be amongst us in the evenings, up to midnight and often times later.

Similarly, in the autumn residents were awakened at early hours in the morning by vegetable sellers. Despite the inconvenience, street hawkers must have found a local market because they continued to visit the neighbourhood and sell their goods.

The design of garden suburbia did nothing to alter the smells and noises of life on the outskirts of the city. Richmond Heights residents lived in modern homes but they would have continued to smell the pungent odors of the fishmeal plant, the abattoir and the city incinerator. The sooty smoke from coal and oil ranges would have been omnipresent from cooking or heating. The voices of neighbours, heard through the walls of the terraced homes,

73 Evening Mail, 5 June 1925.
74 Evening Mail, 3 June 1926
75 Evening Mail, 26 October 1922.
76 Evening Mail, 28 April 1927.
would have joined barking dogs, the horns of ships, and the annual visit of gypsies and organ grinders.77

Like the semi-rural environment, disputes over the use of public space, and the variety of smells and sounds of the urban periphery did not vanish with the construction of modern houses and garden suburbs. The influence of the British garden suburbs improved the standard of housing for many Hydrostone tenants but it did not alter tenancy patterns and a high level of residential turnover continued. Within their lives, many individuals may have directly experienced the local cycle of industrialization and de-industrialization. The explosion and reconstruction may have forced Halifax into the twentieth century with the onslaught of experts and state intervention, but this change may have largely been on the surface. The social geography of Richmond Heights symbolized much that was modern but the people who lived in the houses cannot be so clearly defined. Life experience was a mixture of change and continuity and this apparent paradox, coloured by age and gender, was embodied in many aspects of the residents' lives.

77 Evening Mail, 23 July 1920; 8 June, 25 August 1921; 4 August 1922.
Chapter Two
Values and Daily Life

While the kitchen may have been the most important room in the working-class home, it was the living room which projected the public persona of the family. It was here that the public and the private met through the visits of priests, public health officials, and neighbours. An unusually high degree of uniformity characterized many of the living rooms of Richmond Heights, since many residents would have been among the over 1,800 households to receive furniture from the Massachusetts-Halifax Relief Committee after the explosion.1 In addition to the standard round oak table and pressed-back dining chairs that were common to many of the houses, there also appears to have been a shared understanding of what was appropriate decoration for a living room. These details signified degrees of luxury and good taste, in other words, the interior decorations were meant to "put forward the household's foot" affirming an unstated but well understood community standard.

The standard furniture issued by the Massachusetts Halifax Relief Commission was individualized by many personal touches. A potted rose might sit on a white lace doily on the

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1 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 200, Massachusetts-Halifax Relief Committee Minute Book.
centre of a bare table or upon a tablecloth edged with large
tassels. Family photos would adorn the walls and sideboards
and bureaus. In some cases these would include a priest or
the relatively recent pictures of young men in uniform,
perhaps some of whom had been killed during the war. A jumble
of ferns, conch shells, water pitchers, vases, books, small
dishes, large bowls, and clocks might sit on a variety of
bureau scarves, or upon floral valances. In Roman Catholic
homes, religious icons of the Holy Family or the Bleeding
Heart and religious medals might hang beside elaborate
insurance calendars and pastoral prints. On the floor might
be the only carpet in the house, an oriental Committee-issued
covering individualized with scatter rugs. Other attempts to
individualize the Committee furniture were seen in the lace
antimacassars draped on the back of arm chairs. Household
problems with space could encroach on the living room as beds
could be disguised as couches with large decorated pillows.2

A common understanding of what constituted good taste
was just one of the informal rules residents of Richmond
Heights recognized as they negotiated daily life among family, neighbours, and employers. Although not everyone complied with established customs and beliefs, these unstated ways of behaving had an important hold over how one defined oneself and how one interacted with others. Some rules were remnants of a traditional past such as the prohibition on weddings on Fridays and the bad luck associated with May marriages. Other rules protected the reputation of the family and had real economic significance in the 1920s. The possession of a good name could be used almost like collateral in order to obtain credit. Adherence to the unwritten rules determined whether or not a household had a good name, and so was considered to have been "respectable". The idea of one's respectability played a major role in the mind set of the community, its ideology and its workings.

At the heart of Richmond Heights' respectability was a shared belief in a Christian God, or at least Christian ethics, and an understanding of the distinct roles men and women were supposed to play in the operation of society followed from these religious convictions. Christian ethics were connected to many attitudes and behaviours as Elizabeth Roberts has pointed out in her study of working-class women in England during the same period. Roberts has noted the importance of being a "good" or "Christian" person through the act of loving your neighbour, an Old Testament concept of justice, and a belief in the work ethic, in which labour leads
to salvation and idleness to damnation. All had roots in Christian moral training.3

The place of religion in constructing a world view is extremely difficult to determine, but the religious iconography of the household and the number of similar medals found upon victims of the 1917 explosion suggests a central role in many people's lives.4 In the railway community of Allendale, Ontario, Mark Rosenfeld has noted that lectures and sermons under the auspices of the Methodist, Presbyterian and United Churches during this period specifically addressed the proper roles of men and women. Lectures such as "The Need for Hot-Stone Men", "Men in the Making", and "A Challenge to Manhood" attracted good crowds as did sermons addressing "domesticity, suffrage and the changing role of women."5 In the many Roman Catholic homes in Richmond Heights, the importance placed upon the Virgin Mary and the Holy Family might have provided additional important gender role models.


Language and the ways in which people expressed themselves also reflected the importance of religious beliefs. Several of the thank you notes from explosion victims published in the Halifax-Massachusetts Relief Commission report closed with a blessing for the people of Massachusetts. Patrick Wylie, a tailor who lived at 17 Kane Place throughout the 1920s, wrote, "I trust and pray that God will bless them all their lives." The religious sentiments expressed in these notes are particularly interesting, since they are completely absent in similar notes from the various religious institutions or professionals such as the minister of Kaye Street Methodist Church. In addition, the sheer numbers involved in religious activities was impressive. Three large buses were required in July 1927 to take the 75 St. Joseph altar and choir boys to their annual picnic at Silver Sands. The same congregation offered the sacrament of confirmation to 300 children and 31 adults in June 1929.

The connection between belief, action and respectability is much easier to determine in examining gender ideals, and how these identities were connected to the sexual division of labour, behaviour, and responsibilities. Ideally, men and women had distinct areas of control and separate spheres of

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6 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 200, Massachusetts-Halifax Relief Committee. For example see Cases 40, 99, 158, 453, 1716.

7 Evening Mail, 14 July 1926.

8 Evening Mail, 4 June 1929.
influence. "Separate spheres" was a bourgeois ideology which managed to touch nearly all aspects of society, but it was reproduced and adopted with significant class variation.9 Even where the idea of separate spheres had the greatest hold, the division was always to some extent artificial, since no one lived his or her entire life under the influence of the workplace or home.

For men, working-class manliness was associated with paid work: the physical strength and skills necessary to undertake it along with the ability to financially support a family. As fewer men in Halifax were able to identify with a manhood based solely on production, strength, danger, or skill, more importance was placed on the ability to support a family and even greater pride taken in the role of the breadwinner.10 At the same time, for many occupations, it was impossible to support a family on one wage because of poor or irregular remuneration, a point to be discussed in Chapter Six. The belief that the wage of one male was sufficient to support a family was an illusion given life by skilled men, the state, trade unions, and some employers who either affirmed or

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desired the realization of the illusion by sanctifying the "family," "living," or "basic" wage. They held that an adult male was not only responsible for himself but also for supporting his family and should be remunerated based on that assumption. In case after case, Halifax freight handlers, carpenters, teamsters, and labourers pleaded for the right to a "living wage," always in the context of "domestic responsibilities" or the difficulty of supporting a family. At a meeting of freight handlers in 1928, it was argued that "By the time they [male labourers] buy coal, clothing for the family, pay insurance and rent, there is little left..." The notion of the family wage was also reinforced outside the workplace and the home. In 1928, the newly introduced offering envelopes were only distributed to male members of the United Memorial Congregation.

Men's role as primary breadwinner was the way in which they achieved respectability not only in the family, since their wages legitimized their position as head of the household, but also status in the wider community at a time when former measures of respect such as technical skill or physical strength were in decline. The pay package justified

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11 *Evening Mail*, 28 December 1923, 10 November, 12 December 1928, 18 May 1929; *Citizen*, 19 February 1926.

12 *Evening Mail*, 9 March 1928.

13 PANS, Micro: Churches, Halifax, United Memorial Session Minutes, 1 November 1928.
access to women's unpaid domestic work, and according to Stan Gray offered labourers the sense of the property they lacked. In a sense, the primary wage earner became the owner of the family.\textsuperscript{14} The ability to support a wife and children marked the man, yet while men may have been under increasing pressure to provide, the pay itself may have also offered satisfaction. Paul Willis has pointed to the importance of wages for men as an affirmation of their masculinity. "The male wage packet is held to be central, not simply because of its size, but because it is won in a masculine mode of confrontation with the 'real' world which is too tough for women."\textsuperscript{15} In this public world, community status and reputation rested upon "demonstrated responsibility as family men."\textsuperscript{16}

While men focused outside or beyond the home, most adult married women found their identity within its structure. Women were responsible for making do, for performing the difficult task of making do with their husbands' usually inadequate wage. This involved using the available finances cleverly in order to ensure the adequate provision of food,

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\textsuperscript{16} Joy Parr, \textit{The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950} (Toronto, 1990), p. 188.
\end{quote}
shelter, fuel, and clothing, and stretching the money in order to make it possible for the family to get by.\textsuperscript{17} While men had many acquaintances outside the household, relationships between females were most often based on family through their roles as wives, mothers and daughters. Women were also important wage earners both before marriage and after in times of illness, underemployment and unemployment. Past work experience varied with age. Certainly some of the older women in the neighbourhood had been employed at the cotton mill on Robie Street in their youth. The mill which opened in 1883, by 1889 employed 45 men, 110 women and over 150 boys and girls.\textsuperscript{18} They may even have been among the anonymous female witnesses who testified before the Commission on Labor and Capital concerning the intolerability of long hours, beatings, and poor working conditions. If they continued to live in the neighbourhood, they would remember their childhood work experience which included both unpleasant conditions along


with the occasional unauthorized absence on summer afternoons for picnics.

While working-class men based their authority and respectability upon the ideology of the family wage, respectability was less tangible and straightforward yet more important for working-class women. It was the basic measure used publicly to judge how well neighbours obeyed and conformed with community standards. The domestic sphere was "a central arena for the expression of the cultural patterns denoted by the concept of respectability" according to Ellen Ross.19 The importance of respectability and its maintenance was not forced upon the home or upon the women who spent most of their lives within the domestic sphere. Jane Lewis has suggested that respectability was partially perpetuated by some women as "The wives of better paid working-class men played their part in the creation of a culture of respectability by the pride they took in their homes."20 The connection between pride and respectability makes little sense unless we openly acknowledge that perfected femininity, like perfected masculinity, was a skill, one that took years of


apprenticing and could be destroyed in a single unfeminine action. Respectability has recently been described by Joy Parr as "a virtue that resided in the self-image of women as mothers and homemakers but also formed their sense of their rights and responsibilities beyond the domestic sphere."21 Successful femininity as wives and mothers might bring about material and social rewards and could generate great pride. Women, therefore, personified respectability giving life to the concept by concrete actions and behaviours such as dress, public conduct, spending habits, and sexual activity.22 Respectability was not only an important feminine skill to uphold but was also a survival strategy as the judgement and opinions of neighbours, shopkeepers, churches and social service workers played a role in the distribution and availability of assistance, credit and charity.23

Respectability could be put into jeopardy by poor housing conditions or poverty.24 The link between poverty and

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21 Parr, Gender of Breadwinners, p. 105.

22 Ross, "Respectability in Pre World War 1," p. 39.


24 In Kareen Reiger's study of the Australian Minimum Wage Commission of 1920 she quotes a woman's testimony on her respectable working-class neighbourhood ("not 'common people' at all. Most of them have pianos"). "Perhaps I am a little more sensitive... but... if I went to the back door I saw nothing but chimneys and galvanized iron fences, while if I went to the front veranda, if other people's front doors were open, I saw their private life, and if the doors were shut it
femininity was particularly interesting, since there was almost the inference that "good women" were partially defined by a certain level of material success. A letter written by Mrs Richards repeatedly introduced the idea of respectability. Her family owed the HRC considerable back rent in 1926 and was about to face legal action in order to recover the long overdue sum. The letter not only rings with her desire to remain "respectable" but also the overwhelming nature of debt, lack of family support, and how these worries fell upon the wife. Mrs Richards wrote at length that

...I'm paying my way honestly a[nd] straight forward a[nd] unless a miracle happens a[nd] Mr Richards gets a better job it seems to me impossible. I've no clothes, Mr Richards has none his trousers are dropping off now and the children need clothes also. I've one bed and Mr Richards sleeps in that with 3 children, I sleep on a mattress and broken spring with the baby with 3 blankets and 3 sheets between both beds....It has been pretty hard to be respectable a[nd] to keep up under the conditions we are living.

We were living on scraps from the Priests' table at St. Thomas Aquinas Church Glebe House for 2 whole weeks before Xmas. If you like to call down there they will tell you. When I wrote to Mr Richards' father Columbus Pl a[nd] ask him if he would help us he wrote a[nd] said no... We never have had any help from Mr Richards' people at all never. He would help my husband if he would go away. He would put my two eldest boys in the Roman Catholic orphanage a[nd] look after me my baby and my little girl on one condition that I would be a wife to him. I am not lying. I'm an Englishwoman and I'd not touch one cent of money belonging to that man. Thats why we are having to pay our own way. My Goodness Mr Tibbetts [Tibbs] if you knew just how

was a pleasant relief." Kareen Reiger, "'Clean and Comfortable and Respectable: Working-Class Aspirations and the Australian 1920 Royal Commission on the Basic Wage," History Workshop Journal, 27 (Spring 1989), p. 94.
hard it is to make both ends meet and to keep the children neat and tidy for school. I'd come up and see you but I've no clothes at all only me housedress....

I'll willing pay you when I can see my way but just cant you understand that debt is worrying all the time then I've got to have meal milk bread coal and I've got to pay rent here or where will we go but it is no good saying June 1st get a judge and try me now if you want but I'm not going on the streets to earn money to pay back rent. I'll go to prison first.

I'm trying to live and pay my way and keep respectable and I cannot do any more.25

The Richards were clearly in bad financial straits. Concerns about meeting grocery bills and rent were uppermost in Mrs Richards' mind, since the maintenance of reputation was necessary in order for her family to continue to survive. Clothing and housing conditions of the family were clearly unacceptable and the need to protect her reputation meant that Mrs Richards, through lack of a good dress, was in effect held hostage in her house. The necessity of accepting charity from the Catholic Church wounded family pride and was seen to be the result of the scandalous proposition of her husband's father. The only method of raising money available to Mrs Richards beyond becoming her father-in-law's mistress was to enter prostitution, a consideration which makes Mrs Richards reiterate her claim to respectability. Poverty did not destroy respectability but it certainly made it much more difficult to maintain.

25 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R. 851, 22 Kane Place, 5 April 1926. Emphasis in original.
According to Mrs Richards, cleanliness and proper dress were important to respectability, as they reflected how one appeared in the eyes of one's neighbours. The proper presentation of children appears to have been particularly important during a period when mothers were increasingly being judged more harshly. A widow wrote to the HRC requesting suspension of her rent one September, "If not my children will not be sent to school until I get money enough to clothe them properly to send them."26 Similarly, a mother wrote to the Commission in April 1926, stating her predicament of "just how hard it is to make both ends meet a[nd] to keep the children neat a[nd] tidy for school."27

New types of domestic consumption such as curtains, carpets, dishes and silverware all increased the amount of housework that was necessary and elevated the standards of cleanliness.28 These elevated standards had to meet the criteria of friends and neighbours and in the case of Mrs Smithers of 34 Cabot Place whose ceiling was destroyed by a leaking boiler on the second floor, "I had to make excuses when my friends came for the dirty ceilings."29 Although many women in Richmond Heights took great pride in their

26 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1462, 28 Stanley Place.
27 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.851, 22 Kane Place, April 1926.
28 Ewen, "Immigrant Women", p. 207.
29 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.276, 34 Cabot Place, 3 May 1926.
housekeeping as seen in the "lovely white lace curtains in the windows" and the nearly annual requests that the ceilings be whitened or whitewashed, standards of cleanliness were not universal.\textsuperscript{30} The Commission reported in 1923, that it was "having a little trouble with empty houses that had been vacated by some of our less satisfactory tenants, as they left them in a very dirty state. Mr Thorne had been fumigating etc etc and we hope to get rid of this shortly."\textsuperscript{31}

In addition to cleanliness, control over one's children was also an important characteristic of a respectable woman. The Commission adopted a policy of interfering in the relationship between their tenants and their children, and though the following letter was never sent to its intended recipient Mrs Hogan, it revealed some of the attitudes of the HRC toward children and the responsibility of parents for their behaviour.

We have had continual complaints from several quarters regarding the behavior of your sons. ....Please impress on your boys the necessity of protecting their own property and that of others, as only by so doing can they assist in the development of their city. At the same time I think it would be well to warn them that continuance of such behavior as has been reported to me is likely to land them in the Juvenile Court.

We quite realize that all children are mischievous and in these days control is difficult:

\textsuperscript{30} For example PANS, MG 36, R.244, 3 Cabot Place, R.276, 34 Cabot Place. According to Stella Shore "everybody had lovely white lace curtain in the window - very clean...people didn't seem to be dirty." Interview July 1989.

\textsuperscript{31} PANS, MG 20, Vol. 526, 2, HRC Minutes, 9 September 1923.
but I am sure a few words from you pointing out their share of responsibility for the care of the city and all property, public and private, will have the desired effect.\(^{32}\)

Although the letter was not sent to Mrs Hogan, the exact same text was sent to Mrs Rose of 18 Kane Place whose sons were accused of delinquency as a result of their having broken windows in several empty houses. Mrs Hogan had probably reacted better to a personal visit from a member of the HRC and hence avoided the formal notification. Mrs Rose, on the other hand, did not react properly and was indifferent to the concerns of the Commission. J.M. Hire, the Commission's housing agent reported to the Commission:

There are complaints in the locality that these boys head a rowdy element and two days ago I called on Mrs Rose and pointed out that it was incumbent on the father and mother to keep them in control. Mrs Rose was in no way disturbed, neither affirming or denying, but it was evident to me that there is great lack of control in that family as far as the children are concerned.\(^{33}\)

It is interesting to note that the housing agent called on the mother, though he expected the father to become involved. This perhaps suggests the ambiguity in changing parental responsibilities.

Unrespectable behaviour appeared to run in certain families. Mary Owen had the dubious distinction of being

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\(^{32}\) PANS., MG 36, HRC, R.843, 14 Kane Place, 14 May 1924, not sent.

\(^{33}\) PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.861, 32 Kane Place, J.M. Hire to HRC, 15 May 1924, sent Hogan letter.
charged with creating a disturbance, sharing her home with a
divorced daughter, and being evicted in October 1931.34
Police were repeatedly called to 18 Livingstone Place in 1927
"on account of unreasonable disturbances" involving Mrs Owen.
Although women conducted nearly all the correspondence with
the Commission, after this particular incident, the HRC wrote
to Mary's husband, and on the assumption that he had some
authority in his family, instructed him to "either arrange for
more seemingly conduct in your home or else arrange to
vacate."35

Respectability was a great concern of the Commission
which always wanted to attract the "best" of the working class
as tenants. The Commission secretary reported in 1927 "that
the housing situation was improving and we were now taking
references of every tenant, feeling that the time had arrived
when we should take only first class tenants in our houses."36
The Commission occasionally classified its tenants either
vaguely as "not satisfactory", or alternatively recorded
specific evidence of their inappropriate character.37 Albert

34 PANS, MG 36, R.1004, 18 Livingstone Place, clipping
19 April 1932.

35 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1004, 18 Livingstone Place, 19
April 1927.

36 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 526, 2, HRC Minutes, 16 November
1927.

37 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.780, 30 Hennessey Place, 15 July
1927.
Gray, resident of 2 Cabot Place, was asked to vacate after sixteen years when he was accused of disturbing neighbours. The case against Daniel Barlow of 28 Stanley Place was explicit. The Commission described him as noisy when home, suspected of intemperance, having a family of many "ragged" children who were "dirty, slovenly and unkept." The final condemnation implied that his family's behaviour had breached community standards as his "family [was] collectively an offence to the tenants in that neighbourhood." HRC judgments could be wrong - a man they described in 1924 as "a good respecting tenant" was charged with beating his wife in 1929.

Violation of respectability through breaking certain codes of behaviour was often at the root of trouble between neighbours. Strife between neighbours and within families was relatively common. Problems with neighbours could emerge as a result of abusive behaviour but also over noise, garbage, and the tension of having to live together so closely. A resident of Stanley Place wrote in 1927,

I just want to ask you if you could put a stop or warn those people next door Bradshaws they fill my garden with paper every night. I use to put it back but they throw it back and I am a very sick woman. Dr don't want me to be disturbed. I done nothing to them when I sit out on my veranda they come out trying to pick a fight. We cant use our front if we

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38 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.242, 2 Cabot Place.
39 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1462, 28 Stanley Place.
40 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1437, 3 Stanley Place.
want peace.41

Residents also complained about the way their neighbours discarded garbage and ashes, or shook mats and disposed of water from upper flats. One woman was bewildered by her neighbours' complaint and wrote to the Commission, "I dont enterfear with any off my neighbors and I dont [know] why any one would report stuff about me."42 In this case the woman seems to have considered that neighbourly relations were reciprocal and were based on a principle of non-interference.

A brutal domestic murder in the temporary housing on the Commons in 1919 suggests that in Halifax, as elsewhere, neighbours who were unrelated kept to themselves and did not interfere. A returned soldier, employed at the Halifax Shipyards, killed his wife with his blacksmith's hammer in April 1919.43 A neighbour had heard the fight and woke another neighbour who did not investigate the screams until the arrival of the police. "The neighbors did not attach any important significance to the quarreling which during the short time they had been living in the downstairs flat had become a common occurrence."44 More neighbours became

41 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1358, 22 Sebastian Place, 19 August 1927.
42 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R. 1854 Vacated Balances - Rent Ledger. R.276, 24 Cabot Place.
43 Acadian Recorder, 15 August 1919.
44 Daily Echo, 15 April 1919.
involved when Mrs Annie Hutchinson allegedly assaulted Mrs James Lennox on the front veranda of her Stairs Place home in 1921. Six witnesses claimed that they had seen the attack and three others denied that anything had happened. Mrs Lennox had supposedly dragged Mrs Hutchinson out of her house and her husband, while holding Annie down, had instructed his wife to "give it to her". Verbal assault was probably more common than physical assault. In 1919, a man in the temporary housing was charged with abusive language against his neighbour when he was quoted as saying "your a ______ immigrant" and "your a ______ Newfoundlander". In 1929, George Maclnnis, a resident of Richmond Heights and a tenant of the HRC received a letter at work regarding his wife's behaviour and the reaction of their neighbours. According to the HRC

We are receiving complaints about the objection-able remarks and abusive language used by Mrs MacInnis towards her neighbors on Merkel and Cabot Places. This trouble has developed to such an extent that several of our tenants are considering moving away.

A similar state of affairs developed when you were at Sebastian Place which only died down on removal to your present address. It was then hoped that the difficulty would not re-air but, unfortunately it is again being repeated. We are fearing this will make it necessary for us to call upon you to vacate; meantime, if you will give us

45 Evening Mail, 6 July 1921.
46 Evening Mail, 7 September 1920.
a call we can discuss the case with you.47

By sending the letter to the Nova Scotia Light and Power Company, the Commission was trying to avoid the involvement of Mrs MacInnis about whom the complaints were made. It was also significant that they invited George MacInnis to discuss the matter unaccompanied by his spouse. Conflict and strife between neighbours seems to have been a normal aspect of life in Richmond Heights. The antagonism between neighbours, often played out by women such as the cases of Mrs Lennox and Mrs Hutchinson or Mrs MacInnis who spent a great deal of time around their homes, is no doubt important, though understudied, aspect of female working-class culture and not surprisingly survives in the skipping game still played by little girls about mothers meeting while hanging up laundry and engaging in physical assault.48

47 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1075, 4 Merkel Place, HRC to George MacInnis, Nova Scotia Light and Power, 24 August 1929. The HRC was particularly concerned about relations between neighbours as disputes could cause respectable tenants to leave. See MG 36, HRC, R.763, 13 Hennessey Place, 27 June 1928.

48 My mother and your mother
   Were hanging out the clothes.
   My mother gave your mother
   A punch in the nose.
   What colour was the blood?
   Blue!
   B- L- U- E- spells blue, and out you must go
   As fast as your little slippers will carry you.
   Edith Fowke, Sally Go Round the Sun (Toronto, 1969 [1971]), p. 57.
Not all relationships with neighbours were antagonistic and it is the nature of evidence that unrespectable behaviour is much more likely to be noted than cooperation or assistance. Mrs Bert Black of 23 Hennessey Place was evicted in 1932 after admitting that she had taken in homeless former neighbours who had "no other asylum". The evicted family had been tenants in the neighbourhood since 1923 and had succeeded in achieving a good name and community loyalty.

The continued importance of respectability, as a daily way of sorting out reality, raises questions about the extent to which new consumption values had taken root in the community. Respectability was an older measure of social status or prestige. It was based on the values of who one was and what one did rather than what one owned. Clearly, this community did not have the economic means to abandon totally old community judgments and adopt a social value system based on material acquisitions. While there is evidence of the advent of new and competing belief systems, changes in values and perceptions were uneven in their influence and respectability remained important.

While respectability did not disappear, it was certainly challenged by new forms of status-driven consumption that introduced a new set of rules of behaviour that were thought

49 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.765, 15 Hennessey Place.
50 PANS, MG 36, R.828, 2 Kane Place.
to establish and lend additional support to one's reputation. There seems to be little doubt that aspects of domestic production were being replaced by the consumption of goods produced outside the home. As women had embodied respectability, women also were assigned the roles of chief consumers.

As important as the actual possessions of individualized households in Richmond Heights was the aspect of working-class ideology which suggested the attainment of happiness and status through possessions. It is difficult to measure the influence of rising material expectations and the level of frustration generated by the unequal distribution of goods.51 Advertisers were aware that goods were tied closely to status. For example, an advertisement for Johnson's Polishing Wax boasted that "a wax finish denotes refinement."52

Consumption was an activity which took place on an individual basis and therefore it is difficult to generalize across the neighbourhood. One measure of household participation in a consumer society might be the decision to install a telephone. Ninety-two households in Richmond Heights in 1921 had telephones and the number slowly and steadily increased to 153 in 1929. This meant that by the end of the decade, over two out of every five households could

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51 Wandersee, Women's Work, p. 19.

52 Evening Mail, 2 October 1925.
be reached through Maritime Telephone and Telegraph (MT&T). The likelihood of telephone service in the Hydrostone appears to have been largely dependent upon whether or not a neighbour had one installed and the number of wage earners in the family. Telephones were generally concentrated in blocks with adjacent or diagonal neighbours. Later as telephones became more common, their presence can be taken as a measure of an expected standard of living, as was the installation of furnaces. Telephone hookups appear to have been less a luxury than an increasingly standard piece of household equipment.

The presence of consumer durables in the homes of Richmond Heights was partly the result of the expansion of credit and the extension of new ways of buying. Households bought many large items on installment plans such as sewing machines, dining room furniture, radios, pianos, kitchen ranges, washing machines and gramophones.53 Certain consumer durables were connected to respectability, but status was also available through the acquisition of modern technology. When a Sebastian Place family sold its piano which "no one really played" in order to buy a gramophone, they "thought they were somebody."54 Families appeared willing to undertake new

53 Sometime in mid 1928, the HRC in an attempt to collect back rent made new tenants list any items in their possession which were not paid for in full. Examples of these items appear in PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.248, R.252, R.507, R.759, R.845, R.846, R.989, R.1013, R.1017, R.1078, R.1097, R.1356, R.1870.

financial commitments, despite their limited, or at times non-existent resources. John Miller, a tool room machinist at the Halifax Shipyards for 35 cents an hour, bought a radio in 1930 for which he had to pay ten dollars a month, while he was $393 in arrears on his rent.\(^{55}\) Installment plans did not always work, and so retailers often had to repossess goods that they had allowed on credit. Furniture and a stove acquired by Mrs George Molson were "retook" in 1924.\(^{56}\)

Repossession could be more complicated when the item purchased on credit had already been consumed, for example in the case of fuel, groceries, or services. In these cases it appears to have been usual to have the courts become involved. The names of Richmond Heights residents appeared frequently in the city's magistrate's court with regard to unpaid debts as grocers, coal merchants and the local telephone company attempted to force payment.\(^{57}\)

Money was a personal matter and, at least in the beginning of the decade, few people used banks for personal savings or loans judging from the cash boxes found among the explosion debris, claims of money lost and promissory notes

\(^{55}\) PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.507, 4 Duffus Place.

\(^{56}\) PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1879, Mortgage and Rental Records.

\(^{57}\) PANS, RG 42, A, 9, 1927 unsorted Halifax Magistrate's Court - Civil, Oct 1928, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph $12.70; Oct 1927, goods sold and delivered $63.36, #32 Maritime Telephone & Telegraph $13.08; #58 Merchants Guarantee Assoc $9.00, Healy & Co (coal) $23, #95 Nova Scotia Furnishings $20 and #102 O'Malley's Bakers $42.65.
collected. The extension of credit to the working class was not new, and Paul Johnson has written that, "The distinction is not properly between those who used credit and those who did not, but between those who used it deliberately to purchase luxury goods, and those who could not do without it if they were to fill their bellies and cover their nakedness." The idealization of motherhood and the interference of experts may have even combined to affect available credit. Melanie Tebbutts noted that in England during the 1920s, legislators suddenly took interest in low-level borrowing which had previously been ignored as it "epitomized the 'muddleheadedness' which rational home management was intended to eliminate." While credit may have been easier to obtain for luxury goods, it may have decreased for essentials such as groceries with the expansion of cash and carry and for rent with increasingly legalized tenancy leases.

58 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 200, Minutes Massachusetts-Halifax Relief Committee, Thank you note from P.J. Wylie noted that he lost $165 in the disaster; MG 36, HRC, R.1730, Reconstruction Projects; RG 42, A 9, 1927, unsorted Halifax Magistrate's Court - Civil #76 Promissory note $75 to street railway conductor.


Increased consumer expectations and a general decline in domestic production meant that any means of generating money took on added importance. The residents of Richmond Heights lived in a place and a time in which cash was necessary for survival. Strong-Boag has noted that as a result, the coexistence of paid employment and domestic work appears to have been relatively commonplace.61 In Richmond Heights, in the 1920s, two of the most common methods of generating money were taking in lodgers or boarders and liquidating assets.

The Hydrostone houses were not ideal for either the landlady or the boarder. Although they were close to the tram line, they were distant from many places of employment except the shipyard and the Willow Park round house, employers that had been particularly hard hit by the depression of the 1920s. Furthermore, they were purposely built as single family dwellings, and so space reallocation was limited. Nevertheless, in 1920 and 1921 at least twenty-four advertisements were listed for individual homes in Richmond Heights looking for lodgers, boarders, or persons willing to sub-let several rooms. The advertisements suggest that males were preferred as five homes specifically mentioned men or the proximity of the neighbourhood to the shipyards. Conversely

no advertisement suggested women. The importance of what type of person you let into your home was seen in an advertisement for 27 Stanley Place which specified that boarders must be "respectable." New ideals of a good mother and the increased importance placed upon home discouraged taking in boarders as a new emphasis on privacy conflicted with the "social space" required for a lodger, concluded Leonore Davidoff. In addition as many women became more occupied living up to the expanded ideal of wife and mother, they did not have the time to adopt the additional role of landlady.

Working-class consumption, particularly of new consumer durables, was not simply a blind obedience to the calls of middle class advertisers but in many ways performed a similar role to saving. Goods purchased were potentially goods to sell. This was particularly important in the expensive process of leaving the city when the disposal of household effects financed outmigration. The variety of goods advertised in the Evening Mail was extensive, running the gamut from parrots and canaries through commodes and mahogany


63 Evening Mail, 24 October 1919. Another appeared on the same day requesting "sober" boarders on nearby Agricola Street.

sideboards to motorcycles. During the 1920s, with expanded telephone service, vendors became increasingly difficult to identify but before 1922 there were forty separate advertisements of household goods for sale with addresses in the Richmond Heights. Items such as sewing machines, pianos, and gramophones clearly fit into the category of consumer durables. Others such as a farmer's wagon, blacksmith iron vice and "planer, surfacer, and matcher" were the result of new occupational needs. Most items, however, were large pieces of furniture, furnaces, kitchen ranges and heaters which would have been too expensive to have moved them any distance.

When a resident of 11 Stairs Place vacated with rent owing, there was no property to seize as the family had "sold off furniture to get away." Similarly, by the time Arthur Spencer was evicted from 28 Stanley Place in March 1929, most of the consumer durables had been disposed of and the "house [was] almost bare." A widow at 20 Livingstone Place "had to sell furniture" to meet immediate expenses of fuel and

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65 Evening Mail, 26 March, 17 May 1920, 13 April 1921, 4 October, 10 and 18 November 1922.

66 Evening Mail, 20 July 1920; 9 May and 1 September 1921.

67 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1855, Vacated Balances, 1919-1929.

68 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1462, 28 Stanley Place.
food, while a temporary setback such as illness in the family could also initiate the disposal of goods. A woman at 26 Kane Place wrote to the Commission that as her husband "was sick I found it impossible to send the rest of the money this week. I sold some stuff but I could not get my money." Although selling possessions was a quick method of raising cash, it was seldom possible to receive full value. An unemployed tenant wrote "I hope I will not be compelled to sacrifice my household effects in this way, as possibly things will be brighter soon." Unfortunately, the situation did not improve and his possessions were sold to settle his debts.

The most extreme cases affected the few people on the extension streets who owned single family wooden dwellings and who were forced to sell or lease their property. In February 1922 a five room house on Cabot Street was offered to let with all its furniture for sale. Similarly 22 Livingstone Street, which cost $4,800 was offered for $3,300 as the owner was leaving the city. Many property owners rented their property when they temporarily or permanently

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69 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.

70 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.

71 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.760, 4 July 1923, 10 Hennessey Place.

72 Evening Mail, 21 February 1922.

73 Evening Mail, 28 June 1922.
left the city. Mortgages on the extension streets were being paid by men and women in England, Dartmouth, Central Canada and the United States.74

The need for cash and the inability to meet financial commitments highlighted the difficulty that residents had in participating in the new consumer society. Certainly, many people owned things that could be sold. Consumerism was also a real aspect of daily life in Richmond Heights, but that alone did not determine status within the neighbourhood. The importance which residents continued to place on the notion of respectability suggests the existence of competing ideologies.

The long-term waning of respectability and the waxing of consumerism created special problems for women. Married women could practise respectability independent of their husbands if they chose to do so. Consumption, on the other hand, was much more complicated. Women were the chief consumers in their roles as household managers, in the words of one labour man "women did the world's shopping. Almost every dollar earned by the wage earner was spent by the mother of the home..."75 This role offered some status but very little subsistence. Women were encouraged to spend, but rarely had access to money independently of their husbands. As Richmond

74 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.789, 8 Hennessey Street; MG 36, HRC, R.1879, Mortgage and Rental Records.

75 Citizen, 4 July 1930.
Heights households began to purchase large items such as cars in the 1930s and 1940s, it would be interesting to know the wives' roles in the decision-making process. Through the value system connected to respectability, women had some degree of command. As new standards of consumerism emerged, women had to abdicate control of their status or break the old male barrier of respectability around the sanctity of the family wage, entering the workforce again themselves.

A complex series of codes of behaviour governed everything from the decoration of the family living room to the raising of children in Richmond Heights in the 1920s. Standards of cleanliness or the installation of a telephone may have established or affirmed the reputation of a household and its members. Actions, acquisitions, and taste were applauded or censured through community consensus. Of course, not everyone adhered to the rules. Neighbours fought with words and fists, and poverty could interfere with standards of decent public dress. Respectability which was attained by recognizing and complying with the many community dictums was largely the responsibility of women. Individual women occasionally "let down the side" of motherhood and housewifery such as the woman at 30 Sebastian Place whose husband claimed that "She drinks, smokes and everything else; she never did it before I married her."76 The etiquette surrounding cash

76 PANS RG 39 'D', Supreme Court, Halifax Divorce Court, Vol. 31, 1924, Case 389.
was comparatively recent but this too seemed focused on the mother and wife as she often managed household finances and made decisions about boarders and about the disposal of goods.

At the root of many codes and customs was a mutual understanding of the way things should be and how one should act - whether that meant the responsibilities, duties, and behaviour of a wife or the placement of a doily in the living room. These codes, rules, and customs comprised an important part of working-class culture and its persistence after the defeat of organized labour encourages further examination into the world of home and neighbourhood.
Chapter Three

Elderly Men and Women

In 1921, one in every four residents of Halifax had been born before 1881 and had witnessed tremendous change in the first forty years of their lives. Between 1881 and 1921 the population increased from 36,100 to 58,372 – not a tremendous level of growth but sufficient to encourage population movement into the northern section of the peninsula. More striking than the change in size and geographic boundaries of the city was the change in the city's physical appearance. A former resident, James Seth returned to visit his old community in 1922 after an absence of forty years. Seth commented on the remarkable transformation of the sleepy colonial city. The splendid ocean 'terminals', the visitor noted,

reminded me at once of the commercial activity of New York; they were a striking contrast to the wharves of my youth.... The wooden sidewalks, always more or less out of repair, had given way to fine asphalt pavements, and handsome stone buildings had taken the place of the plain frame structures which were then so numerous even in the central streets of the city. The North End in particular had altered quite beyond recognition.2

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Many Haligonians would have shared this perception of change and the proportion of those who remembered the older city was gradually increasing. This aging population reflected national trends to such an extent that in 1931, the city of Halifax came closest to the average Canadian age breakdown of any census district in the country. People of different ages not only shared the city, but in many cases co-habited within the same household. Under a single roof co-existed people with varying self-definitions, partially rooted in generational differences. The multi-generational community meant that not every adult experienced change at the same rate. Individuals had differing perceptions of their community based partly on the length of their own life experience, and as a result the speed and impact of change spread unevenly throughout the community.

The approximately six per cent of the population of Halifax over the age of 65 were central in the balance between change and continuity. The elderly of Richmond Heights were generally pushed to the margins of society during the 1920s but the glimpses of their lives which remain suggest the importance of their efforts to maintain their independence and participate in the labour market. Their presence in the households of Richmond Heights provided a tangible link to the past and traditional world view and posed problems for the

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It is difficult to define the aged as a distinct segment of the population. Without access to the manuscript census, it is impossible to determine the age breakdown within Richmond Heights, but qualitative evidence suggests age played a critical role in the way that individuals experienced home and the workplace. The definition of old differed for men and women and could be based on a variety of economic, biological, life course or cultural criteria that differed by sex. In accordance with the definition of masculinity, men were old when they were no longer able to support their families economically. Most men continued to work as long as they were able and experienced a gradual decline in their incomes to the point of non-support. On the other hand, women were judged by different criteria such as motherhood and not surprisingly menopause was a common barrier for women, a medical or biological tradition which held that after its onset women ceased their reproductive roles, rejected sexual desire, and began a long period of illness or decline. The use of menopause as the start of old age fostered the belief that


women aged earlier than men despite the fact that they lived longer. The discrepancy between the basic economic definition of old age for men and the younger biological definition for women was exemplified in the difference in the ages at which men and women could retire under the MT&T retirement plan. Although women lived longer than men, women could retire five years earlier with a full Class A pension. Another important marker for women was life course. As women had fewer children and these children were spaced more closely together, women were increasingly likely to find themselves as middle-age grandmothers. The aged image of a grandmother could conflict with reality. In other cases, old age was signalled by widowhood, a common experience among women who lived long enough.

Both men and women were classified by an arbitrary cultural definition of old age as beginning at 70 years of age. This chronological point was used by the Nova Scotia government in its study of the Old Age Pension and in its collection of statistics under the provisions of the Workmens' Compensation Act. Given the variance in the manner in which old age could be defined, and the differences based

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6 Dalhousie University Archives (DUA), MS 4, 180, H 301, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph Personnel Benefits; Stearns, "Old Women," p. 45.

on sex, the category included a wide and heterogeneous group. Yet among this diverse group, the shared past could act as a unifying force bringing together different people with a common life experience.

Of all the groups in the community the aged were the most invisible to the social historian. Older people were more likely to be housebound by poor health and inclement weather, and were less likely to be involved in activities outside the home which created historical evidence. Glimpses of their lives can be caught in the rare announcement of a Golden or Diamond wedding anniversary, or the family celebration of an important birthday. The elderly in Halifax appeared most regularly in death, in obituaries which often indicated age, marital status, religious affiliation, number of children and their children's place of residence. The difficulty of capturing historical insights into older men and women is compounded by the difficulty of classifying them by other than a broad chronological sweep. There are methodological advantages to this approach, however, for as Tamara Hareven has noted "transitions of the later years - the empty nest, widowhood and loss of household headship - followed no ordered

8 There has been very little research on the elderly in Canada. See Sharon Anne Cook, "A Quiet Place...to Die': Ottawa's First Protestant Old Age Homes for Women and Men," Ontario History, LXXXI, I, (Spring 1989), 24-50.

9 For example see Evening Mail, 24 November 1921, 13 September 1923, 26 September 1929.
sequence, were not closely synchronized and took a relatively long time to complete."10

The vague historical and diverse contemporary classification of old age contrasts with the intense interest in the aged which developed in the early twentieth century. Some historians have claimed that between the First and Second World War, Americans increasingly came to regard old age from a negative perspective and that it rose to become a "national problem."11 Even those who have wished to emphasize continuity rather than change in the experience and perception of the elderly have also focused on the early twentieth century in their research.12

In Halifax, contemporary interest usually centred around an awareness of the poverty faced by the elderly. The Labor Party supported the introduction of the Old Age Pension and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty noted "there is a


class of old people [who]... need attention of our officers." Research conducted by a government commission into the introduction of an Old Age Pension in 1929 confirmed the widespread poverty among those in the population over the age of 70. The financial and living conditions of the 929 Haligonians interviewed was shocking. Over one third reported having no income at all and over half had an income of less than $199 per annum. Poverty for aged Haligonians would have been much more severe than for their rural counterparts as the Commission noted the importance of informal sources of income and home production such as the raising of hens and pigs, the cultivation of vegetable gardens and the ready availability of food in rural areas. The Commission concluded that the province's aged had either successfully accumulated a moderate income and found themselves able to live off savings or were "practically destitute and dependent"

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14 Nova Scotia, Journal of House of Assembly (JHA), 1930, Appendix 29, "Report of Commission on Old Age Pensions," p. 6. The Halifax statistics found that 41.7% had incomes over $400, 3.9% $300 to $399, 4.3 per cent $200 to $299; 7.3 per cent $100 to $199; 8.5 per cent less than $100 and 34.6 per cent no income at all.

15 Nova Scotia, JHA, 1930, Appendix 29, "Report of Commission on Old Age Pensions," p. 4. On the other hand the Halifax figures also show that there was a greater opportunity to accumulate wealth in the city than in the rural counties.
Poverty among the aged was largely brought about by the death or illness of a wage earning husband and the gradual withdrawal of men from the workforce. According to Andrew Achenbaum, conditions for the elderly worsened in the early twentieth century with their withdrawal from the workforce. Caution is required in any discussion of the elderly's workforce participation according to Brian Gratton since the level of employment declined very gradually, with the result that scholars have exaggerated the poverty and dependency of the aged prior to the creation of the welfare state. This ambiguity between the real poverty and the appearance of poverty was reflected in Halifax in the 1920s. Fifty-five per cent of males sixty and over had some type of income from wage earnings, while 45 per cent had no access to this type of revenue, and so fit Achenbaum's more pessimistic image.

The place of the elderly in the workforce was part of a general discussion which emerged concerning the continued suitability of older workers as employees. In the nineteenth century workers had expected to have been employed as long as

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17 Achenbaum, Old Age, p. 115.

they were able to work.19 Despite the fears of older workers and the presence of efficiency experts, old age did not result in wide scale dismissals. Some 55 per cent of Halifax men over the age of 65 were gainfully employed in 1921.20 Comparable statistics for 1931 are not available, but men over the age of 65 continued to compose approximately five per cent of the total male population and approximately the same percentage of males over the age of ten were gainfully employed.21 Although more than one half of the men over 65 continued to work, the fear of job loss was not unfounded, but was actually compounded by the pattern of occupational change which relegated old men to less lucrative positions as watchmen, janitors, and sweepers, work which they were still able to perform. Factory workers and industrial labourers who were less likely to keep their jobs probably composed the bulk of men in these occupations for "old man". Of the 608 men over the age of 65 listed in the 1921 Halifax census as still working, nearly half were employed in the trade, service and finance sectors.22 Within the manufacturing sector, nearly 40 per cent of men over 65 were listed as owners, managers and


22 Canada, Census, 1921, Vol. 4, T. 5, pp. 382-299.
superintendents, and therefore would have largely excluded any residents of Richmond Heights.23

High levels of unemployment and underemployment may have made keeping a job particularly difficult for older men. During the Halifax Shipyards Strike of 1920, a prominent elderly socialist ignored the strike call and crossed the picket lines to continue working. A younger contemporary looking back with the advantage of over fifty years of hindsight has questioned his motivation in terms of his age. The elderly man was old, so aged that he reportedly was able to remember "Chartist meetings and their troubles with the police ... [f]or a man of his age to have any job, let alone a rather good job was unusual. Did he fear that he would be fired and never get another?"24

Ill health could accelerate the aging worker's move to a less demanding position. Patrick Ross of 27 Stairs Street spent fifteen years as a groundman, lineman and finally loop crew foreman with MT&T before becoming a janitor at the Lorne Central Office in 1921. Ross worked only three years in his new position of janitor before his death at the age of 59.25

Occupational flexibility appears to have been an

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24 DUA, MS 10, 2, A.1, Correspondence: Fred W. Thompson to J. Br11, 9 August 1976, pp. 8-9.

25 Evening Mail, 13 June 1924, Monthly Bulletin (Halifax, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph), June 1924.
important factor in getting by. An army pensioner was able
to support himself and his wife between his pension and his
position as caretaker at Joe Howe School.26 John and Barbara
Green, an aged couple who owned a house at 60 Stairs Street,
made their living by taking in boarders.27 Others such as 64
year old crippled David Schultz may have felt he had no option
except illegal activities. This Richmond Heights resident
pleaded guilty in February 1924 to keeping a gaming house at
the corner of Agricola and Almon. The newspaper report of the
sentencing condemned his actions in terms of his having
encouraged "young men going into the house and gambling away
earnings."28 But after years as a boilermaker and ironworker
at the old Graving Dock, he may have felt some entitlement to
young men's money.29

Older men in Richmond Heights rarely retired. During
the entire decade, not one name appeared in the city directory
which listed occupation as retired and only six retired men
were recorded on the municipal voters' list.30

The most obvious explanation for why men did not retire

26 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1361, 25 Sebastian Place.

27 PANS, MG 36, HRC, A.79, Correspondence re: claims,
John and Barbara Green, property.

28 Evening Mail, 27 February 1924.

29 Halifax City Directory, 1904-1914.

30 Halifax City Directory, 1920-29; PANS, RG 35, 102,
City of Halifax, 8A, 1920s, The voters list included at total
of 448 men.
was the economic consequence. Some workers at the CNR and MT&T may have been eligible for retirement or pension programs but these were not generous nor were they guaranteed. Harry Walters had been employed with the railway for over twenty years yet found himself at the age of 69 working as a caretaker at one of the Piers. 

Railway pensions varied according to position, length of service and age of retirement. Engineman Norman Prince, a homeowner at 19 Kane Street, was employed intermittently with the Intercolonial, Canadian Government Railways, and CNR from August 1890 until his retirement in March 1934 at the age of 61 years after a total of 33 years with the railway. This length of service, occupational classification and age entitled him to a generous pension of $96.24 a month. Less fortunate was James Karl of 39 Livingstone Street whose poor health forced him to retire early on a pension of only $44 a month.

Employees at MT&T received one per cent of their average annual pay for ten years multiplied by the number of years of employment. There was a minimum monthly pension of $25 for men and $20 for women, but this did not apply to employees who had worked less than twenty years. The pension was also at the discretion of the Employee Benefits Committee who were

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31 Evening Mail, 26 September 1929.
32 NAC, RG 43, Department of Railways, Vol 291, 3871.
33 NAC, RG 43, Department of Railways, Vol 291, 3871.
capable of suspending pensions to any employee it judged as being involved in activities "prejudicial to the interests of the Company." MT&T admitted to the inadequacy of its pension program when it introduced an Employees Stock Saving Plan in 1927 with the dual purpose of encouraging thrift and providing "competence for old age." Poor private pensions and limited opportunities to save meant that voluntary retirement was a luxury that few people achieved.

The federal government attempted to encourage saving for old age through Canadian Government Annuities. This savings program was transferred from the Post Office to the Department of Labour in April 1923, but was largely unsuccessful despite its claim to provide safe old age pensions. Throughout the early 1920s, only several hundred Canadians undertook contracts; but a Department of Labour advertisement campaign through newspapers, periodicals and radio talks increased sales to over 1,000 in 1928 and 1929. An example of this hard sell campaign appearing in a Halifax newspaper played upon the fear of unemployment in the elderly with a drawing of a rejected older man and the caption: "Everywhere they say ..."

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35 DUA, MS 4, 180, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph, H 302, Employee Benefits.

36 Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Gazette, July 1923, p. 704; February 1929, p. 170; October 1929, p. 1123.
too old. What a tragedy - to be turned away from all chance of earning one's living."37

Older women also found that opportunities for paid employment decreased with age. The loss of youth - defined by physical attractiveness - meant that employers discriminated against them and choices were often limited to low wage work that could be conducted from their own homes such as dressmaking, laudringy, or operating a rooming house.38 Few women over 65 were engaged in waged employment in Halifax in 1921, less than seven per cent of the total age group.39 The limited role of women in the paid workforce did not mean that old age brought relief from work. Women continued to work within the house and contribute to domestic responsibilities as long as they were able. Thus, old age was experienced differently by men and women. Men marked it by a gradual withdrawal from the workforce; women did not retire for their domestic work continued.

While the approach of old age for men was associated with a withdrawal from participation in the labour force, the greatest change in most women's lives was the death of her

37 Daily Star, 9 March 1927.


husband. The 1930 report on Old Age Pensions in the province found that men over the age of 70 were much more likely to be married and that, in the target areas, 55.7 per cent of men compared to 25.1 per cent of women were likely to have a spouse living.\textsuperscript{40} This difference was explained by women living longer and men marrying younger women. For example, those over 70 who had a spouse under 70, accounted for 19 per cent of the men interviewed and only 2.3 per cent of the women.\textsuperscript{41}

The death of a spouse could also mean the loss of household financial independence, since most women depended on a male wage to operate their home. A rare glimpse of a woman who did not want to give up operation of her own home was evident in a widow's 1922 classified notice advertising for "correspondence with gentleman 50 years of age or more. Protestant preferred."\textsuperscript{42}

Scholars have suggested that elderly men were more likely to face institutionalization than were women.\textsuperscript{43} In Halifax,

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\textsuperscript{42} Evening Mail, 16 June 1922.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{43} See for example: Haber, Beyond 65 as cited in Feinson, "Review Essay: Where are the Women in the History of Aging?," p. 433.
\end{flushright}
the impoverished aged were admitted to the City Home where they composed a substantial proportion of the residents. An analysis of the number of deaths of residents at the City Home who were over 60 showed that, although women composed a greater percentage of the general population over that age, more older men than older women died in the City Home. These older men were not transient labourers without local kin. The only two people among the existing records of those admitted to the home from Richmond Heights were both men with family in the city. In November 1920, John Mahar a 59 year old Irish-born Roman Catholic was admitted and listed his next of kin as a wife Ellen who resided at 20 Stairs Street. Similarly, Francis Saunders, a 66 year old English-born retired military man listed his kin as two sons, Frank and William, who lived at 46 Stairs Street.44

In addition to the City Home, local charities operated the Home for Aged Men and the Old Ladies Home on Gottingen Streets. Like the City Home, both institutions separated men and women, a practice which caused the Saint Vincent De Paul Society to agitate for married couples quarters within the institutions. The society claimed that it frequently had to maintain, for long periods of time, "old married couples who when advised to enter the City Home, refuse to do so because

it would entail their separation."45

Many older people surveyed by the Commission managed to maintain their own homes. Of the 2,767 persons who were over the age of 70, and had incomes less than $400 a year, nearly half lived in their own home and over a third lived with their children. The remaining 17 per cent, in declining order of popularity, lived with relatives, friends, in charitable institutions and as boarders.46 Without a manuscript census, it is impossible to determine the household composition in Richmond Heights.47 Certainly the small houses of the neighbourhood, with a general shortage of space following North American architectural trends, did not encourage multi-generational co-residency. Nevertheless, many elderly people resided with their children. We do not know if elderly parents were more likely to stay with the eldest child than the youngest, if daughters had more responsibility than sons, if those who stayed in Nova Scotia had more responsibility than those who left or if there was any difference based on rural or urban residency. What we do know is based on obituaries which indicated that many parents and in-laws lived

45 Daily Star (Halifax), 14 February 1927.


47 It is interesting to note that the Canadian census did not differentiate between elderly parents and other dependents within a household despite the fact that this specific group were supposedly regarded as a social problem.
with their adult sons and daughters in Richmond Heights.

Living with an adult child could be seasonal as in the case of a Hennessey Place retired military man and his wife who spent the winters with their son in Massachusetts. It could also be permanent in the case of John Ryerson who was "unable to earn a living through age" and whose only option was that of moving in with his daughter's family who lived a few blocks over.

Moving in with an adult son or daughter may have been a terribly isolating experience, uprooting the elderly from the place where they had lived most of their lives. In 1922, at the age of 85, George Milroy moved from Newfoundland to live with his son at 27 Columbus Place where he died five years later. The impression that the stay in Halifax was only temporary and quite separate from their past was also suggested by older men and women who died in Richmond Heights and were buried in outlying villages such as Terrence Bay or Ketch Harbour.

Not all old men and women left their familiar surroundings, some were able to maintain independent

48 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.748, 2 Hennessey Place.
49 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.
50 Daily Star, 26 January 1927.
51 Acadian Recorder, 29 December 1919; Daily Echo, 14 May 1920; Evening Mail, 28 January 1925.
households through the generosity of their children. An elderly couple on Duffus Place was able to get by as the husband earned $10 a week and their son paid their rent.\textsuperscript{52} While some of the elderly managed by drawing on the principal of their savings or generating income from property, the report of the Nova Scotia government concluded that "by far the greatest number were supported by their children." (Table 3.1) The importance of adult children as providers of financial support to the elderly raised fears about the effect of the declining birth rate placing the same responsibility on fewer family members.\textsuperscript{53} Over half of the sample group received full support from their children - the likelihood of full support increasing with the greater the number of children living.\textsuperscript{54} (Table 3.2) This conclusion conforms with traditional wisdom that children formed an old age policy, but casts doubt on the findings of Daniel Scott Smith who concluded that in 1900 the number of children did not affect the likelihood of support in old age in America.\textsuperscript{55} Children were not always available to give the needed assistance.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[52] PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.
\item[53] Brian Gratton, Urban Elders, p. 177.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Table 3.1
Sources of Support and Income of Persons over 70 years of Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Breakdown of Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300-399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200-299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100-199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56 Nova Scotia, JHA, 1930, Appendix 29, "Report of Commission on Old Age Pensions," pp. 7, 9, 11. All numbers are based on those 70 years of age and over with incomes less than $400 per annum and living in the sample areas of Halifax City and the Counties of Cape Breton, Richmond and Shelburne.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent Children Can Aid</th>
<th>full</th>
<th>partial</th>
<th>none</th>
<th>unstated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 children</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

57 Nova Scotia, JHA, 1930, Appendix 29, "Report of Commission on Old Age Pensions," pp. 7, 9, 11. All numbers are based on those 70 years of age and over with incomes less than $400 per annum and living in the sample areas of Halifax City and the Counties of Cape Breton, Richmond and Shelburne. Error in original.
Approximately one in four of the septagenarians interviewed had no children and in the remaining group nearly a third of the children had left the province. While many of these children might have been able to provide material support, they would not have been immediately and regularly available. Care and support for elderly parents fell harder on single child families and this appears to have influenced life options of adult children. Even in large families, weight could fall on one or two children as the number of children in a family appears to have affected the overall likelihood of sibling outmigration. Children in large families were more likely to have siblings living elsewhere in Canada or the United States. (Table 3.3)

Adult sons and daughters regularly assisted their elderly parents but occasionally this relationship was reversed. In at least three cases in the neighbourhood, mothers financially or materially assisted their married daughters and grandchildren. Thea Buckles married a man with an "indisposition to work, a state of matters which has existed since her early married days." As a result, she and her four small children relied on the generosity of her mother to supply the family with coal and fuel. Another example of mothers offering material support to married


59 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1411, 30 Stairs Place.
Table 3.3

Size of Family and Place of Residence
of Adult Children for Persons over 70 years of Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>families</th>
<th>Nova Scotia</th>
<th>Elsewhere Canada</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>86.6%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 chldrn</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 +</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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60 Nova Scotia, JHA, 1930, Appendix 29, "Report of Commission on Old Age Pensions," pp. 7, 9, 11. All numbers are based on those 70 years of age and over with incomes less than $400 per annum and living in the sample areas of Halifax City and the Counties of Cape Breton, Richmond and Shelburne.
daughters became evident when the HRC was unable to place a lien on William O'Reilly's furniture as it was not his own and had been loaned to him by his mother-in-law. 61 Probably, the most common means of support was offering shelter to a married daughter moving home with or without her husband. When Edna Farmer left her husband shortly after her marriage in 1919, she moved into her parents' Duffus Place home.

Examples of couples living with parents could be more complicated as the balance of who was supporting whom shifted over time. Young newlyweds who could not afford either separate housing or the expense of setting up housekeeping occasionally moved in with parents. In the case of those families in the extension streets who owned their own homes, this pattern was prevalent, and appears to have been worked out in the intergenerational negotiations in which housing was exchanged for regular money entering the household.

The economic vulnerability of the elderly and their sometimes dependent state meant that the aged, along with widowed mothers and orphans, were at the forefront of the development of the welfare state. The Old Age Pension Act of 1927 provided an income of not more than $20 a month to British subjects, 70 years of age and over who did not have an annual income of more than $365 and who had lived in Canada.

61 PANS, MG 36, R.1365, 29 Sebastian Place.
for 20 years and in the province paying the pension for the preceding five years before the pension began. The Pension Act was a shared-cost program between the federal and provincial governments which Nova Scotia could not afford to enter into until 1937. As a result few of the Richmond Heights elderly of the 1920s, ever saw any money. The payment of $20 a month did not solve the problems of poverty, dependence or vulnerability. The fact that some action was taken, nonetheless, suggests that the condition of the elderly was regarded as a problem.

Men and women experienced old age differently though they shared a common dependency on children and vulnerability. As with most women, old men were often caught in inferior and low paying jobs. Old age, like gender, influenced the employment options that were available and limited the possibility of economic independence. Just as old age took away those characteristics which defined men -- their physical strength and their ability to support a family -- old age also defeminized women. Women reaching menopause lost some of the physical traits which society used to define women as feminine. Older women looked different, a change that went beyond natural attributes such as grey hair, stooped posture, wrinkled skin and false teeth. Peter Stearns notes that the dress of older women was distinct - shapeless and black, often

62 Gratton, Urban Elders, pp. 76, 96.
covered with shawls compared to the colourful cottons of youth.63 In the 1920s, this contrast must have been particularly visible with the increased cultural emphasis on youth. Older women also occasionally wore their hair short, a factor which seemed to be overlooked in the discussions of young girls cutting their hair short in the fashion of the 1920s.64 Perhaps short hair on older women did not matter, as in many ways they were no longer considered to be feminine. Older women, however, remained entitled to be female through their roles as mothers and grandmothers. The photo of Mrs Fleck, the proud grandmother of 105 grandchildren alleviated the devaluation of one's personhood that could accompany old age.65 Because old age was associated with dependency and vulnerability, gender connotations were less relevant. It is ironic that the men and women who probably possessed the clearest polarized and class-based understanding of male and female gender ideals, in the final years of their lives were treated and perceived as very much the same.


64 PANS, MG 27, Vol. 1, 285, "Some Details that May Assist in the Identification of the Hundreds of Unclaimed Bodies which have been interned." 1917-8. 183, 114.

65 Evening Mail, 12 May 1928.
Chapter Four

Women on their Own:
Single Mothers and Female Household Heads

Forty-three year old Jessie Muir had seven children under fourteen and was pregnant again when her husband died in December 1919. Jessie's rather desperate circumstances would have been better than some in her situation, as her husband, a yard foreman for the Canadian National Railway repair shops, had left an estate which included a six room house, in fair condition, at 14 Stairs Street and personal property and effects totalling less than $2,200. The house was an important source of income for Jessie, and throughout 1920 to 1922 classified advertisements appeared in the Evening Mail offering board, furnished rooms, and lodging at 14 Stairs Street. Before the economic collapse in the summer of 1920, board was advertised at $8.50 a week. But the dramatic decline in local employment opportunities drastically affected the rates a Richmond Height's resident could charge.

1 NAC, RG 43, "CNR Employees and Halifax Explosion," Vol., 19265; Evening Mail 6 December 1919; PANS, Micro: Churches, Halifax, St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church Baptismal Register; Mail-Star, 1 June 1972; Halifax, Nova Scotia, Probate Court, 9537.

prospective boarders. By the fall of 1920, the shipyard had laid off employees, tenants were scarce, and Jessie Muir was advertising five furnished rooms to be let in whole or in part. Advertisements until the late summer of 1921 offered a varying number of rooms for light housekeeping. In August 1921, an advertisement appeared for lodgers, offering single accommodation at $2.00 a week and shared rooms at $1.50. The attempt to attract lodgers must have been unsuccessful as three furnished rooms were again advertised in November for $5.00 weekly.3

Jessie did not give up her house to live with friends and relatives, as her home was never rented out in whole. Advertisements offering up to five of the six available rooms, such as those appearing in October 1920 and January 1922, indicate that the living arrangements of the children must have been more flexible. Perhaps the children spent time with relatives, friends or temporarily resided in a local orphanage. After the 1917 explosion, while Jessie was recovering from injuries, the five eldest children stayed as students at the Convent of the Sacred Heart and St. Joseph's orphanage.4 During 1919, St. Joseph's orphanage, located only

3 Evening Mail, 26 June; 2, 5, 29 July, 9 October, 3 November 1920, 5 April, 15 August, 19 November 1921, 27 January, 23 May 1922.

4 PANS, MG 36, HRC, C.32.59.5f, Children's Department, Alphabetical List of Children at Convent of the Sacred Heart and C.32.5i St. Joseph's Orphanage.
a few blocks away from the neighbourhood, housed 95 such "half-orphans".5

Jessie Muir survived the way most widows did in the pre-welfare state. We know she used her home to generate income, and perhaps she also occasionally accepted day work in the critical period before she could depend on her children's labour. In 1925, John, her eldest son, was working as a call boy with the CNR. The fact that he was able to find employment in a period of layoffs with the company that had employed his father suggests one way in which community networks were utilized to assist distressed families. In the same year, Mary, the eldest girl, was also employed as a cashier. Circumstances for the family must have improved further by 1927, when the second son was employed as a clerk.6 While the eldest children may have had no choice about leaving school and earning for the family, Jessie, unlike other women in her circumstances, does not seem to have forced all her children to work as soon as possible.7 Teresa, born around 1913, was able to attend St. Patrick's High School.8

6 Halifax City Directory, 1925, 1927.
8 Evening Mail, 23 May 1932.
Jessie also received support from her community and neighbours. During the late winter and early spring of 1923, a card social and dance, and a card social, dance, and pie social were held to raise money to assist the widow and her family. While support from friends and relatives was typical, the broad community support offered to Jessie Muir was the only such example uncovered. This in part reflected her extreme circumstances of supporting eight children, but community support also may have been indicative of at least three other factors. Firstly, there is no record of relatives despite the fact that her husband had been born in the city. Secondly, while Richmond Heights had a large transient population, at its core was a remarkably continuous group composed of families who had lived in old Richmond along the waterfront. This group could be subdivided along occupational lines and church affiliation and Jessie Muir would have had connections to both the railway community and St. Joseph's parish. Finally Jessie Muir was the epitome of respectability. She was a devout Catholic with at least one of her daughters a member of the Sodality of the Children of Mary and another daughter entering a religious order.

Widowhood was often associated with old age, the stage

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9 Evening Mail, 22 February, 18 March 1922.
10 PANS, Cemeteries, Halifax, Mount Olivet, Burials 1843-1955, 6 December 1919.
11 Evening Mail, 23 May 1932; Mail-Star, 1 June 1972.
in the life-cycle which was supposed to follow the raising of children. Female aging was certainly fraught with problems, but the younger widow in the 1920s, who had no choice but to accept responsibility as household head, was in a very different position than one who lived with an adult son or daughter. This chapter focuses on women such as Jessie Muir who maintained their families and survived on their own.

Widows were not the only women who headed households in Halifax, though they composed the large majority. This chapter will also examine women who were deserted, divorced, or found themselves heading their family after their husbands had left the city in search of employment. While the latter group of women might expect financial support from remitted wages, they composed an important though understudied group in the population. "Going away" in search of employment was a standard strategy for riding out bad times. In addition to economic downturn, employment in the military or the merchant marine necessitated absences from home.

In a society which defined the norm as a male-headed household supported by a male wage, families led by women constituted a significant proportion of households in Richmond Heights. During the 1920s, their visibility was heightened by concern for the plight of war and explosion widows, fear for the traditional family in light of a perceived changing sexual morality, and specifically the dismal local economic conditions which forced men to leave Halifax in search of
employment.

The increased awareness of female-headed households corresponded to their recognition as a social problem. Female-headed households did create problems as they laid bare the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of the male family-wage economy. The disparity in male and female wages meant that it was almost impossible for single women to earn sufficient wages successfully to support themselves, let alone children. While pointing to the weaknesses of capitalism's sexual division of labour, female-headed households simultaneously exhibited the strength of family, and the flexibility of the household. The necessity for these women to move beyond traditional gender roles and the strain they placed on existing survival strategies and networks initiated state intervention into the private home. Concern was expressed for their economic vulnerability and poverty but fear for their moral vulnerability, as sexually active women who now lived outside marriage and male supervision, was seldom far from the surface.

Widows in early-twentieth century North America continued to be marked by a number of stigmas. Bettina Bradbury has pointed to the "stereotypes of the merry widow, the remarrying widow, and widows as the most deserving of the poor." 12 Here,

the first two stereotypes hint at female sexuality while the third refers to economic vulnerability. These stereotypes existed in Richmond Heights in addition to a second level of more subtle compartmentalizations. While the death of a husband could restore a woman's hidden given name, summonses for debt issued by the Halifax city court addressed women as "Widow Smith". Historian Arlene Scadron has suggested that widows remained as the "carriers and transmitters of the reality of death" in a society in which death was taboo and the ill and the dying physically isolated. In such a strong patriarchal society, there must have been something unsettling to surviving men as they witnessed widowed women functioning outside the status quo.

In 1921 and 1931, approximately 16 per cent of all Halifax families with children were headed by a single woman. Of the 1,506 female-headed families in 1931, the large majority, 1,131, were led by widows. Many of the children in the vast majority of these families were sixteen or older but this did not mean they had access to decent wages. Boys learning trades did not earn sufficient funds to maintain

13 PANS, RG 42, 'C' 11, Halifax Police Court Cases, Unsorted.


themselves, let alone contribute to the family coffers. The case of an Agricola Street widow with two sons 16 and 22 illustrated this problem. The older boy, Albert, was apprenticed as a printer for $12 a week and the younger son Maynard brought home only $3.50 a week as an errand boy. Without access to the manuscript census, there is no way of knowing either the number of these women living in Richmond Heights or the ages of their children; however, thirty widows appeared on the municipal voters' list between 1920 and 1929, and 115 different individual widows were listed in the city directory.

The Halifax explosion did not result in an unusual number of widows residing in the city by 1921. In Canadian cities such as Hamilton, Ottawa, and Moncton with a female age breakdown similar to that of Halifax, widows composed the same percentage of the total female population. Some widows were the result of industrial accidents which occurred in the city. In 1926, there were thirteen fatalities in Halifax County covered under the Workmen's Compensation Act, although

16 PANS, MG 20, Halifax Rotary Club, Vol. 1979, 35, Ernest H. Blois to Professor McKay, 1 February 1918; Case 3237.

17 PANS, RG 35, 102, City of Halifax, 8, A.6, Card Index File of Voters, Ward 6, 1920s-30s.

18 Seven per cent of all women in Halifax, Hamilton, Moncton, and Ottawa were widows. Canada, Census, 1921; 2; pp. 45-64, 224. In 1931 the percentage of widows in the female population remained at seven per cent. Census, 1931, Vol. 2, T.30, p. 290.
these did not represent all work related accidents. Neighbourhood women not protected under the Workmen's Compensation Act include Elizabeth Docherty whose husband was killed in an American construction accident and Maude Kenner whose husband was lost at sea. Normally the death of a wage earner occurred after a long period of illness which interrupted regular income and drained savings on immediate living and medical expenses. Tuberculosis was a long and expensive death during which the family was forced to pay for expensive sanitorium treatments or alternatively witness a slow death at home. The latter also severely affected income because wives could not undertake day labour due to home nursing responsibilities. At the time of the death of James Walker from tuberculosis in July 1929, the family was already in considerable debt because he had been ill for a year and had been unable to work.

Property and insurance were the only two means young families had of protecting themselves against the poverty of the sudden loss of the primary male wage earners. In most cases, these means would prove either impossible to adopt or inadequate in their provisions.

A study of widows in four American cities completed in

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20 Evening Mail, 4 February 1928.

1910 lists 61 case histories in its appendix. Among the 29 cases noted in the first city, presumably Boston, three widows were Nova Scotian. The ways in which these widows distributed their resources, particularly the large outlay on funeral expenses, offers insight into their values and customs. The first widow's husband was killed in an industrial accident and left her with five children under ten years of age. The woman received $280 from her husband's life insurance, $100 from the insurance of her husband's employers, and a collection of $94 from her husband's fellow employees. Of the total $474, over one fourth, or $143 was spent on the funeral. In the second case another widow with five children under fourteen whose husband died of Bright's disease, was left $240 in life insurance and spent $140 on funeral expenses. The final case mentioned involved a woman with two children under three, whose husband's life insurance of $100 did not manage to meet outstanding debts and funeral expenses had to be covered by a private agency. All three women secured life insurance, even though the first widow's husband only earned $12 a week and the last woman's family was heavily in debt.

In her study of Italian and Jewish women in the Lower East Side of New York City, Elizabeth Ewen noted that the American working class carried life insurance on every person

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22 Mary Richmond and Fred S. Hall, A Study of Nine Hundred and Eighty-Five Widows Known to Certain Charity Organizations Societies in 1910 (New York, 1913 [1974]), Cases Number 41, 42, and 52, pp. 53, 54, 55.
from the age of two up as the expense of funerals made coverage a necessity. In Richmond Heights, insurance was probably just as important. Minnie Smithers of 34 Cabot Place explained in an undated note to the Halifax Relief Commission (HRC), that her rent would be delayed as "We had forgotten about the Insurance coming due and I never like to leave it over as something might happen and I would lose everything."  

The large portion of available resources widows chose to spend on funeral expenses was significant. The three Nova Scotian women living in an American city were probably without an extended family or community, which while possibly explaining their appearance on public charity case files, also suggests the importance of maintaining public prestige even in a funeral amongst strangers. Certainly the expense of funerals in Halifax was high. Stewart Howell of 21 Cabot Place stoically wrote that "Owing to the death of our boy at the Oil works i am unable to pay my rent as it put us to quite an expense." A proper funeral seriously depleted limited resources, and supports the claim of a 1920 Nova Scotia government report that life insurance alone was inadequate as "it was found in practically all cases sufficient only to


24 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.276, 34 Cabot Place.

25 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, 21 Cabot Place.
cover funeral expenses, doctors' bills, and clothing, or at most to tide over a temporary period of adjustment when the real struggle would be faced."  

While insurance alone would not suffice, the same 1920 report found that in cases in which savings had been invested in a home "a number of fatherless families were found to be self-supporting".  

Property ownership excluded most residents of Richmond Heights. Tenants in the Hydrostone, such as widow Ida Davis of 28 Stanley Place, owned property before the explosion; but during the 1920s all residents rented. In the wooden houses on the extension streets, however, widows were listed among property owners. By 1929, at least twelve properties on these streets had been or were currently owned by widows, most of whom had been widowed in the decade after resettlement. Thus property ownership was only available to a relatively small proportion of the residents of Richmond Heights and even the widows who did possess their own homes were usually saddled with a large mortgage. Since both insurance and property were found wanting, or in the case of property unattainable, most widows had to rely on alternative survival strategies.

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28 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1869, Rental Accounts by street with section on wooden houses, 1919-1927.
The supposedly "ideal" family-based combination was home ownership and one or two older children working; most women had to accept less satisfactory alternatives. These included the mother engaging in wage labour, the use of the home to generate income by opening the house to boarders and lodgers, and the early-school leaving of children. In the nineteenth-century, widows usually engaged in wage labour if the children were young, preferring employment opportunities which kept them in their own homes according to Bettina Bradbury's study of family life in Montreal between 1860 and 1885. When young children were involved and work inside the home was not possible, children were temporarily or permanently surrendered.29 In Halifax in the 1920s, one of the obvious impediments to waged labour which remained was the problem of child care. The Jost Mission operated a downtown creche but it would not have been convenient for women in Richmond Heights.30

Survival strategies were divided between family and non-family tactics. Extended families were the most important support and survival network for women on their own. Mary


Gracie of 25 Cabot Place moved in with her brother's family at 19 Hennessey Place after the death of her husband. When William Tilley of 3 Cabot Place went to the United States in search of work, his wife lived with her sister at 12 Kane Place until her husband was established in Rhode Island. Shortly thereafter, the assistance was reciprocated as the sister's husband died leaving the Kane Place widow with three small children. The widow sold her furniture and moved to Rhode Island where her sister's family was already settled. The desertion of a husband also left women dependent on her family. When Thea Buckles of 30 Stairs Place charged her husband for non-support in February 1930, she and her four small children were relying on the generosity of her mother. According to a HRC report, Thea Buckles' mother had "put in the winter's coal and also provides food to stave off absolute want." Upon the family's eviction from the Hydrostone, a married sister of Thea's provided shelter.

Employment opportunities for widows were not plentiful during the 1920s and with a few exceptions were restricted to domestic service. The expanded female employment opportunities in the service and clerical sectors were largely

31 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.
32 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1411, 30 Stairs Place.
restricted to young and attractive women. Clara Brown who resided at 15 Sebastian Place was described as a "widow in strained circumstances working for Dr. McDougall as [an] office cleaner." Cleaning and domestic service were standard occupations for female heads of households.

Domestic service was characterized by low wages and the case of Hennessey Street resident Melinda Graham, the matron of one of the Richmond piers, might have been typical as she was unable to keep out of debt and in September 1925 found herself $484.50 in arrears on her mortgage. The limited employment opportunities open for widows seemed to have had little to do with community stature or respectability. Emma Ingram, a member of "a prominent North End family," was employed as a matron at the old North End railway terminal after her husband's death.

Given women's poor employment prospects and the limited assistance available, re-marriage may have appeared an attractive alternative. Marriage records at St. Marks Anglican Church show that 11 of the 135 weddings performed in

34 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances Rent Ledger, 1919-25.
35 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.791, 10 Hennessey Street.
36 Evening Mail, 1 March 1926.
the church between January 1920 and December 1929 involved widows. These women were relatively young ranging in age from 22 to 38, with the mean age 30. The widows who remarried, while older than first time brides, were largely a youthful lot. Even so, most women could not count upon the prospect of remarriage and the support of another male earner, and when they could not manage by themselves turned to others for assistance.

The poverty which most widows endured made them particularly dependent on their children's earnings, no matter how meager. A change in Christmas school holidays affected one widow as she wrote to the *Evening Mail* describing her circumstances:

I am a widow with a family of six young children. My oldest is 15 and she goes to school on week days and works Friday and Saturday evenings, and the weeks of Christmas vacation. The money which she earns is the only source of buying toys for the children. Now I read in the papers that the school children are only having two days holidays before Christmas Day. That means that my girl can only work for the two days and there will not be enough money to buy the toys for the children... I do not want my girl to miss her school, but I need the money. What am I to do?38

Few children of widows continued in school beyond the age of fifteen. In 1931, only 225 of the 1,850 children of widows

37 PANS, Micro: Churches, Halifax, Saint Mark's Anglican Church, Marriage Register, 1920-1929.

38 *Evening Mail*, 13 November 1928.
in Halifax, 15 years of age and over attended school. Early school leaving meant entry into waged labour. Between 1920 and 1925, property-owning widow Melinda Graham of 10 Hennessey Street had four women and one male with the same surname living with her and working at Moirs. In addition to what appears to be her five children, Melinda Graham also housed a boarder employed at the confectionery factory. While the wages of children might provide enough to survive and keep the family together, they did not compensate for the lost wages of a male worker.

In addition to family, the community also played an important role in helping women get by. Specific assistance from outside the realm of church or work, as in the case of Jessie Muir, was unusual. Trade unionists and work mates might offer generous assistance such as the $1,300 collected by employees of the Halifax Shipyards for the widow of James Slater, secretary of the Electrical Workers Union Local 625 who had been electrocuted in a workplace accident. The generosity in this particular case was noteworthy as the collection occurred during a strike which economically devastated many of its participants. A Shipyard walking party in November 1925 attracted 200 people and raised $50.

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40 *Morning Chronicle*, 10 June 1920; *Citizen*, 14 May 1920.
41 *Evening Mail*, 5 November 1925.
Weekly dances and card socials held in the Mayflower Hall on Agricola Street raised money which was distributed to needy families in the community.42

The churches played a role in assisting families within their parishes. During the depression of the 1930s, Father Curran of St. Joseph's covered the rent for at least one of his hydrostone parish members.43 The Saint Vincent de Paul Society was also active at St. Joseph's and presumably assisted local families. Beginning in January 1923, the members of United Memorial began contributing to an extra collection each Communion Sunday, the proceeds of which were to be distributed by the minister to needy families.44 While the session minutes note success as the fund collected $61, a number of parcels, and an order of groceries during a "Poor Fund Gift Sunday" in December 1927, the same minutes also indicate that in January 1926 a motion was passed that the wine for Communion "be paid for out of Poor Fund".45 The diversion of "poor funds" from their original purpose raises many questions about commitment to the problem and probably

42 Evening Mail, 4 August 1927.

43 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.842, 13 Kane Place.

44 PANS, Micro: Churches: Halifax, United Memorial United Church, Session Minutes, 3 January 1923.

45 PANS, Micro: Churches, United Memorial Church, Session Minutes, 29 December 1927, 11 January 1926.
reflects an ambivalent attitude toward charity. This mixed public perception surrounding charity was carried into public policy in the development of early government assistance programs.

A new survival strategy available to Richmond Heights widows was pension income made available through the HRC, the Department of Soldier's Civil Re-establishment, and the Workman's Compensation Act. Bertha Flynn of 31 Stanley Place, existed solely on pension earnings. The HRC, like the elaborate pension scheme established by the Board of Pension Commissioners became an avenue by which a government body intervened into the lives of ordinary Canadians. Like the military's, the HRC's widow's pension was based on the earnings of the deceased husband. This was significant for a working-class neighbourhood for the widow of a ship's captain who had earned $170 a month, might receive a pension of $60 while a labourer's widow who had been managing her home on $45 a month would receive only $25. On 1 January 1920, the HRC was paying pensions to 198 widows; and 25 years later

46 The spending of funds on non-assistance items was not the result of any lack of need. At this point, several prominent members of the congregation were in serious difficulty.

76 widows were still receiving support.48

Throughout the 1920s, the possibility of a new state-administered pension for widows hung over the community as an unfulfilled election promise. In 1920, a government Commission presented a report on the establishment of Mothers' Allowance. Five Canadian provinces, including Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Ontario had already instituted what the Commission described as "a system of granting government aid to indigent mothers with young children deprived of a father's support."49 In Nova Scotia, mothers allowance would only be made available to "one class in particular as unquestionably deserving of state aid ... the indigent widow with two or more children to support".50 Support for the families of disabled men "would be open to abuse".51 While the Commission acknowledged that families of men who had been institutionalized in mental hospitals had merits, families in which the father was in prison "although recognized under some schemes, [are] of more or less doubtful character, particularly as prison labour with remuneration for


the wife and dependents is being strongly advocated in many quarters and seems the more reasonable remedy."52 Deserted women were also not considered for state support as the Commission thought that the legal process should be strengthened so as to ensure that the absent father fulfilled his "natural obligations to his family".53 No public money would be distributed to unmarried mothers; it was left to the legal system to establish paternity and financial responsibility.54 The Commission's restricted vision of who would be entitled to state aid and its tendency to recommend legal changes ensured that even the limited help it offered would have no impact. The Commission's recommendations remained largely intact in the Mothers' Allowance Act which was finally implemented in October 1930.55

While the findings and recommendations of the Commission had no immediate effect on the lives of the women they set out to assist, findings and attitudes revealed and reinforced contemporary stereotypes. Research was carried out by the province's teachers who submitted names and addresses of all


55 Nova Scotia, Statutes 1930, chapter 4, "An act to provide for the payment of Allowances towards the Maintenance of the Dependent Children of Certain Mothers".
widows with whom they had contact. Obviously, from the
beginning of the study there was no intention of including
women other than widows. In Halifax County, which included
the city and its rural environs, the Commission found that
there were 303 widows with 775 children under sixteen and that
78 widows and 234 children needed assistance. The prejudice against women working was reflected in the
report which condemned "Day work", "Service", and "Boarding
House" widows for destroying family life. Children of "Day
work widows" were left unsupervised, while children in
"Boarding House families" were exposed to boarders and lodgers
who presented a "real menace to normal family life and [were]
not in the best interest of the children." Perhaps most at

56 There were 73 widows with one child under 16; 102 with
two children; 61 with three children; 37 with four children;
17 with five children; ten with six children; two with seven
children and one widow with eight children. Nova Scotia, JHA,
1921, Appendix 34, "Report of the Commission on Mothers
Allowances," p. 22.

57 Nova Scotia, JHA, 1921, Appendix 34, "Report of the
Commission on Mothers Allowances," p. 12. In the case of the
Children's Aid Society, they had a policy of leaving at least
one child with the mother, to ensure she did not escape her
responsibility of motherhood.

58 Nova Scotia, JHA, 1921, Appendix 34, "Report of the
Commission on Mothers Allowances," p. 11. See Tamara Hareven
and John Modell, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household:
An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families,"
risk were the children of widows in service who supported their children in institutions or "scattered about with relatives who could provide a home as long as the mother could contribute from her earnings towards their support". In some cases these children were boarded out to "strangers at a nominal charge and received questionable care." Children could be boarded at the city's orphanages or in private homes for approximately three dollars a week.

The initial report of the Commission on Mother's Allowances was not only exclusive and rigid, it was also parsimonious. The report recommended an average pension of $35 a month, a sum below the pension granted under the Workmen's Compensation Act. The meager pension proposed, the restrictions placed on recipients, and the ten year delay in implementation make the intention of the government and its Commission questionable. Widows might be the most "deserving" of the poor, but they were not above suspicion.

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60 PANS, MG 36, HRC, C.32.3b "Children's Department"; Evening Mail, 23 June 1922. The HRC boarded children for $3.00 a week. There seems to have been no difference in cost between private and institutional boarding.

While widows such as Jessie Muir epitomized respectability evoking community sympathy for their unfortunate circumstance, other widows were subject to careful community scrutiny. The Mothers' Allowance Act of 1930, sensitive to public opinion, further restricted those who could benefit by declaring that the act would only assist the mother who was "in every respect a fit, proper, and suitable person to have the custody and care of her children" and only make payment to legitimate offspring. HRC pensions could also be suspended for immoral behaviour. When a man was seen leaving Emma Lawson's home late in the evening, his wife filed a complaint which resulted in Emma Lawson's pension being temporarily discontinued. Another widow, Lillian Kennedy was permanently suspended after the birth of an illegitimate child. Her immoral behaviour was confirmed by the fact that she had taken in boarders with "undesirable character". Similar interference probably occurred with widows receiving military pensions as morality guidelines concurred. The concern that the Mothers' Allowance Act, the HRC, and the military only support respectable women reflected general prejudices. Neighbours spied on widows and passed judgments

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62 Nova Scotia, Statutes 1930, c. 4, s. 1.
63 Duke, "Pension System", p. 27.
on their activities. A Sebastian Place woman, for example, was concerned about the widow who was subletting the house next door and wrote the HRC to inform them that Mrs Canning was keeping

a proper cat house I guess you know what that is. now that Mrs George that you put out last fall moved in this morning, they have partys nearly every night including Sunday evenings and they get drunk vomiting over my veranda and backyard.....65

Widows had to be particularly careful of their reputation as public opinion was fickle with little middle-ground between compassion and condemnation.

At times it was impossible to distinguish between widowhood and a broken marriage. The situation of deserted or separated women did not differ greatly from the plight of widows. Certainly in this mobile community, some of the women who claimed to be widows probably were not. A separated woman who testified under oath at a Halifax divorce trial in 1923, when asked directly if she was indeed a widow responded, "Married woman; I am the same as a widow"66

Desertion, which the Halifax Welfare Bureau described as "The Poor Man's Divorce," was the most common form of marriage breakdown.67 The Children's Aid Society and the Superintendent of Neglected Children, later Child Welfare,

65 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1358, 22 Sebastian Place.
66 PANS, RG 39, 'D', Supreme Court, Halifax Divorce Court, Vol. 31, Case 389, 1924.
67 Evening Mail, 12 January 1928.
regarded it as one of the most crucial problems they faced.68 Within the community of Richmond Heights there were many examples of its devastation. Howard Wilson of 17 Cabot Place deserted his wife leaving her with back rent owing.69 Another husband, James Bowden abandoned his wife who was ill with tuberculosis, leaving her to be supported and nursed by friends and charity.70

Desertion occasionally was temporary. In August 1929, George Bart, a debt-ridden 33 year old shoemaker who lived at 29 Stairs Place, disappeared for six days. Upon his reappearance at his sister's home, Bart "claimed to have been doped and robbed of $50".71 Similarly George Paul, a waiter on the Maritime Express who lived at 1 Livingstone Place, "disappeared" for a few days after picking up his pay cheque in May 1929.72 At the time of George Paul's departure, he was at least $145 in arrears on rent. The economic pressures of supporting a family in hard times must have made the possibility of escape attractive and the disappearance of a wage earner must have sent panic through the entire family.

69 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.
70 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.
71 Evening Mail, 7, 9 August 1929.
72 Evening Mail, 27 May 1929.
Sometimes separation was involuntary. Emma Jones, a woman with two sons while renting 60 Stairs Street for twelve dollars a month, became a single mother when her husband was imprisoned at Rockhead. Her poverty and reputation were evident for when authorities appeared in October 1925 to evict the family she was accused of "bluffing the sheriff" by claiming to be ill in bed.73 Other patient histories of the Halifax Visiting Dispensary, a charity organization which provided medical services for the city's poor, also reveal the devastating impact of desertion on the family unit. In case after case, the cause of poverty in the family is noted as, "Father not with family" or "Husband left her, does not know where he is" which directly linked the desertion of the primary wage earner to the collapse of the family unit.74

The HRC was reluctant to accept deserted women as tenants since commissioners felt it placed with them responsibilities "we should not be called upon to carry."75 During the high vacancy period of the spring of 1925, the Halifax Welfare Bureau proposed the HRC accept a female tenant whom they were providing with $60 a month at a special reduced rent of $15 a month. The woman's husband had left her in the summer of

73 DUA, MS 2, 240, Halifax Visiting Dispensary, Registry of Calls.

74 DUA, MS 2, 240, Halifax Visiting Dispensary, Record of Patients, 1924-37.

75 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1364, 28 Sebastian Place, 27 April 1925.
1924 with their seven children while he found work as a carpenter in Albany, New York. Until December of the same year, he regularly sent $25 a week for the support of his family, but since that time had not been heard from. According to the report made to the HRC, she also engaged in day work in wealthy homes in the south end of the city, but this created an "awkward circumstance in that the children are young and leaving them alone all day presents a problem from our point of view."

This example was not at all unusual. The report of the Halifax Children's Aid Society in 1925 described a case of a man with eight children, the eldest a sickly girl of 17. The husband had been an average husband and father, supporting his family until about a year ago, when he lost his job. He searched in vain in Halifax for work, and then left for the U.S. Since last February he has not written his family. Through social agencies we learned that he secured work, but moved from place to place. This mother, who is very fond of her children, tried to support the family by day work, leaving the daughter of 17 years in charge of the house. The children became undernourished, through insufficient food and unruly because of the absence of the mother.76

In this example, the mother surrendered three children to Children's Aid Society and took out a warrant for the arrest of her husband.

Desertion was the primary cause of surrendering children

to the Children's Aid Society. The desertion of 24 fathers in 1925 meant that nearly sixty children in the city were removed from their homes.\footnote{Nova Scotia, JHA, 1927, Appendix 28, "Report of the Superintendent of Neglected and Delinquent Children," p. 24.} As already noted, for widows permanent or temporary surrendering of children was the last resort among possible survival strategies, yet this action appears to have been adopted readily by deserted women.

Throughout the 1920s, the \textit{Evening Mail} and the \textit{Halifax Herald} ran an adoption column in their classified section. While inserts with box numbers might have been placed by the Children's Aid Society, others gave private north end addresses. "Adoption - home for baby girl eight months, 833 Robie", "Home wanted for a baby girl six months old. Apply 76 Maine", and "Healthy Baby girl for adoption, aged one year. Apply evenings between 7 and 8, 49 Bilby" all suggest family dislocation or tragedy.\footnote{\textit{Evening Mail}, 19 June 1924, 3 February 1920, 15 May 1922.} An offer of "complete surrender" of a four month old baby boy of refined parentage or an advertisement specifying the religion of prospective parents cause one to imagine the desperate choices some women had to make. Women were not the only ones faced with the dilemma of surrendering children. The following 1920 advertisement from a father suggests a conjuncture of several family crises. Perhaps the death or desertion of the mother, in combination
with the dismal economic conditions in Amherst compelled the father to contemplate outmigration which he could not manage if accompanied by two young daughters.

Home wanted Good Christian home for two bright pretty girls, age 7 yrs and 12 yrs, oldest one good singer. Would like to have them in one home. Religion Baptist or Methodist preferred - Will give them away absolutely. Bedroom suite goes with them, also clothes for a year or two and $250 in cash to each one. Apply N.D. Aktinson, father of the girls, P.O. Box 532, Amherst. 79

We may never know if the $500 promised came from the sale of his Amherst possessions, but the wording of the advertisement expressed concern for the girls' future and pride in their qualities. These feelings may have been shared with the many women who could not be so generous in their search for their children's new home. The surrendering of children was one of the tragic aspects of life for women on their own in a male wage economy.

Mothers looking for private homes to board their children also advertised in the adoption column. One woman asked "Will you give an eight month old baby a good home and mother's care for $12 monthly?" 80 Another wanted board for a seven month baby girl stating that she was willing to pay a reasonable price while another was more concerned that the home should be "loving". 81 Offers to board children "cheap" also

79 Evening Mail, 16 September 1920.
80 Evening Mail, 23 June 1922.
81 Evening Mail, 26 June 1920, 11 November 1921.
appeared, such as that of the woman at 188 West Young Street, suggesting another house-based survival strategy by which women could generate income.82

Deserted women did not stand helpless in their fight for survival. George Swan, a former resident of 30 Merkel Place, was sued by his wife for non-support in October 1928.83 Thea Buckles of 30 Stairs Place also sued her husband for non-support in February 1930, but the action came too late to delay her family's eviction in April of the same year.84 The wife of Guy Thompson of Stairs and Hennessey Place succeeded in convicting her husband of both using profane language towards her and non-support.85 If the deserting husband remained in Halifax, he could be forced to fulfil his financial obligations. In a period of high local unemployment, however, men often left to find work in the United States, and crossing international or even provincial boundaries made them much more difficult to trace and to prosecute.86 Obviously, not all women were familiar with

82 Evening Mail, 8 January 1927.
83 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1855, Vacated Balances.
84 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1411, 20 Stairs Place.
85 Evening Mail, 18 August 1923.
86 After June 1922, desertion was an extraditable offense, but there was still tremendous difficulty in tracking down the guilty culprit. Canada, Department of External Affairs, Treaties and Agreements affecting Canada in force between His Majesty and the U.S.A, 1814-1925 (Ottawa, 1927), p. 504.
their legal rights, but questions regarding the legality of desertion did appear in the newspaper, and agencies such as the Halifax social service bureau did press women to exercise their legal rights. In fact, women used legal means not only to force their husbands to fulfill their financial responsibilities but also to control physical abuse. A former resident of 3 Stanley Place was summoned to court in April 1929 when his wife charged him with assault.

Women were not always the "victim" as separation could come about by mutual agreement or female initiated dissolution. Self-divorce, the mutual dissolution of an unsuccessful marriage, may have remained as a popular solution which rejected dominant mores of respectability. Public notices appeared in newspapers announcing the names of wives who had left their husbands "bed and board" and whose husbands declared they would no longer be responsible for any debt contracted. Bessie Lewis' husband could not be held liable for her unpaid rent on Duffus Place since they were living

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87 Evening Mail, 21 January 1919; PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1364, 28 Sebastian Place, April 1925.

88 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.


90 Two such examples appeared Morning Chronicle, 5 August 1920 and Evening Mail, 9 April 1926.
apart at the time that the debt had been incurred.\textsuperscript{91} For a 23 Cabot Place resident whose wife had left him the consequences meant giving up independent housekeeping since he was a navy cook who was often away for long periods of time. The desertion of a wife may have been inconvenient or embarrassing, and may even have made it impossible to maintain a household, but it did not create the same financial chaos as the departure of a husband.

While desertion was relatively common in Halifax in the 1920s, divorce was not. Nova Scotians had perhaps the most liberal access to divorce in the country; cruelty was designated sufficient grounds for termination of marriage.\textsuperscript{92} But the 1931 census only lists 17 men and 17 women in the city of Halifax as divorced. Certainly the number of divorcees would have been greater since presumably re-marriage occurred in some cases. Taken altogether the number of divorces would not have been large. Even so, the number of people personally touched by divorces might explain the perceived threat that divorce posed to the institution of marriage. There could not have been many people in Richmond Heights who were not the relative, neighbour or acquaintance of someone involved in a legal separation. If this circle enlarged to include the

\textsuperscript{91} PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.

people who knew someone, most of the community would have felt involved. In one case, involving a 22 year old widow of a Hydrostone family who had married a 25 year old widowed machinist in April 1919, both parties continued to reside in the neighbourhood after separation. Four months after the marriage the new husband had been found guilty in the City Stipendiary Court of fathering an illegitimate child. Between the court's decision and the 1926 divorce, Edna Farmer lived with her parents in Richmond Heights. At least two other Richmond Heights couples both from "old North End" families, were involved in divorce proceedings, though the first case seems to have been discontinued.

While divorce was relatively infrequent, many female-headed households were created as men left Halifax in search of employment. Men working away were a fact of life in Halifax. The presence of the military and merchant marine meant that men had always had to leave their family to earn their living. The economic crisis of the 1920s accentuated this trend and while many families left the city, in many other cases it was just the men. In the community of Richmond

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93 PANS, RG 39, 'D', Supreme Court, Halifax Divorce Court, Vol. 35, Case 487, 1926.

94 PANS, RG 39, 'D', Supreme Court, Halifax Divorce Court, Vol. 21, Case 159, 1919 and Vol. 31, Case 389, 1924.

Heights, women were left on their own to run their own households while husbands worked elsewhere.

Some occupations by their nature involved long periods spent away from home. During the winter, men in the merchant marine sailed out of the port and in the summer were usually laid off. This seasonal interruption of employment forced migration from the city to find work. Ellen Conley of 13 Columbus Place whose husband was employed by the Canadian Government Marine wrote in March 1923 that her husband had found work in Ontario and "if all goes well" would earn $75 a month until October.96 This case illustrates the importance of financial assistance from one's family in keeping the household together while her husband searched for work. Her father's pension cheque and her sister's earnings allowed her to settle the family's debts.97 A husband sailing out of port could also mean a long period without any knowledge of his whereabouts. Sarah Shupe had to explain to the HRC "My husband is gone away to sea, where, I dont know yet."98 The annual Harvesters' Excursion to the Canadian Northwest was another example of seasonal employment which took men away. Every August men left Halifax with the attractive one way fare

96 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances and Rent Ledger, 1919-1925, 19 March 1923.

97 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances and Rent Ledger, 1919-1925, 1 December 1922, 19 March 1923.

98 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.424 [2 files], 33 Columbus Place, 12 May no year.
to Winnipeg set at only $26.10 in 1924.\textsuperscript{99} In November 1920, 115 lumbermen were recruited by a New Brunswick firm\textsuperscript{100}, and many Halifax men must have been involved in large construction projects such as the Sheet Harbour hydro-electric development which temporarily employed 300 men along the isolated Eastern Shore.\textsuperscript{101}

Men also left their families for employment elsewhere for reasons which did not reflect the demands of their occupation but were the result of few local opportunities and large scale layoffs. The lay offs at the Halifax Shipyards, a large employer of local labour, were devastating as the payroll dropped from over 2,000 in the spring of 1920 to a low of less than 100 in 1927.\textsuperscript{102} The departure of a husband in search of work could mean an immediate expense for the remaining household. Mrs Sears of 3 Merkel Place explained her failure to pay rent as "Mr Sears has gone to the States to look for employment and I gave him all the money I had."\textsuperscript{103} Remitted wages would not have been generous as the male wage earner was placed in a position in which he had to support two

\textsuperscript{99} Evening Mail, 12 August 1924.
\textsuperscript{100} Evening Mail, 2 November 1920.
\textsuperscript{101} Evening Mail, 7 June 1924.
\textsuperscript{102} Evening Mail, 25 March, 22 September 1927.
\textsuperscript{103} PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances and Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.
residences.104

Sometimes the separation was only temporary as the family followed upon the establishment of a new home. One example of this two-staged migration was that of Mrs Sewell and family of 12 Stairs Street who left to join her husband in Massachusetts in October 1924 after he had settled into a permanent position there.105

The decision to go away in search of work must have been as difficult as it was at times almost inevitable. Mrs Armstrong dreaded the future prospect of her husband, a laid off employee at the Shipyard, leaving Halifax, writing to the HRC "I hope and trust there may be a job come in, before he starts to move."106 Once the decision had been made a husband working away might migrate annually. Owen Isnor, a carpenter who owned a set of flats at 7 Hennessey Street, was back and forth to Boston with great regularity. The Evening Mail social column noted in March 1926 that having spent the winter with Mrs Isnor and family in Halifax, he had returned to a permanent position in Boston.107 At times, these migrations

104 Canada, Department of Labour, Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, Minutes of Evidence (Microfilm), Reel 4, p. 4416; Mark Rosenfeld, "'It was a Hard Life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920 - 1950," Historical Papers (Ottawa, 1988), p. 251.

105 Evening Mail, 7 October 1924.

106 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.776, 26 Hennessey Place.

107 Evening Mail, 29 March 1926.
were unsuccessful as an undated memo in the HRC rent book noted: on one occasion Owen Isnor had been back from the United States for three months and was without work or money.\textsuperscript{108} While carpenters might follow the seasonal nature of their work, family tragedy could also bring men home. In May 1926, John Mahar returned to his 27 Livingstone Street home from Detroit to attend the funeral of his only child.\textsuperscript{109}

It is difficult to comprehend the impact of long absences on family life. In June 1924, a former employee of Hagen and Co. who had found work in Chicago visited his wife and children after a twelve month absence.\textsuperscript{110} Similarly in November 1923 the north end social column in the \textit{Evening Mail} remarked that a local woman had "returned home from an extended visit to the U.S. where she remained with her husband who is working in Massachusetts, near Boston."\textsuperscript{111} The difficulty women faced keeping a house and raising children on their own while managing the emotional stress of re-adjustment they faced with the absences of their husband has been discussed by Mark Rosenfeld, in his work on the railway community of Allendale, Ontario.\textsuperscript{112} Separation probably

\textsuperscript{108} PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1879, Mortgage and Rental Records, Accounts Payable, 1920s-1940s.

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Evening Mail}, 20 May 1926.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Evening Mail}, 12 June 1924.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Evening Mail}, 15 November 1923.

\textsuperscript{112} Rosenfeld, "It was a Hard Life", pp. 252-253.
increased tension in the home, both before, during, and after the husband's absence. The closeness of kin would have relieved part of the loneliness, but would hardly have compensated for the absence of a husband.113

In March 1924, Ellen Conley hinted at the risks involved in husbands working away by concluding a message with the information that he would be returning to Halifax in eight months "please god."114 Sometimes men did not return, the result of desertion or death. In February 1928 Frank Docherty died in a construction accident in Bath, Pennsylvania, leaving a widow and four children at 34 Merkel Place. Frank Docherty had worked at the Halifax Shipyards but for the two years preceding his death had been employed throughout the United States, largely in Florida.115 With Frank's death, Elizabeth Docherty suddenly went from temporary to permanent household head.

Women who found themselves temporary or permanent heads of households were economically and socially vulnerable and stand out as an important and significant exception to the dominant stereotype of the household unit in a male wage economy. It is in the examination of women on their own that we see most clearly the tenacity of the ideology of separate

113 Rosenfeld, "It was a Hard Life", p. 254.
114 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.404, 13 Columbus Place, 18 March 1924.
115 Evening Mail, 24 February 1928.
spheres well into the twentieth century. Single mothers, who had always been present, had increasing difficulty in the fragile balancing act of maintaining a nineteenth century feminine ideal in the twentieth century economic context. Female-headed households were identified as a social problem between 1890 and 1920 according to Linda Gordon.\footnote{Linda Gordon, Heroes in Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880-1960 (New York, 1988), p. 83.} Nineteenth-century, respectable, working-class culture was firmly based on the ideal of a high male wage capable of supporting a family. The reality of female-headed households challenged existing definitions and conceptions of a woman's role and her capabilities. Most contemporaries possessed a restricted and restrictive definition of family life supported by assumptions of natural roles, duties, and obligations. Female household-heads were a crisis, one which the existing economic system and intellectual framework could not meet.

In the identification of single mothers as a social problem, we can see evidence of the nascent welfare state. Pensions were not only tough and exclusive but their very introduction and existence was a means to maintain women in an economically disadvantaged sphere. Women did not have to earn an equal wage to men as this meager income supplement could stave off absolute want. In the absence of a male breadwinner, rigid adherence to the ideal of the male family
wage as the best means to protect the family in the absence of a male breadwinner, could result in women and children engaged in low-paying waged labour and the sacred home being shared with outsiders.

The structure or role expectation of society was slow to change; a household-head and a mother appeared to be in many ways contradictory. Yet any discussion of households in a male wage economy must keep in mind the large number of households without a male wage upon which to depend. Even households which survived on remitted wages did not conform with dominant stereotypes as they made do without the presence of a man at the head. Women household-heads did not choose their roles, but their presence raised questions concerning society's responsibility to support the family. It was less frequently that society questioned the economic and social system which denied women access both to fair wages and to the assistance with child care which might have placed them in a position to support their families on their own.
Chapter Five
Domestic Roles:
Men and Women as Husbands and Wives; Fathers and Mothers

One of the attractions of Richmond Heights for those who moved into the neighbourhood after the explosion was the appeal of working-class suburbia. As the words home and family became increasingly interchangeable and their use became almost synonymous, the role of the family dwelling took on increased importance. The HRC promoted the advantages of the Richmond Heights development describing it as a "Healthful location, excellent transportation facilities, close to churches and schools" with "ideal surroundings especially suited to householders with children."¹ In short, it was thought to be ideal for the working-class family. In the photo, which often accompanied notices of houses available, three young children played on the quiet boulevard, safe from the heavy traffic of urban streets. The appeal to family was a marketing approach which struck a chord with many residents. Indeed, a father and husband wrote the HRC stating, "I want to hold the house as it is very suitable for my family and near the school for the children."² James and Susan Arthurs,

¹ Evening Mail, 2 April 1927.
² PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.401, 10 Columbus Place.
the lighthouse keeper at Pope's Harbour on the Eastern Shore, brought ten of their eleven children to 29 Hennessey Place during the winter of 1924-25 so that the children had the opportunity to attend school. The working-class suburb of Richmond Heights with its proximity to schools and its carefully planned domestic architecture, offered families conveniences which were increasingly regarded as necessary for happy family life.

Working-class suburbia was a product of the twentieth century made possible by the extension of public transportation, the decentralization of employment, and the increased physical and intellectual separation between the worlds of home and work. These new suburbs were not idyllic; Kareen Reiger in her work on the Australian working class has noted that the "stories of parents mistreating children, of neighbours squabbling over noise and livestock and many accounts of the suffering of deserted wives show something of life in working-class suburbia." While these tales also form part of the reality of Richmond Heights in the 1920s, it must be acknowledged that at the heart of this new suburbia was the

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3 DUA, MS 2, 240, Halifax Visiting Dispensary, Record of Patients, 1924-37.

4 Jean Barman, "'Knowledge is Essential for Universal Progress but Fatal to Class Privilege': Working People and the Schools of Vancouver During the 1920s," Labour/Le Travail, 22 (Fall 1988), p. 52.

ideal, and to some extent practiced reality, of an increased home and family centredness in the culture of the respectable working class. The move toward private, compartmentalized, self-contained dwellings among the British working class in the late nineteenth century related to changes within the family and the developing notions of domesticity argued M.J. Daunton in *House and Home in the Victorian City.*

Changes within the family were partially a response to the loss of dignity many men suffered in the public sphere as they became increasingly distanced or completely lost control over production. Working-class men, who practically defined working-class culture by their maleness, could find renewed purpose and status through family and home. Hence, Daunton saw this move to the domestic sphere as a "mechanism to assert independence and identity within a setting of subordination." The value placed upon home-life by Richmond Heights residents was not universal, but within some households it had taken root firmly. After the explosion, a couple wrote a relief organization expressing the desire "to make our house look once more like home sweet home." This assertion of identity through family life simultaneously reinforced gender roles.

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8 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 20, Massachusetts–Halifax Relief Committee, Case 67.
though it also assisted in changing them. The home-based roles of husband and father or in the case of women, wife and mother took on increased importance and more responsibilities. Family could provide a sense of importance and a source of strength but it could also generate new tensions and establish impossible ideals.

Restriction of the concept of family to a single dwelling in the early twentieth century must have been confusing for many residents to whom family did not mean a nuclear two-generational unit, but rather an extended network of related people. As already demonstrated, family acted as an important economic support network. But family also could conflict with the economic imperative of making a living, and so in hard times people left their families in rural Nova Scotia, in the counties of Hants, Guysborough, Victoria and Richmond, and moved to Halifax to take advantage of urban opportunities. Sometimes this migration was multi-staged, and settlement in Halifax only for a generation before a longer journey took Nova Scotians to New England, Central Canada, and the West. The 1920s was one such time when families dispersed in the search for something better. Between 1921 and 1931, Nova Scotia experienced a net decline in population; and in Halifax, though the population of those over the age of ten

In a period of high outmigration the tenacity of family was perhaps all the more striking; and in the community of Richmond Heights, even during the transient 1920s, neighbours and family were for some interchangeable. The case of one railway family illustrates this point dramatically. A young married man, Noble Tinsdall, lived between Stanley and Columbus on Agricola Street, close to his parents and younger brothers and sisters at 14 Duffus Place and his uncle's family at 24 Duffus Place. Three brothers who had also left home remained in the immediate vicinity. The first brother moved around to tenancies at 8 Hennessey Place, 29 Sebastian Place, and 32 Duffus Place, never far from his wife's mother at 28 Hennessey Place. The second brother, who at various times lived at 8 and 27 Sebastian Place, had a mother-in-law and sister-in-law at 20 Sebastian Place and a second sister-in-law at 55 Livingstone Street. The third brother lived at 7 Columbus Place, his father-in-law a few doors down at 30 Columbus Place. In his own immediate family, Noble's parents-in-law lived a few doors away at the corner of Columbus and Agricola, and a sister-in-law on Cabot Street. This one family would doubtless extend beyond these twelve
interconnected households if cousins and all in-laws in Richmond Heights could be traced. As significant as the size of the family network was its reach across religious boundaries. Three of the four brothers married Roman Catholics though they had been raised Presbyterian.\textsuperscript{10} Although the case of the Tindalls might be atypical, it was not isolated. A woman who grew up in the neighbourhood remembered that "Most people ... who had relatives stayed – if you were brought up in the north end you more or less [stayed] there. I suppose 'cause families then were more clannish than they are today."

The shift from an extended to a nuclear family cannot be isolated in a specific time or place. In the lives of residents of Richmond Heights both definitions of family were experienced at the same time. Change was difficult, and as the responsibilities and expectations of a larger family became concentrated upon fewer and fewer people, strain was perhaps inevitable. While the structure of the family changed


\textsuperscript{11} Interview Gladys McTier, Ottawa, July 1988. See also Michael Young and Peter Willmont, Family and Kinship in East London (Harmondworth, Eng., 1962). Although this study took place in Bethnal Green and the suburban housing estate of "Greenleigh" in England in the 1950s, some interesting parallels might be made with Richmond Heights in the 1920s.
so did the identities of those who composed it. Men and women, uncertain of what type of husband or father, wife or mother, they were supposed to be did not have the luxury of privacy to experiment with new ideals, duties or roles. Under the watchful eye of neighbours, who could also be family, a good reputation and the maintenance of the veneer of respectability continued to be of central importance. Indeed, if the working class retreated to the home in order to escape the defeats of industrial capitalism in the 1920s, perhaps they did not find the peace and tranquility for which they had hoped. The change that was touching every facet of life did not stop at the domestic threshold.

During the inter-war period, there emerged among the respectable working class a home centredness on the surface reminiscent of the middle class values of the mid-nineteenth century. The nineteenth century working class home had been the domain of the wife, who had responsibility for maintaining the household's social status in the community.12 Peter Stearns has argued the domestic centredness of women, and their lack of contact outside the home, "created greater gender differences than had characterized the lower classes previously, and obviously could lead to a female

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traditionalism opposed to a male adaptive mentality." In the early twentieth century, however, it appears men retreated to the home; and like their mid-Victorian gentlemen counterparts in turn became champions of traditionalism while women's lives and roles became increasingly complex and malleable as they were challenged with new identities brought into the home.

One of the obvious explanations for the attractiveness of home in new neighbourhoods such as Richmond Heights was the comfort the houses had to offer. Electricity, water and sewage connections all improved the standard of living. Throughout the 1920s, furnaces were installed in many homes to replace the dirty and somewhat inefficient stoves and heaters. Although living conditions could still be crowded, they were probably better than those available before the explosion. In the new houses, separate space was marked for eating and relaxation. Improved housing conditions meant that it was no longer necessary to find, outside the home, the leisure that provided an escape from the squalor of working-class housing.

Technology such as the radio assisted in making working-class men more home centred. A number of people in Richmond Heights built radio sets and the Evening Mail noted that many

workingmen were now "spending a quiet evening at home."\(^{14}\) The radio was a good example of the complexity of working class adoption of mass culture for while on the surface radios and their mass culture programming appeared to be readily embraced by the Halifax working class, on closer examination we see that governmental licensing of radio operation was an area of conflict. The Department of Marine and Fisheries published a number of notices in the labour newspaper, the *Citizen*, warning "users of radio" that all receiving sets must be licensed at the annual fee of one dollar.\(^{15}\) A radio owner described himself as "only a poor working man" who was always having to pay for extras.

People who used to be proud to know they were able to pay their bills in time to get their discount, are now faced with staggering... bills. Then on top of this, when a man purchased a radio set to entertain his family and his friends he had to pay for the pleasure.\(^{16}\)

Home-centred mass culture did not necessarily conflict with a distinct working-class culture. Even the radio, the virtual symbol of homogeneous taste with its programming entering every home, could provide an opportunity to resist the intrusion of the bureaucratic state into the home.

The increased importance of home was reflected in discussions at the male workplace. An employee of Moirs

\(^{14}\) *Evening Mail*, 5 October 1922, 7 January 1926.

\(^{15}\) *Citizen*, 4 November 1927.

\(^{16}\) *Evening Mail*, 11 December 1924.
voiced his concern about the company's recreation program in terms of the separation of the employee from his family. By participating in the work based recreation program provided, "What time would a man have to spend with his family? Such plans do not benefit a man's family. We are not asking for charity or amusements. All we want is a living wage, one that will pay our honest debts, and we will choose our own amusements." Similarly the debate surrounding the evening working hours of barbers was presented in the context of its effect on the families of the men concerned. With the end of evening hours, a north end barber explained that it was now "possible for me to enjoy myself with my wife and family in the evenings, whereas under the old conditions, by the time I got home the children were to bed, and my wife was patiently waiting to dish up my supper and wash up the tea things." During the long Printers' strike for the eight hour day from 1921 to 1924, the conflict between members' duties as fathers and husbands at home and the demands of work appeared in the strike propaganda. One case described a man with long working hours who was unfitted for fatherhood. His overtaxed body sought relief in alcoholic drink and in the excessive use of nicotine and narcotic poisons. He could not be the good husband or the good father, or the good citizen that he might have been with less work and

17 Citizen, 13 May 1927.
18 Evening Mail, 25 October 1928.
more leisure. 19

The belief that work could infringe upon family life implicitly placed the home at the centre of workers' lives.

Home may have also been attractive to men because of growing expectations as to how they could expect to be treated. The popular advice books distributed to mothers by the Department of Health supported the elevated status of husbands and fathers. "He carries the big responsibilities of life. He comes back to his home to rest." 20 The political and economic defeat of labour after the First World War might have directed some men to find prestige and status anywhere they could get it.

The primary duty of fatherhood continued to be performed outside the home in the act of providing for family. As the chief family breadwinner, men were supposed to achieve status and respect within the home. John Gillis stated in his study of British marriage that "Economic, social and psychological conditions of working-class life in the early twentieth century were in fact quite conducive to the revival of both patriarchy and matriarchy." 21 Patriarchy adopted a variety of forms in Richmond Heights homes and one strain appears to

19 Citizen, 20 April 1921.


have brought fathers greater involvement emotionally in their children's lives. In an explanatory essay on the history of fatherhood, John Demos has suggested that in the early part of the twentieth century, fathers emerged as "chums" as they shared non-work activities with their children in an admittedly "more contrived, and self-conscious and altogether more confined" manner. Demos claims that the leisure-based relationship between fathers and sons grew while contact between fathers and daughters had "no clear focus and little enough substantive content." Certainly the special relationship between fathers and sons was assumed by some Haligonians. The important role fathers were supposed to play in the development of their sons was suggested by the concern the Halifax Rotary club expressed about the fate of boys who had lost their fathers during the explosion. This concern was not necessarily economic, for fatherless daughters would have suffered similar consequences.

Assorted glimpses of Richmond Heights fathers in interaction with their children suggest a variety of roles fathers could adopt such as disciplinarian, chum, indulgent provider, and moral counsellor. In a Sebastian Place home,
the father implemented punishment. Stella Shore remembered that her mother postponed any punishments until her father arrived home from work, and that her father had revealed later in life how it had upset him to beat his children though he had not been involved in the original incident. The same father, a seasonally employed carpenter, made certain that each of his children received a dime every payday, five cents for a movie and five cents for candy. Others fathers spent at least some of their leisure time with their children. A widowed father with three young girls never sent them to Sunday School until they were older since "he thought more of taking us out...on a Sunday." Fathers engaged in outings such as berry picking with both sons and daughters, but most leisure activities were restricted to their sons, to the father and son banquets at United Memorial Church, the "youth work" of the churches, the wide range of sports, and formal organizations like Boy Scouts.25 Concern for the material happiness of their children was demonstrated by the men employed at the Shipyards who in 1928 held weekly dances and card socials to raise sufficient money to "give the children of Shipyard employees a real treat at Christmas time."26 The plan was a success and 530 children's parcels were

25 Morning Chronicle, 30 September 1920.

26 Evening Mail, 1 November 1928.
Within the community, relationships between fathers and their children varied widely. A motor boat operator was apparently unaware of his children's improper behaviour and when confronted by a representative of the HRC responded in what might be considered a traditional manner. The father, "looked surprised but answered me he would not stand for any irregularity and would call his household to order and see that children behaved." The authoritarian father could be distinct from fathers who saw themselves as responsible for their children's moral education. When the son of a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer was accused of breaking a neighbour's window, the father defended the boy's claim to innocence with the confidence that he himself had "provided child on general principles" of morality. The varying patterns of fatherhood in part related to the long-term general shift in working-class families from traditional patriarchy to a child-centred orientation. The weakening

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27 Evening Mail, 27 December 1928.
28 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1079, 13 Merkel Place.
29 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.983, 1 Livingstone Place.
30 During the early years of the twentieth century, many working-class families began to adopt characteristics of nineteenth century middle-class families in their attitudes towards children. Increased importance was placed on childhood and the role the family played in raising children. Neil Sutherland, Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus (Toronto, 1976), p. 92.
of father's authority in some cases reflected in part the
general societal transformation from production to
consumption.31 Although fathers may have spent more leisure
time with their children, conversely their knowledge and
expertise was partially discredited by the rise of boys' and
sports clubs which assumed the roles of teaching skills
formerly transferred from father to son in the workplace
environment.32

As fathers appeared to become more emotionally involved
with their sons and daughters, there was a concurrent
increased emphasis on the mother-child relationship. The
expanded responsibilities surrounding mothering were just one
of the areas of the domestic sphere which was increasing to
fill the time made available by the decline of domestic
production.33 New and elevated standards of consumption,
housekeeping, home management, mothering, and marriage
continued to make the duties of the wife/mother almost
indispensable.

Some households simply could not get by without the work

31 Elizabeth Ewen, "Immigrant Women in the Land of
Brook, 1979, p. 102.

32 Rayna Rapp and Ellen Ross, "The Twenties Backlash:
Compulsory Heterosexuality, the Consumer Family, and the
Waning of Feminism," in Amy Swedlow and Hanna Lessinger,
ed.s., Class, Race and Sex: The Dynamics of Control (New York,

33 Winnifred Bolin Wandersee, Women's Work and Family
of the mother, and important expenses such as rent had to be put off to pay for temporary help if no family member was available. In January 1923, Mrs Kyle of 32 Duffus Place requested more time to pay her rent because her children had been sick and "I have been under the doctor's care ever since July and I am not able to do my own work yet but I expect to be alright in a few weeks and therefore you see I had to pay for a woman to look after the house for me."  

Women usually conducted the correspondence with the HRC as part of their responsibility for all financial transactions and household operations. When the HRC contacted Mr Richards at his work, Mrs Richards responded quickly to point out that "I look after the money part of this house a[nd] and handle all Mr Richards' business and when you write again will you please send mail here so as not to cause any upset with Mr Richards' work. I don't want him to lose his job." The fear of mixing the operation of the household and the workplace is interesting and suggests the vulnerability of male employment and the tension women experienced in keeping the two spheres separate.

The importance of mother in society was suggested in the frequency with which women appealed to the Commission in this role or capacity. A young women whose husband had been

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35 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.851, 22 Kane Place, 30 March 1926.
unemployed throughout the winter of 1927-28 and did not pay any rent as a result requested mercy and flexibility in the face of eviction: "I have a young baby 4 months old and 3 other young children and as I'm not very strong myself it will be quite difficult for me to move so soon."36 In response, the Commission delayed the eviction of the family from April to the end of August. Women in their role of household manager also made decisions to fit their family's financial and space needs.37

It was not surprising that women made appeals based on their roles as mothers, for the ideal and responsibility surrounding motherhood was growing stronger. As middle-class reformers sought to better the working-class mother by focusing on public health, infant welfare, social purity, education, and child welfare, they created a new restrictive ideal for "the good working-class mother."38 This image also created its own antithesis, the ignorant and neglectful mother of British literature on 'the deterioration of the race' in the early 1900s.39 Although the mother was increasingly regarded negatively, as the ideal outstripped the realities of working-class motherhood, it is important to note that

36 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.837, 8 Kane Place, 12 March 1928.
37 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.404, 13 Columbus Place.
38 Matthews, Good and Mad Women, p. 87.
before the First World War, mother was projected as superior to her husband. Jane Lewis has noted that working-class mothers were generally better regarded than their husbands who were constantly suspected of idleness and drunkenness. The mothers were thought to be well-meaning but all too often ignorant and in need of education as to appropriate methods of infant care and household management.40

The increased expectation of mothers and the corresponding negative image were evident in the 1920 remarks by the Judge of the Halifax Juvenile Court who placed much of the blame for juvenile delinquents upon mothers. Judge J.J. Hunt wrote: "There are scores of homes in our City where the father of a family is compelled to be away all day earning a livelihood, and where the mother neglecting her family duties is found too often spending her time in some of our many places of amusement."41 From the same perspective, the Evening Mail's "shocking" headline for a north end domestic stabbing read "Mother Admits to Playing Cards Five Nights a Week".42 Earlier in the same year a reporter had spoken with a woman who claimed "she knew mothers who either locked their children up at nights or let them roam the streets" as "all the women of this class cared about was playing cards."43


42 Evening Mail, 27 November 1926.

43 Evening Mail, 14 January 1926.
Criticism of mothers was not restricted to those easily dismissed as incompetent or negligent. Public health is an excellent example of the intrusion of experts into the private home to usurp the authority and knowledge of the mother. In Halifax, as a result of the explosion, existing organizations were expanded and new organizations were created to deal with immediate health problems, such as the Victorian Order of Nurses and the Halifax-Massachusetts Health Commission. These enlarged institutions remained in Halifax after reconstruction and were influential in public health programs. The Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) was particularly concerned about the ignorance of mothers. Halifax president, Agnes Dennis, noted in her report for 1919 that "ignorance on the part of mothers and children of food values and the elementary conditions of health all help to make our death rate high" and questioned "why give such care to mother and infant the first month and allow the child to die through ignorance or lack of care during the first year." Dr. W.D. Forrest, in congratulatory comments in the same report, was much more explicit as to the class of mothers to which this education must be directed. Forrest wrote that in reference "to the child welfare nurses, I am firmly convinced that this work, which is really a work of education among the women of the poorer classes must be

most beneficial."45 To educate mothers, the organization instituted "Baby Saving Week", "Better Babies Contests", weekly prenatal clinics, a Little Mothers League and a Mothers Club.46 Work of the VON with mothers was far reaching. Nurses conducted a weekly clinic at Bloomfield High School for new mothers on Friday afternoons and during the winter months of 1926-27 attracted 22 young women to a home nursing class at United Memorial Church.47

The Victorian Order of Nurses was not alone in its assault on female authority and knowledge within the home. The Halifax-Massachusetts Health Commission alone employed fifteen public health nurses and two visiting housekeepers who in July 1924 paid 4,745 house-calls in the metropolitan area: "Each nurse... no matter what may be her reason for contact with the family, becomes responsible for the health standards of each member of the family."48 According to the Health Commission, Halifax as an older community posed special

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45 PANS, MG 20, Vol. 755, 86, VON, "Report of Board of Governors, 1919," p. 120.


47 Evening Mail, 25 March 1919, 28 April 1927.

problems as "for ever is one met with the argument that the mother or grandmother or great-grandmother did thus and so - hence it is right." The health commission set about on a vigorous program of weekly visits to every baby under six months, followed by visits every ten days until the child reached one, on the grounds that "the mother needs frequent advice as to her habits". Prenatal contact was also stressed so "that the unborn child may not suffer throughout life because of any deficiency in the mother's diet" during pregnancy.49

Public Health intervention into the home caused one student at Bloomfield School to remark rather ambiguously that every Wednesday Miss Richardson visited the school and "if any children have disease she goes to their homes and tells them what is wrong" thereby leaving the reader uncertain as to whether the nurse was going to diagnose the illness or faults in the home which produced ill health.50 The health of children was one specific area in which the ignorance of mothers, particularly working-class mothers, needed to be exposed. All mothers were considered to be in need of expertise, but working-class mothers needed special assistance and supervision since they were often considered to be

49 Ross, "Saving Babies, p. 126.

50 Evening Mail, 23 November 1922.
Discussion of mothers and motherhood during the 1920s took place within the context of a rapidly declining birth rate. The birth rate had been falling since the 1870s, but during the 1920s the decline grew particularly drastic as the Canadian crude birth rate dropped by 20.8 per cent. The reduction in family size was obviously more significant for young families starting out than for the many older families who constituted the residents of the neighbourhood. Many large families lived in the relatively small space available in homes in Richmond Heights and there appears to have been little difference in the size of Catholic and Protestant families. In fact, two of the largest families identified with fifteen and fourteen children were both active at United Memorial Church. Through obituaries and notes in rental correspondence, twenty-one families have been identified with over five children, seven had ten or more. Large families were often the poorest. Michael and Mary O'Brien had eleven children, only one of whom was working. They lived together in their seven room home at 17 Kane Street. In another neighbourhood example, "six children, none of age earning

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51 Lewis, Politics of Motherhood, p. 61.


53 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1879, Mortgage and Rental Records and R.873, 17 Kane Street, 16 March 1931.
"ability" lived in a house with several rooms sublet and there was "visible evidence that the home is not very prosperous." Often these families had trouble meeting their rent and the Commission occasionally marked "large family" in an explanatory fashion in the rents ledgers of families in arrears. Of course not all children born lived, in part because of the explosion. Vincent Macleod lost eight of his nine children in the explosion and following remarriage fathered an additional two. Some families in the neighbourhood also may have been composed of cousins and step-children as households were reformed after the 1917 explosion.

The explosion was not the only cause for the loss of life since levels of infant, child and maternal mortality remained high. Of the 55 persons who were buried in St. John's cemetery between May 1919 and December 1929 and who had addresses in Richmond Heights eighteen were under the age of ten. During the same period the Municipal Department of Health registered 152 cases of infectious diseases in the


55 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.


57 PANS, Cemeteries: Halifax: St. John's [Fairview], Burial Records.
neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{58} Despite the falling birth rate, maternal mortality remained high into the 1930s, reaching its peak in 1920 and only declining after 1930.\textsuperscript{59}

By necessity or by choice, mothers who survived childbirth were largely isolated in their homes with young children. Discussion surrounding vaccination exemptions noted that it was nearly impossible for many women to visit the downtown Health Board office "especially when there are little children in the home, and the breadwinner is on hand for his supper shortly after five."\textsuperscript{60} One woman simply seemed to feel more comfortable in her own home environment. A widow who was having trouble meeting rent requested the postponement of rent negotiations until "you get time [to] come up and I'll talk matters over as I can talk to you better in the house than in the office."\textsuperscript{61} That a woman would be more comfortable in her own home discussing such a delicate matter as family finances was not at all surprising but it appears that other women had

\textsuperscript{58} PANS, RG 35, 102, City of Halifax, 28, D.3 "Infectious Diseases Cases."


\textsuperscript{60} Evening Mail, 8 March 1928.

\textsuperscript{61} PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.
even less choice and were largely confined to their homes. From an early age children acted as their mothers' feet, delivering messages and running errands. These little messengers, together with increasingly affordable utilities gave women less cause to leave the home. Indeed, Christine Stansell remarked that the solitary housewife emerged among the urban working class in the 1920s with the advent of inexpensive utilities. Indoor water, electricity, sewer connections and consumer durables such as ice boxes and washing machines removed the necessity for frequent ventures into the streets and may have confined women to their homes to a much greater degree than their mothers or grandmothers.

Although most wives' and mothers' time was likely to be divided between mothering, housekeeping and consumption, domestic production did take place. Home preserving appears to have been relatively commonplace. Fruit was available from rural relatives, street hawkers selling strawberries, and berry picking which appears to have been a common activity for fathers and children. One North End teamster reported in July 1928 that he had hauled 136 bags and 12 boxes of sugar to the Richmond Heights area. Children also contributed by picking dandelion greens in the spring, shovelling snow in the winter, gathering berries and fishing and occasionally

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63 Evening Mail, 11 July 1928.
stealing coal from the rail yards.64

Not all domestic production was carried out by women and children. The manufacture of liquor and home brew was largely undertaken by men. The *Evening Mail* in 1921 noted the large demand in the North End for pumpkins and brown sugar, the main ingredients for its manufacture.65 There were also stills in Richmond Heights and at least two tenants, one a RCMP officer, were charged under the Nova Scotia Liquor Act.66 This form of home manufacture may have benefitted the household since it prevented the diversion of some cash from housekeeping money, but did not in itself act directly towards improving the family's standard of living.

A more important means of generating additional cash for the household was the wage labour of wives. According to the 1931 Halifax Census, in the 3,104 one family households paying between $16 and $39 in rent per month, which would have included all renters in Richmond Heights, only 48 wives reported earnings. The census probably underestimated the number employed since many women participated in occupations

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64 *Morning Chronicle*, 15 April 1920; *Evening Mail*, 18 May 1921, 3 January 1923, 11 July 1928; NAC, RG 43, Railways and Canals, Vol. 5616, Theft of Coal at Halifax.

65 *Evening Mail*, 22 December 1921.

66 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger; MG 20, Vol. 526, 2, HRC Minutes, 7 October 1926.
that might not be counted in the census return. For example, Mrs Smithers received a commission for collecting rent on properties held by her father who lived in Bermuda. The small number of employed wives can be placed in better perspective when one also considers that in these same households, 1,268 children reported employment.

Women did have some opportunities to work in their homes. Advertisements appeared offering employment writing show cards or colouring Easter or Birthday cards. Mrs Richards paid a dollar a week on a sewing machine which she used for dressmaking, but claimed that the opportunity and returns were limited and "it only buys a meal." Not all work in the home was of a casual nature. Annie Thomas operated a grocery store from her home until its bankruptcy in 1928. Annie Thomas was 49 years old in 1928, married, and for nearly ten years had operated a general grocery, meat, fruit and vegetable store at the corner of Livingstone Street and Robie. She opened the store in 1919 with $100 of her own money and kept no bank account, no life insurance, no books and did not "know income

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68 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.276, 34 Cabot Place.


70 Evening Mail, 5 April 1920, 13 February 1922.

71 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.851, 22 Kane Place, 5 April 1926.
or profits", and though the business failed, at the time of dissolution could put together $8,814 to partially repay her creditors.72 Despite Thomas' lack of organization, her store was a major concern and had been profitable. At the time of the store's bankruptcy she also owned four houses and three sets of flats in the North End. Less successful appears to have been Mrs Keller who modified the front part of the parlour in her Stairs Street house for a tailor shop.73

Even though a relatively small percentage of married women worked outside the home, the public perception was that their numbers were increasing dramatically. In fact, married women who were employed may have appeared to have been more numerous than was actually the case as they were met with hostility. A reader of the Citizen wrote in 1927 "we have a real fad now in Halifax and I think this should be put a stop to; that is married women working; nearly every second one that marries holds her job, with husbands having good salaries coming in."74 Criticisms of wage-earning married women were nearly always connected to the responsibility of the husband for providing an income. A wife working was considered an insult to her husband's masculinity. In an 1987 article

72 PANS, RG 39, 'B,' Case 458, 1928 Annie Thomas, married woman debtor.

73 PANS, RG 35, 102, City of Halifax, 39, I, City Engineer Building Permits, 64 Stairs Street.

74 Citizen, 6 May 1927.
Bettina Bradbury pointed out that "The pride of skilled male workers did not end when they left the workplace. For married men, the 'manliness' so important to them as workers and strikers extended to their capacity to support a wife."  

Supporting a wife was the hallmark of an adult male, but family economies were precarious and could be sent reeling by the unemployment of an older child, an illness, or a birth. Evicted families often had little choice but to move to "the country" where rent was even cheaper and domestic production could reduce the amount of cash required.  

Sarah Shaw explained in an undated note to the HRC: "I have come over to Tuft's Cove to reduce my rent from $40 to $15 being everyone had a 10 per cent cut in pay."  

Alternatively, James Eaton, a tailor at Tip Top Tailors who attempted to support his wife and seven children on less than $100 a month, built a shack on Elm Street, in the city's undeveloped west end which in the winter of 1926 finally had water but no sewage connection.  

A tenant, Bernard Boyle, demonstrated how precarious life could be for those who could find no alternatives; he had been

75 Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working-Class History," Labour/Le Travail, 19, (Spring 1987), p. 35.  
76 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1382, 3 Stairs Place, R.273, 32 Cabot Place.  
77 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.424, 33 Columbus Place, 12 May no year.  
78 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1398, 18 Stairs Place, 26 June 1926.
twice imprisoned for debt and released under the Poor Debtors Act before being evicted from HRC housing in 1926.79

Although women managed the money, it was usually the husbands who carried home the pay packet. The trick often became getting the money into the household before it was spent. In railway communities, it was usual for wives to meet husbands at the station on payday to preempt any diversions such as drinking or gambling on the way home.80 Mrs Smithers, whose husband was a member of the CNR dining room staff, was forced to take more drastic measures to secure her husband's wages. In 1930 she employed one of the city's most prominent lawyers to attempt legal intervention and force her husband to sign over his pay cheques. This tactic was not successful and Minnie Smithers grew upset as the lawyer Joseph Kenny became familiar with her family's finances. Accordingly she wrote the HRC

Mr Kenny phoned me you were speaking to him about our rent. I think that is a very queer way to act. Mr Kenny was not employed by me to pay my bills or rent bills. As far as Mr K. was concerned it was none of his affair what we owed. He was asked to make Mr Smithers sign his cheque to me so I could get it and pay the bills as [he] was drinking and some times did not bring it home but it is impossible for me to get his cheque and if you doubt my word just phone the pay master ... and ask him if the wives on the Dining Car staff can draw their

79 PANS, MG 36, HRC. R.1340, 4 Sebastian Place, 17 June 1926.

80 Mark Rosenfeld, "'It was a Hard Life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950," Historical Papers, (Ottawa, 1988), p. 257.
husbands' cheques and he will tell you. So I have to chance him keeping his word in his letter to Mr Kenny to give me a certain amount of his money.

Although women largely controlled the way in which money was spent, it was not theirs, and if their husbands chose not to hand over the pay, there was little immediate action they could take.

Poor local economic conditions could affect the conventional roles of husbands and wives. The failure of a husband to provide for his family could disrupt established patterns of interaction and interdependence. A woman wrote to a local advice column:

My husband and I are not well off....I believe I am a good housekeeper, and, in addition, I often take temporary work. Lately, however, I have discovered that each time I go out to a bit of work my husband stays away from his on some pretext or other. My idea has been to help; but it does not seem to work.

In this case, the women sees herself as generally conforming to societal expectations stating that she was capable in her primary role as a housekeeper. However, by moving slightly beyond her role and accepting responsibility for bringing money into the home, her husband appears to have abandoned his role and responsibility as breadwinner. In response, the Evening Mail columnist advised Mrs H. that she must make it clear to your husband that the money you earn is not meant to take the place of his slackness. If that doesn't have the desired effect, stop taking these temporary jobs of work for a while....It is disgraceful for any man to rely on

81 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.276, 34 Cabot Place, 26 July 1930.
his wife's earnings when work is within his own reach.  

Although the masculine ethic was strong in Richmond Heights, it was not universal. A representative of the HRC visited an unemployed tenant in March 1924 and "Impressed him he must provide for wife and family. Thibeault said he would follow up at CNR but talked of his rights and was largely indifferent." Mrs H's husband and Thibeault remind us that the masculine ideal was not a responsibility accepted by every father and husband.

Those who rejected the role of husband as breadwinner and provider, were exceptional, for it was in this light that most men saw themselves. In the less frequent correspondence between male-household heads and the HRC the failure to provide weighed heavily on their minds. The tenant at 23 Kane Place in 1920 who was unable to meet his rental obligations informed the Commission that "it worries me as much as you." In another case, an employee at Moirs, residing at 6 Kane Place, wrote in November 1924 "I really don't know sometimes which way to turn with already two judgments against [me], no furniture anymore and my wife in the hospital. Certainly a bad

82 Evening Mail, 12 September 1928.
83 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1341, 28 Duffus Place, 3 March 1924.
84 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1924.
year, this 1924 for me."85 Husbands who felt responsible for the family income did not prevent wives from making real contributions. An unemployed unskilled labourer related that he had "held out as long as he could" before his wife had to go and do day washing to keep the family afloat.86

Conflicts within families between husbands and wives were likely to result from the almost inevitable failure of one partner to live up to the societal gender ideal. Men could not always be reliable breadwinners in an unstable local economy. In the same manner, many women also were unable to perform to high expectations as perfect mothers, efficient housekeepers, and loving and supportive wives. The result of this failure was perhaps evident in a rental report which noted than an additional fee was charged to Albert Avery upon the completion of his tenancy as the storm door and cellar window had been "willfully" broken by his wife in her attempt to gain admittance into the family home after being locked out. A later inclusion noted that his wife eventually left him in 1929.87 Avery had been employed as a motorman with the street railway and after a lay off moved around to a series

85 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.834, 6 Kane Place, 6 November 1924.
86 Evening Mail, 9 December 1920.
87 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1854, Vacated Balances, Rent Ledger, 1919-1925.
of jobs as a freight handler, porter and an employee of Vetcraft.88

Living up to gender ideals was difficult with the changing relationship between men and women, new ways of perceiving the purpose of marriage and greater expectations of domestic happiness. Heightened expectations of the private sphere were corollaries of the new home-centredness among working-class men. Marriage and the relationship with a spouse were expected to provide greater satisfaction. Yet, there was not a single consolidated ideology surrounding marriage that young Richmond Heights couples could adopt. The new perceptions were apparent to Robert and Helen Lynd, in their 1924-5 study of Muncie, Indiana. They found that most people believed that "romantic love" was the only legitimate basis for marriage.89 Romantic love certainly did not conjure up the traditional image of a holy hierarchy ordained by God. In its place romantic love suggested a loss of control and the diminished desire to defer gratification to a heavenly after-life. Like consumption, romantic love focused on immediate self-gratification and fun. While the modern perception of marriage gained strength, traditional views remained present. In the Nor'and of Halifax, the rector at St. Mark's Anglican

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church articulated the older view in the debate surrounding the use of "obey" in the Anglican service. Rev. George Ambrose defended the use of "obey" for

The Anglican Church has ever stood for things tried and proved, and the patriarchal government of the home is one of these things. Instances of unworthy men to whom his government has been given do not alter the fact that the ideal home, with a wise and loving father, a loving and obedient wife, and dutiful and respectful children, is the picture and the type of all good government. Let the word "obey" be omitted and the word "honor" naturally follows it into oblivion; whilst "love" in its true sense cannot exist in a family without a head, without respect and without obedience. It is for men to recognize their responsibilities in the "Holy State of Matrimony"; to realize the very high position in regard to their families, in which God has placed them, and to make themselves worthy of honor and obedience.90

Ambrose's vision of marriage did not coincide with contemporary thought, but may have been present among older couples such as 61 year old Jane Anderson who was noted for her faithful attendance to her dying husband.91 Certainly, there had always been households in which genuine affection bound husband and wife. In two of the rare wills left by Richmond Heights residents, wives were referred to as "beloved."92 Nonetheless, the purpose of marriage had partially shifted from the procreation and raising of children

90 Evening Mail, 21 March 1922.
91 Evening Mail, 29 June 1919.
92 PANS, RG 48, 366, Vol. 16, Halifax County Wills, 1919-1925, 9704, 367, Vol.17, 11251, Halifax County Wills, 1925-1929. A total of 13 wills were found 1919-1931 by residents of Richmond Heights.
to personal fulfillment and the promotion of happiness for the spouses. At the same time, working-class marriage to a large extent continued as a financial partnership. Wives were necessary to transform and extend a husband's wages into a form that could sustain the family. This mutual economic dependence did not conform to either Ambrose's image of a family patriarchy or the modern goal of "romantic love". In north end Halifax, the romantic ideal and the economic function of marriage co-existed uneasily.

Although the romantic and the economic could not be reconciled, the idea of companionate marriage made inroads into Richmond Heights. While it is impossible to measure the extent of these inroads, changes in leisure activities confirm the presence of the new ideals surrounding companionate marriage. In her study of fraternalism, Mary Ann Clawson has noted social relations between men and women shifted in the early twentieth century with the expansion of mixed-sex commercial activities such as dance halls, amusement parks and movies. Companionate marriage also encouraged a more sexually

93 May, Great Expectations, pp. 71, 90.
integrated social life and the rise of married-couple leisure. In Richmond Heights during the 1920s, though men continued to participate in exclusively male social activities, there appears to have been an increased emphasis on shared leisure of the couple after courtship and marriage. Indeed, an important aspect of the rise of domesticity among the working class was the increased likelihood that men and women would engage in leisure activities together.

Card playing, dances, sleigh rides, and church social events brought married men and women together outside the home. Public card socials could occupy more than 800 men and women on winter Saturday evenings in the five halls in the north end offering games of "45s". The Ways and Means Committee of the CNR hosted a Grand Armistice Thanksgiving Dance in the South End Railway Station Rotunda which attracted 600 couples. Similar functions were held by other organizations such as the Tram Employees Union. For the first time, in 1929, railwaymen and their wives together attended the annual convention in Moncton, the women holding simultaneous meetings. Church drama clubs consisted of

95 Mary Ann Clawson, Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender and Fraternalism (Princeton, 1989), p. 263.
96 Evening Mail, 9 January 1928.
97 Evening Mail, 2 November 1927.
98 Evening Mail, 17 April 1928.
99 Evening Mail, 26 September 1929.
married men and women, and societies at both St. Joseph's and United Memorial were led by Richmond Heights residents.100 Other church based recreations encouraging interaction between men and women included events such as the St Joseph's annual garden party and St. Mark's fair, choirs, and church suppers. "Jigg's Suppers" - inspired by the popular comic-strip character of "Bringing Up Father" and his love of corn beef and cabbage - and bean suppers were regular events at St. Mark's near the end of the decade.101

The most prevalent form of leisure and entertainment involving men and women probably took the form of house parties. Despite increasingly greater opportunities to participate in commercial leisure activities, it appears that the residents of Richmond Heights continued to "make their own fun" through mixed-gender, home entertaining. Mr and Mrs A. H. Grant of 2 Cabot Place managed to fit 50 guests into their home on a Monday evening in October 1925 for a 45s tournament.102 House dances, Halloween parties, whist drives, bean suppers, and singing all managed to crowd as many as 35 couples into the small houses.103

100 Morning Chronicle, 30 September 1920.
101 Evening Mail, 8 November 1928, 19 October 1929.
102 Evening Mail, 29 October 1925.
103 Evening Mail, 21, 25 January, 26 May 1921, 12 October, 12 December 1922, 12 January, 24 February, 27 November 1924.
entertainment also entered the debate on temperance for one critic argued that bringing alcohol into the home also made it accessible to women. "In the days of the saloon only men drank; but now the women are drinking."104 Mixed drinking or entertainment among married men and women suggests that a form of companionate marriage was emerging and was altering homosocial leisure. That the home was the centre for much of this new type of married entertainment reinforces the notion of the growing influence of domesticity. Leisure outside the home continued to be primarily male, but if married women continued to be tied to the home, they were no longer always there alone, and for better or worse, they probably shared their husband's company more often.

The appeal of home meant that many working-class men and women turned to their families and expected more fulfillment from the private sphere. At the same time that spouses had an increased emotional expectation of home, the household and the domestic economy was undergoing great change and acquiring a fragility resulting from broader economic changes. The change and fragility within the household economy was felt by household participants. The roles of mothers and fathers changed as fathers appeared to become more involved with their children at the same time that even greater expectations were being made of mothers. The role of mother in particular was

104 Citizen, 1 March 1929.
opened to greater criticism. More responsible parenthood was demanded at the same time that power was lost to schools, the juvenile courts, and in the case of Richmond Heights residents the increasingly interventionist HRC. Expanding responsibility both maintained and reinforced the different roles of mother and father at the same time as these very roles were changing. In addition, women appear to have lost their power and influence as mothers and heads of the domestic sphere with the return of their husbands to the home. As ideals became more strictly defined, it became much easier to fail.

Increasingly sharp definitions of ideal motherhood and fatherhood, around a core of images varying little across class, generated not clarity of focus but confusion. In the Richmond Heights of the 1920s, at least three ideologies surrounding the purpose of marriage competed for ascendancy. The economic partnership of marriage, the traditional recognition of the distinct economic roles played by working-class husbands and wives continued to have very real resonance. Marriage as a blessed state ordained by God for procreation was still propounded by local clergy but was less obvious in residents' daily lives. The third and most modern ideology, marriage as a romantic and companionate union, was evident in the leisure activity of married couples. Married people in Richmond Heights, depending on age, economic security, and religious beliefs probably lived some
combination of all three.

Compounding confusion, the rigid definition of mother contrasted with the many ideals presented to wives. Was it possible to reconcile and embody in a single person the competing images of devoted mother, efficient house manager, life companion and sexual partner? The domestic role of men, though not as strained or demanding as that of women, was perhaps even more ambiguous. The involved loving father, the detached disciplinarian, the marriage partner, and the breadwinner whose connection to the household was primarily through his wage packet were all possible roles to adopt. Domesticity made gender roles more rigid and restrictive at the very time that men and women experienced increasing uncertainty as to how to act. As the emotional importance of home expanded, so did the many and sometimes contradictory roles men and women subsumed within its walls. The roles created under the titles husband and wife, father and mother enlarged and gender ideals emerged as much more complicated.
Chapter Six

Men

"Big Bill" Vallance lived at 30 Livingstone Place throughout the 1920s with his wife Emma, four daughters and five sons. Probably illiterate, "Big Bill" went to sea as a boy until the age of twenty when, in 1896, he joined MT&T as a groundsman. Vallance "stuck to the job steadily" for four years until 1900, when he heard "the rumours of the Tom Tidler's ground to be found in Sydney, Cape Breton. Like many another young, strong and - shall we say restless man at that time, he joined the crowds then pouring toward Sydney and presented himself at the Dominion Iron and Steel Co.'s office." In 1905, he returned to Halifax and a job with MT&T and by 1920 was foreman of the line crew. He was a member of the Halifax Fire Brigade, played an instrument in the company band and declared fishing and shooting his favourite recreations. Vallance was typical of many Richmond Heights men of his age in occupation, migrant employment history, family, leisure activities, and interests. As a foreman, a member of the fire brigade, a musician and a sportsman,


2 Monthly Bulletin, July 1920, February 1929; PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1016, 30 Livingstone Place. The 1920 lease was co-signed by his wife in the same signature and the 1923 lease was marked with an x.
Vallance played a number of roles outside the home.

Male adults were likely to have multiple personae. Men were not only fathers and husbands but also carried an assortment of public identities such as employee, trade unionist, comrade, team member, and lodge brother. While men were increasingly integrated into the household through expanded responsibilities in their roles as husbands and fathers, the most obvious examples of a distinct working-class culture remained exclusively male and removed from the home.

The text of men's obituaries highlighted the diversity in their lives and richness of their experience. Obituaries of men recited employment and military history, the names of family members, and often remarks about social activities, affiliations, involvement in sports or hobbies. The importance of acquaintances outside the workplace or family was noted in the frequently repeated phrases of "widely known", "well known", or comments about a "wide circle of friends." Examination of men must extend beyond the household, since the domestic sphere, while encroaching on their time, was only one aspect of their life. Work, trade unions, labour politics, sports, and leisure activities simultaneously affirmed class and fraternal bonds.

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3 Evening Mail, 24 December 1931; Mail-Star, 14 April 1936, 10 June 1939, 2 September 1943, 31 August 1948, 17 May 1951.
While working-class men undoubtedly differed from women they shared certain aspects of life. Home, family, neighbourhood, church, and some leisure activities united men and women, yet there was much which kept them apart. The economic role performed by most males meant men were more class-bound in their outlook. As direct and hopefully permanent participants in the labour market, men experienced more direct relations to production. Women usually attained a class position as the result of a relationship with male breadwinners, such as fathers or husbands. Men, on the other hand, established a class identity for themselves within a usually limited range of options. As much as individuals were able to create their own lives, most men had the opportunity to do so. As individuals participating in the labour market upon which class was based, identification with class could have greater immediacy.

Labour not only provided men with a class identity but also formed an important component of the meaning of masculinity. Andrew Tolson, in fact, has pointed out that in "western capitalist societies, definitions of masculinity are bound up with definitions of work."4 Occupations, strength, and skill were value laden qualities integrated into the construction of what it meant to be a man.

In contrast to the experience of women, work made a boy

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a man. In 1923, a man in his early forties remembered the way in which fathers were instrumental in the launching of a boy's career. Accordingly, a father would declare, "Jumbley, the junk man wants a boy; better go and 'get the job'. That was the sort of instruction the stern father used to give his son when, his schooling done, he had to begin earning a living." Fathers were important in finding their sons employment whether through a neighbourhood junk man or their own place of employment. In the railway shops, apprentices were often the sons of shopmen. Similarly, a number of non-railway Richmond Heights families had fathers and sons working in the same establishments. Oscar Mathers and his son Lauchlan of 28 Stairs Place both worked as repairmen for the tramway. William, the son of Charles Myers, foreman rigger at the Halifax Shipyards and resident of 22 Cabot Street, apprenticed in the same trade, and he was able to find steady work despite dismal conditions in the yard.

Although some fathers were able to get their sons into good positions through connections and prestige, industrialization and the rationalization of the labour force were rapidly changing the conditions and skills under which

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5 Tolson, Masculinity, p. 47.
6 Monthly Bulletin, April 1923.
7 William F. Coltrell, The Railroader (Stanford, 1940), pp. 24-25.
8 Halifax City Directories, 1919-1929.
production occurred. Furthermore, in Halifax, fewer men were employed making things, as production became centralized in other regions of the country. With class identity and masculine self-image closely tied to skill and/or strength, the changing economic structure of early twentieth century Halifax was especially difficult for men. The image of the independent producer, prominent in the political ideology of labourism, had little connection to the new daily reality in the 1920s.9

This new reality was evident in the employment of the men of Richmond Heights. According to the city directory, there was a shift in the economic sectors in which residents were likely to find employment. (Table 6.1) In 1920 and 1921, construction was the most important sector as it included the employees of the shipyards. Throughout the rest of the decade until 1929, transportation was the largest employer, with the majority of men working for the CNR. (Table 6.2). Although the railways were the largest employers in transportation and communication, the importance of the street tramway and MT&T were daily reminders of the increased opportunity in the expanding urban infrastructure. These two employers were related to the service sector in the roles they performed. By 1929, even excluding public transportation and the telephone companies, the service sector was the largest

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9 Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," Labour/ Le Travail, 13 (Spring 1984), p. 59.
Table 6.1

Occupations of Richmond Heights Males by Economic Sector Based Upon Halifax City Directories, 1920-1929

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Occupations of Richmond Heights Males by Economic Sector as Percentage Based Upon Halifax City Directories, 1920-1929

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<td>1.4</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

trad = trade  fin = finance
con = construction  ser = service
man = manufacturing  oth = other
tran = transportation
Table 6.2
Breakdown of Richmond Heights Males
Employed in the Transportation Sector, 1920-1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CNR</th>
<th>NSTP</th>
<th>MT&amp;T</th>
<th>DAR</th>
<th>ship</th>
<th>long'n</th>
<th>taxi/</th>
<th>team</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>1928</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CNR = Canadian National Railway
NSTP = Nova Scotia Tramway and Power Corp.
MT&T = Maritime Telephone and Telegraph
DAR = Dominion Atlantic Railway
long'n = longshoremen
taxi/ | team = teamster
employer. Furthermore, over half of the 145 men employed in the category worked in the public sector, employees with a branch of the military or a level of government. (Table 6.3) The shift in important employers reflected changes in the local economy. The overwhelming importance of the shipyards in 1920 and 1921 was significantly different from Richmond Height's employment profile of 1929 when employment was distributed much more evenly among transportation, trade, and service. The number of Richmond Heights' men with occupations listed in the directory also varied dramatically, from a high of 625 in 1921 to a low of 251 in 1923. While the economic sectors in which Richmond Heights men were likely to find employment altered, the nature of work that men engaged in did not. Throughout the decade, with the exception of 1921, around 80 per cent of the men were engaged in blue collar occupations. (Table 6.4) The number of skilled workers rose and fell with the activity at the shipyard and it is possible that the very definitions of the skilled work changed. George Rountree, in his study of employment in the Canadian railways, noted that as new procedures were introduced, jobs continued to be performed by the same craft, though the actual work might be altered dramatically. In particular, Rountree drew attention to the blacksmiths, whose work had disappeared from the railway shops, and yet without any decrease in the overall
Table 6.3

Breakdown of Richmond Heights Males Employed by Government, 1920-1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>mil</th>
<th>gov't</th>
<th>prov</th>
<th>fed</th>
<th>mun</th>
<th>P.O.</th>
<th>HRC</th>
<th>RCMP</th>
<th>HFD</th>
<th>HPD</th>
<th>Hosp</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mil. = military  HRC = Halifax Relief Commission
gov't = government  RCMP = Royal Canadian Mounted Police
prov = provincial  HFD = Halifax Fire Department
fed = federal  HPD = Halifax Police Department
mun = municipal  Hosp = Hospital
P.O. = post office
Table 6.4

Richmond Heights Men Engaged in Blue Collar, Lower-White Collar, and White Collar Employment
Based Upon Halifax City Directories, 1920-1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blue Collar</th>
<th>Lower White Collar</th>
<th>White Collar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>85.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
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<td>1926</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
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<td>1928</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
number of "blacksmiths" employed. As technology changed, so did the definition of what it meant to be a blacksmith, though the word remained the same. Thus, while the number of skilled workers living in Richmond Heights did not change dramatically, it is probable that the level of skill necessary to perform their tasks did. The decline in skill appears to have been complemented by an increase in employees in the area of warehousing, storage, and shipping as reflected in the new census category of 1931. These men did not produce, but rather handled and distributed goods made elsewhere to be consumed locally.

The fact that men were less likely to be involved in actual production coincided with increased consumer expectations and fewer non-cash survival strategies. These changes made men, with more emphasis upon their role as family provider, particularly vulnerable to health difficulties and fearful of old age. Concern about health was apparent in the medicine advertisements which appealed to an old-time work ethic and suggestions of financial security. Vestiges of the independent producers appeared in a 1929 advertisement accompanied by a smiling plasterer in overalls.

It's a joy to meet a craftsman of the old school, who'd rather be a first-rate workman in overalls than a tenth-rate man in a white collar job. If you were to ask him his rules for success, he'd probably tell you with a twinkle in his eye, "Same

as for any other job, I guess. Hard work; steady plugging. And good health. I've never missed a day's work from illness.11

Similarly, a 1923 advertisement played upon the connection between health and supporting a family.

Workingmen Attention
Your weekly earnings depend upon the state of your health. Will the fall weather find you ready to resist the colds, coughs, influenza, and such like? A great tonic to fortify against disease is Santo Paulo Tonic Wine.12

The need for wage security, through the maintenance of good health or by means of a steady job, had important consequences for the labour market.

The increased importance of the role of breadwinner may have also affected turnover levels of employment. With high levels of unemployment, married workers may have been reluctant to quit any job as new work was difficult to secure. David Montgomery concluded that during the 1920s, workers were "more likely to link their plans for the future to a particular company, and less likely to tie themselves to some particular occupation than their parents and grandparents had been."13 In Richmond Heights, long-term residents experienced practically no job turnover or changes in employers. Job

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11 Evening Mail, 24 April 1929.
12 Evening Mail, 1 September 1923.
security was also important since the new forms of welfare capitalism which emerged after the war were often linked to seniority.

New welfare programs reflected the man's role as breadwinner, since they were quasi-pecuniary rather than social. Companies which offered profit-sharing and stock ownership plans, group insurance, pensions and paid vacations all had continuous service provisions.\textsuperscript{14} Death benefits payable to spouses at MT&T began after five years of service, but it was not until after ten years of employment that benefits reached the equivalent of one year of pay.\textsuperscript{15} Pensions, under ideal conditions, began after 20 years of employment while sick benefits were prorated after two years based on the number of years with the company.\textsuperscript{16}

The role of breadwinner was also evident in the classified advertisement of an unemployed carpenter who lived


\textsuperscript{15} DUA, MS 4, 180, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph, H 301, Personnel Benefits.

\textsuperscript{16} DUA, MS 4, 180, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph, H 301, Personnel Benefits, Employees' Benefit Fund 1917, Pensions, Disability Benefits and Death Benefits. Maritime Telephone and Telegraph also introduced a Group Life Insurance Plan and an Employee Stock Saving Plan and while 89 per cent of employees participated in the former only 107 of the eligible 400 joined the latter. DUA, MS 4 180, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph, H 303, Employees Stock Saving Plan, 1927; H 313, Rulings of the trustees, 19 October 1927, p. 70; Monthly Bulletin, April 1927.
at 61 Columbus Street and had lost $25. Simon Lewis described himself as a poor married man, as if the finder would have been more likely to return the money than if he had been single.17 Similarly, a north end carpenter looking for employment in another advertisement mentioned that he had a family of nine to feed.18 This also assumed that the burden constantly weighing on the shoulders of the breadwinner would capture the sympathy of anyone reading the notice. Restrictions on employment on municipal projects discriminated against unmarried men. Single men were not eligible to apply for work on city contracts and in municipal stone crushing; preference was given to married men with families, and especially prospective workers with babies.19 Family responsibilities were also mentioned during wage negotiations, such as the 1929 effort to raise wages of labourers in the building trades. Trade unionists argued that labourers had "the same domestic responsibilities as those enjoying better wages. They have homes to maintain, families to feed, rent to pay, children to clothe and educate, and at 35 c[ents] an hour cannot meet the ordinary expenses of even a decent living."20

17 Evening Mail, 16 May 1923.
18 Evening Mail, 9 July 1921.
19 Evening Mail, 27 July 1921, 29 November 1923.
20 Evening Mail, 18 May 1929.
If the primary responsibility for men was to earn money and support a family, it is necessary to ask how successful Richmond Heights men were in this role. The Department of Labour published in March 1921 a family budget for five based on prices in sixty Canadian cities. The weekly figure of $23.83 which included $13.23 for groceries, $3.98 for fuel and light, and $6.62 for rent would have been extremely difficult to manage in Halifax because rent and the price of food were higher than the national average. This budget provided the bare minimum and did not include other necessities such as clothing, insurance and sundries. The same family budget published in March 1931 reflected deflation over the decade. The necessary weekly sum had dropped to $19.44 with food down to $9.14, fuel and light at $3.24 and rent up to $7.06. The Department of Labour did not claim that this wage was sufficient, but rather that food, fuel and rent composed about 65 per cent of the necessary expenditure of the average family. In 1925, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway employees composed a similar family budget which they

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22 Canada, Labour Gazette, March 1921, p. 634.


described as for "minimum health and decency" which required an annual income of $2,202.37 or $42.35 a week.  

The 1931 census lists average annual earnings of male heads of households and of their families in 34 different occupations in Halifax. Over half of the occupations listed had higher wages in 1931 and for two-thirds of the occupations total family income had increased; however, the majority of families where the male head of household was a carpenter, chauffeur, unskilled labourer, longshoreman, or teamster found themselves with less income than had been the case in 1921.  

While some of these struggling occupations were represented in the tenants of the Hydrostone and among the owner-occupants on the extension streets, they generally composed a small fraction of the residents.

The families of unskilled labourers and longshoremen, who in 1931 had total family earnings of around $13.54 and $14.12 a week could not contemplate the rents in Richmond Heights. While carpenters only averaged $17.83 a week, they were heavily supplemented by family members and had an average accumulated family income of $23.39 a week, and hence appeared among the tenants. Truck drivers, teamsters, and chauffeurs, whose families averaged nearly $19.00 a week occasionally took out leases. Most of the 34 listed occupations had a family

25 Copp, Anatomy of Poverty, p. 159.

26 Canada, Census, V.5, T. 41, pp. 704-705.
income of between $23 and $33 a week and it appears that these occupations included most Richmond Heights residents. This group was composed of railway employees, except for the highest paid engineers and conductors, metal workers, skilled building trades, street railway employees, police, salesmen and most clerks. Rents in the Hydrostone ranged from a low of $25 a month to $40, with an additional two dollars a month if a furnace had been installed.²⁷ It appears that tenants making between $23 and $33 a week could have met the minimum budget issued by the Department of Labour - but not if it only represented 65 per cent of household expenditures and only if they could rely upon full rather than seasonal employment. Furthermore, even when incomes were regular, they rarely proved to be sufficient to meet the highly variable expenses of most ordinary households.

This income level was perilously close to the abyss of poverty, and under fragile economic conditions, many families, through illness, unemployment, or reductions in wages or hours, descended sometimes temporarily and sometimes permanently into the underclass. Families evicted for an inability to pay their rent were often struggling under the combined stresses of low wages and insufficient hours. Bernard Boyle was a sectionman with the CNR earning 35 cents an hour. The most generous estimate might calculate that

²⁷ PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1360, 24 Sebastian Place.
throughout the year he was able to work 300 nine-hour days and almost certainly the actual total would have been less. This meant that Boyle had an annual income of less than $945 or $18.17 a week. 28 Similarly, attempts by the HRC to collect back rent from a former tenant in 1926 were not promising, since the man was supporting a wife and seven children on less than $100 a month, a sum more than that received by most unskilled and semi-skilled workers. 29 Even employees with regular incomes fell behind on their rent. When RCMP officer William Calvin vacated 32 Cabot Place in June 1926, he was $294.50 in arrears. 30 Men with less dependable work were that much more vulnerable. Carpenter Joseph Everett worked "around wherever he can find work and has no regular employer." 31 The former tenants of 22 Kane Place were managing on just nine dollars a week in 1926, as a result of Mr Richards' unemployment and ill health. Mrs Richards explained,

My rent here has been paid. I cannot pay any on my grocery bill only 4 dollars and I've had more than that this week too that means a double payment next week. I'll just write down my expenditure for the week Rent 5.0[0] groceries 8 sometimes 9 dollars, coal 1.50, insurance 1.0[0], sewing machine $1, milk 2.3[0]. If you will just reckon that and than tell me just how a[nd] where I am going to get any

28 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1340, 4 Sebastian Place.
29 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1398, 18 Stairs Place.
30 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.273, 32 Cabot Place.
31 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.411, 20 Columbus Place.
money...to pay.\textsuperscript{32}

Part of the reason that providing was so central to the male identity, was that though it was the wife's responsibility to make do, forcing her to undertake an impossible task would have revealed failure and undermined authority on a daily basis. Mrs Armstrong complained that due to lack of work in the shipyard her husband was only giving her sixteen dollars a week and hence meeting rent was not possible.\textsuperscript{33}

Rising consumer expectations increased the potential for disappointment and increased the likelihood of failure. In a study of divorce in California and New Jersey during this period, Elaine Tyler May has noted that failure to provide was at the root of a number of working class divorces.\textsuperscript{34} Although women had to make do with whatever they had, men were ultimately responsible for the household's financial management. When the Smithers of 34 Cabot Place went into arrears on rent, Joseph "claimed that his wife was running him into debt without his knowledge or sanction." Smithers stated that he earned a good wage of $155 a month with the CNR and from that sum paid $5.00 in insurance, kept $25.00 for his

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.851, 22 Kane Place, 5 April 1926.
\item \textsuperscript{33} PANS, MG 36, R.776, 26 Hennessey Place.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Elaine Tyler May, Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America (Chicago, 1980), pp.146-150. See also Mirra Komarovsky, "The Breakdown of the Husband's Status," in Elizabeth Peck and Joseph Peck, eds., The American Man (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1980).\
\end{itemize}}
"privy purse", and paid to his wife $125 for housekeeping.35

The same responsibility ultimately fell on Michael Flynn who explained in 1929 that

When I took your place 23 Cabot Place, I was a salesman making good money and since that things have changed. Moirs Ltd, where I am employed done away with the Confectionery sales team and I was placed on a delivery team - wages cut and I find it impossible to make endc meet.36

Flynn did not blame his wife or anyone else for his family's financial problem and alone shouldered responsibility for his inability to make do.

Failure to provide for a family and the inability to fulfill the duties of manhood affected individuals differently. As already discussed, some men temporarily or permanently deserted their families. In the case of one Hydrostone resident it appears that severe financial stress and thwarted social mobility eventually led to emotional breakdown. After the war, at the age of 45, discharged English-born William Wilks rented a house at 16 Stanley Place and established a china and crockery shop among the Hydrostone stores on Young Street. The store was a disaster, went quickly into bankruptcy and put Wilks in arrears to the HRC.

35 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.276.72, 34 Cabot Place, note from J.M. Hire. Men were not always aware of their household finances. A tenant of 33 Columbus Place was surprised to find himself behind on his rent as he "thought [it] was being paid by my wife monthly." PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.424 [2 files], 33 Columbus Place, 27 July 1928.

36 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1446, 12 Stanley Place, 3 January 1929.
The family's pretension to upward social mobility, seen in one daughter training as a music teacher and a rare engagement announcement in the newspaper, was firmly capped when the family appeared in the records of the Halifax Welfare Bureau and the Halifax Visiting Dispensary. By 1945, Wilks, at the age of 71, experienced his third nervous breakdown and was reduced to selling newspapers outside the Majestic Theatre.37

All men, regardless of class, were to some extent experiencing what has been referred to as a crisis of masculinity. Around the turn of the century, as women moved into the public sphere in their fight for and ultimate benefit from legal, political and educational reforms, many North Americans began to discuss the feminization of culture. The expanding role for women had direct consequences for men. Female reform movements such as temperance were specifically directed at changing the way in which men behaved. Boys were taught to be men by their mothers and female teachers.38

The construction of masculinity and femininity is relational, and

37 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1450, 16 Stanley Place, R.1869, Rental Accounts by street with section on wooden houses, 1919-1927; DUA, MS 2, 240, Halifax Visiting Dispensary, Record of Patients, 1924-37, #80; Evening Mail, 4 August 1920, 5 May 1926.

so changes for women forced men to re-evaluate the meaning and characteristics of manhood. The reassessment took place at a time when many men felt particularly vulnerable and hence experienced a gender crisis.

On the front page of the Citizen, the local labour newspaper, the question was posed in November 1922, "What will be Man's Place in Society of the Future." According to the paper,

> Every sort of clerkship and factory job is done nowadays by a woman or a child where a man used to earn double the pay and support a family. Where are the men to go if this keeps on? What is to become of family life? Many towns in the United States are already known are "She-towns".39

The combination of an expanded economic role of women and the belief by many men that they were less able to support a family than their grandfathers, jeopardized men's position in society. Yet uncertainty over their role and the tensions of economic instability provided the foundation on which men could build a new and far reaching power. The fear of "She-towns" encouraged men to reach across class boundaries to create cross-class bonds. These cross-class bonds were reinforced as many working-class husbands and fathers adopted what had been the middle class ideal of domesticity and belief in their importance as primary wage earner. Men in Richmond Heights adapted these general principles and transformed them to fit the context of their lives in which male companionship

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39 Citizen, 17 November 1922.
remained important and it was nearly impossible for families to exist on one wage. Ideas about home and work were not the only links between men which reached across classes. Many young men shared the experience of the First World War and took away notions of masculinity as a result of that conflict. The restlessness which caused Bill Vallance to leave his Halifax job for the Sydney Steel Plant was a characteristic of men regardless of class. Finally, most men were in a unique position to participate in leisure activities. Unemployment and underemployment in fact meant that free time expanded and as a result a greater variety of activities could be adopted. Although participation in these activities was usually restricted by class, the 1920s brought greater uniformity in the type of activities undertaken.

Richmond Heights men were involved in many cross class activities. They were not invited into the middle-class Rotary Club, but certainly formed important connections with Rotarians in their roles as scoutmasters and church stewards. Michael O'Brien of 17 Kane Street, leader of the 2nd Halifax Sea Scouts out of St. Joseph's Church, was assistant Scoutmaster of the City Armoury Jamboree in 1927. One of his


Patrol Leaders at this fundraising event was a neighbour from Livingstone Street, William Warren. At United Memorial Church in 1925, four Richmond Heights men acted as Stewards, responsible for financial and management decisions of the congregation. At St. Joseph's, Leo Foot, a blacksmith now employed at Brandam-Henderson led a drama group. Other neighbourhood men accepted leadership roles in cross-class organizations such as the Acadian L’Assomption Society, the Knights of Pythias and the Masonic Order.

Although saloons, the pillar of male working class culture, had disappeared in Halifax with the 1886 liquor legislation which restricted legal drinking to private residences and bona fide guests at hotels, alcohol continued to be available and teetotalers could find an active social life in the various Halifax Catholic Total Abstinence and Benevolent Associations.

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43 PANS, Micro: Churches, Halifax, United Memorial Session Minutes, 1925.

44 Morning Chronicle, 30 September 1920.

45 Halifax City Directory, 1923; Evening Mail, 5 April 1923; PANS, MG 20, Knights of Pythias, Vol. 507.

46 Fingard, The Dark Side of Life, p. 27; Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920 (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 35-64. Fred Thompson describes the drinking habits of the man who was president of the Halifax Trades and Labor Council for most of the decade. DUA, MS 10, 2, Social Radicalism Collection: Fred W. Thompson. A.1, Correspondence: Fred W. Thompson to J. Bell,
As much as tensions surrounding changing gender ideals united all men, class differences remained important. The most obvious examples of class based activity which attracted Richmond Heights men were trade unions and labour politics. Neighbourhood men joined and led unions, sat as labour politicians on City Council, and organized the unemployed. Robert Daw of Cabot Street sat as the labour alderman for Ward 6 from 1922 to 1927 and his nomination forms indicate support from neighbours. Other Richmond Heights men were prominent in the short-lived Marine Trades and Labor Federation at the Shipyards, the Carpenters, Barbers, Street Railway, and the Firemen and Railway Engineers Union.47

Involvement in the labour movement could meet not only political and economic interests but also social needs. Local labour activist and radical Ronald MacDonald explained his involvement in a wide range of labour activities as a hobby. Before his permanent departure from the city in 1924, the machinist explained that "He liked the Labor movement [and] it was a hobby to him. He had spent time and money on it, he had not been interested in much else."48

47 Evening Mail, 11 March 1927; Citizen, 4 July 1919, 29 August 1919, 18 March 1921, 5 June 1925, 14 April 1922; PANS, MG 36, HPC, R.1077, 11 Merkel Place.

48 Citizen, 4 July 1924.
Union and labour politics in Halifax in the 1920s were marked by a cycle of strength, fragmentation, apathy, and resurrection. The leadership of the economic and political organizations overlapped and was composed of relatively few men who remained in permanent executive positions until either death, departure from the city, or revitalization of the labour movement during the Second World War removed them. Even in the 1920s, this leadership was not composed of young men, and the generational differences were a recurring theme in the complaints of the older men. E.E. Pride, an organizer for the American Federation of Labor with 23 years of experience in the local labour movement, commented in 1929 that

Today the young man is quite satisfied with paying his dues, but that is as far as his interests in the Union goes. Older men understand better the value of unions and because of their interest in all union matters, they, therefore, come in for the great share of the responsibility and work.49

In the same manner, another trade unionist complained that modern urban living provided too many other distractions and alternative ways of spending leisure time and as a result the labour movement suffered.

In these days of flivvers, flappers, and road houses, horse races and prohibition, I find it a difficult matter to secure volunteer workers for the interests of the Union. "Let George do it" seems to be the universal cry. Most of our members want increased wages and better conditions, but do

49 Evening Mail, 21 August 1929.
not want to make any personal effort.  

The lack of personal effort appears to have represented a generational split, as younger men did not step forward to take over union duties.

The decade began with a high level of labour organization in the city. Indeed, in 1920 Halifax boasted 8,000 unionized workers and the fourth largest number of workers organized in the entire country.  

The economic depression which began in the summer of 1920 played havoc with local employment and many workers faced unemployment and or wage reductions which wiped out post war victories. Charters and locals lapsed and disintegrated as members left town in search of better prospects. By the end of the decade, however, there was a resurgence of organization as at least twelve unions reorganized bringing the total 1929 union membership to 3,000 in 43 different unions.  

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50 Evening Mail, 21 August 1929.

51 Canada, Department of Labour, Tenth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1920 (Ottawa, 1921), p. 276. Only Montreal, Toronto and Quebec City could boast more organized workers.

52 The organizations reorganized included the Blacksmiths (Evening Mail, 22 July 1929), Labourers (Evening Mail 18 May, 18 August 1928; Citizen, 20 April 1928), Barbers (Evening Mail, 11 May, 15 August 1928), Theatre and Stage Employees (Citizen, 9 August 1929), Plasterers (Evening Mail, 8 April 1927), Fish Handlers (Citizen, 29 June, 21 December 1928; Evening Mail, 28 January 1929, Shipyard Workers (Citizen, 2 November 1928; Evening Mail, 31 October 1928), Teamsters and Chauffeurs (Citizen, 1, 15 June 1928), Telegraph Operators (Evening Mail, 9 September 1929), Bakers (Evening Mail, 6 November 1929) and Musicians (Evening Mail, 6 August 1929). Department of Labor, Twentieth Annual Report on Labor
Not only did unions fall apart in mid decade, but so did the umbrella organization, the Halifax District Trades and Labor Council. The integration of economics and politics briefly in the post-war labour revolt created permanent schisms between radicals and conservatives on the Council. In 1926, the Communists finally succeeded in taking over the organization and nearly every major union in the city withdrew. The resurrected Labor Council of 1927 was very different, founded on an apolitical premise and able to boast that it knew "no religion, no nationality, no politics and no color line." While this reduced the possible impact the Council could have upon its members' consciousness, it would be difficult to deny its material success with a growth in union membership and the purchase of a labour temple in 1929.

But this success had a cost. At the centre of the revitalized Labour Day celebrations hosted by the Halifax Trades and Labor Council in 1927 was the first "Miss Nova Scotia Beauty Contest" which attracted over a thousand spectators to McNab's Island. The Halifax Trades and Labor Organizations in Canada, 1930 (Ottawa, 1931), T.6, p. 214.


54 Evening Mail, 8 September 1928.

55 Evening Mail, 3, 6 September 1927.
Council now appeared little different from the city's other fraternal societies and service clubs. As part of the fund raising drive for the labour temple, the council hosted an "Industrial, Auto and Fashion Show" in November 1928. The show displayed a bizarre mix of contemporary commercialism and traditional indigenous culture. Alongside the automobiles and the fashion show were demonstrations of old time cloth making on handlooms, a display of hooked rugs and mats and a fiddlers' contest.56 This jumbled exhibition is particularly interesting because of its potential appeal to all tastes regardless of age, gender, or class.

Like the service clubs of the middle class, unions also participated in community services. For instance, the tramway employees participated as a group in an unsuccessful search for a lost boy in 1921 and the painters' union volunteered to paint the old Dutch Church in 1927.57 This type of public relations activity was very different from the practice of self-help or mutual assistance. As unions abandoned politics and adopted activities with mass appeal they appeared to be on the road to the secular union.

The concept of a secular union, a labour organization without direct connections to work, was raised several times in the possible formation of a workingman's club for Richmond

56 Evening Mail, 13 October 1928.
57 Evening Mail, 29 July 1921, 10 December 1927.
Heights residents. In the winter of 1921, the joy of domesticity may have been wearing thin as it was suggested that one of the vacant stores in the Hydrostone Block be turned into a club where men could "gather for quiet evenings of cards, chess or dominos, away from home."58 Again in 1924, this proposal was raised "by a number of Richmond Heights residents," but the continued poor economy precluded the expense.59 Unions had to serve as the workingman's club and in 1928 the labour movement was finally able to achieve the long-term goal of purchasing a labour temple which fulfilled a primarily social function.60

The other explicit working-class image of male leisure activities pertained to young men and their actions as hoodlums and gang members. In this instance, class, gender and age intersected to create an apparently unique culture based upon male bonding and exploration of the boundaries of masculinity through courage, cunning, and nonconformity.61

The sons of Richmond Heights were regularly noted as a bad lot. Juvenile vandals cut down a clothes line on Kane

58 Evening Mail, 22 December 1921.
59 Evening Mail, 13 November 1924.
60 Halifax District Trades and Labor Council Journal 1928.
Street and placed the clothes on the front step. A report concluded that "the fact that the clothes were not stolen proves that this is the work of juveniles who seem to find pleasure from such mad pranks which cause so much annoyance to mothers of baby children." Other regular pranks included stealing milk bottles and groceries left at back doors and stealing rides by jumping on the rear of tram cars. A "gang of hoodlums in the Hydrostone" between the ages of 16 and 20, also annoyed residents by interfering with shoppers in the Hydrostone Block, breaking fences, throwing stones through windows and congregating on nearby Fort Needham to "sing and shout at all hours of the night...". The most persistent complaints, however, referred to "garden vandalism." The boys were blamed for stealing tulip bulbs and destroying trees. During the summer of 1921, garden vandalism in the neighbourhood was so severe that the Relief Commission had to hire a watchman for regular patrol. Army pensioner William Colt of 2 Hennessey Place seemed to have been a regular victim of the boy's actions. A person or persons unknown ignored his

62 Evening Mail, 25 March 1925.

63 Evening Mail, 13 July 1922, 22 July 1926 and 9 October 1928.

64 Evening Mail, 1 October 1924, 20 April 1926, 25 September 1928; PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.842, 13 Kane Place, R.861, 18 Kane Place, misfiled, R.983, 3 Livingstone Place, R.1358, 22 Sebastian Place.

65 Evening Mail, 21 July 1921.
sign to "Have a Heart and Keep off Grass" and removed all the plants from his yard in 1921. It was again noted in 1924 and 1929 that his garden was "ravaged by hoodlums."66

High unemployment would have been particularly hard on young boys who had finished school and were not able to find work. Unlike their sisters, who could always enter domestic service at worst, teenage boys had little choice. Classes at Alexander McKay school were disrupted during the winter of 1923 by the noise of "large boys who do not go to school, who skate while school is in session."67 Several residents of Richmond Heights noted that the long unemployment of their teenage boys had resulted in getting behind in rent. The Bothwells who resided at 22 Sebastian Place throughout the decade went into arrears when son "Buster" lost his job.68 Similarly, Mrs Gunn wrote that "the oldest boy has not been able to get work for a year" and that this had made it impossible to begin paying any of the rent owed.69 During William Gunn's period of unemployment, he had in fact been charged with assault after a snowball he threw knocked out two teeth of another boy.70

66 Evening Mail, 19 June 1924, 18 July 1929.
67 Evening Mail, 9 February 1923.
68 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1358, 22 Sebastian Place, 27 April 1927.
69 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.511, 12 Duffus, 17 October 1921.
70 Evening Mail, 2 February 1921.
The frustration of being denied the opportunity to become a man, as poor economic conditions blocked access to work and made it impossible to express masculinity through wage earning, encouraged some Richmond Heights adolescents to express themselves in what was considered a deviant manner. Most of the activity was directed against property or violated the regulation of public space.\(^{71}\) This behaviour alone appears to have had no cross class equivalent but this could be explained by the specialized group involved and the fact that middle class adolescent males would be less likely to face youth unemployment as their education lasted longer. Vandalism and gang activities were only one aspect of working-class male adolescent culture. Teenage boys also participated in sports in much the same manner as all men.

Absorption in sports, as athletes or spectators, was characteristic of men across all classes, though the activities were usually class based. Sport could reinforce class loyalties such as the baseball games organized during the Building Trades Strike of 1919, when various building trades scheduled afternoon games to keep up the spirits of striking workers.\(^{72}\) The popularity of sport among the city's workers was also evident in the central role it played in

\(^{71}\) Neil Sutherland, Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus (Toronto, 1976), pp. 95-96.

\(^{72}\) Citizen, 9 May 1919.
annual labour day activities.

Leisure and work were not completely distinct as company teams and leagues were evident throughout the city. Bowling was a particularly popular company sport as the age and physical condition of the employee did not affect ability to participate.\textsuperscript{73} Moirs operated an inter-departmental bowling league and participated in the City Commercial League which had twenty teams representing a wide range of businesses and factories.\textsuperscript{74} Other commercial leagues were less successful as in 1921 baseball had only five teams and hockey only three.\textsuperscript{75} A Halifax Commercial Baseball League was reorganized in 1928 with six teams playing Tuesday and Thursday evenings on the Commons.\textsuperscript{76} Commercial leagues and intramural sports were tied to local employment levels. High employment at the Shipyards in early 1921 meant that hockey games between the boilermakers and the machinists could be organized.\textsuperscript{77}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{74} \textit{Evening Mail}, 28 October, 1 December 1926, 8 October 1927.
  \item \textsuperscript{75} \textit{Evening Mail}, 14 January, 18 April 1921.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} \textit{Halifax Chronicle}, 5, 6 June 1928. The six teams represented the Herald and \textit{Mail}, Shipyards, Navy, Moirs, CNR and \textit{Halifax Chronicle}.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} \textit{Evening Mail}, 19 February 1921.
\end{itemize}
Company picnics, such as the annual events hosted by Eaton's, the CNR, or MT&T always had a sports component such as the annual baseball game between the Eaton's furniture and main stores. At the MT&T picnic, job skills and athletic competition merged as male employees competed against each other in job-related events such as pole climbing, cable splicing, and line throwing.

Baseball was the most popular working-class sport as it was inexpensive with practically no special equipment or facilities and took relatively little time to play or watch. Furthermore, as a game it encouraged what Colin Howell has described as "manly virtue" - the characteristics of courage, strength, agility, teamwork, decision-making and foresight.

In Halifax, spectator baseball was dominated by the Twilight League which played on the North Commons Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings during the 1920s. The League was composed of six teams, roughly based on the working class

78 Evening Mail, 9 July 1928.
79 Monthly Bulletin, August 1920
80 Expense was an important factor in the feasibility of sport. In 1922 the "proposal to form outlaw hockey league falls through. The officials regret to report that owing to the large expense which would be entailed in securing the rink and fitting out the teams (the boys being unable to stand any expense owing to unemployment) the project had to be abandoned." Evening Mail, 13 January 1922.
North End neighbourhoods, with important exceptions. The Federals and St. Agnes' represented the west end, the Casinos and St. Patrick's, the North End and the Willow Parks and St Joseph's, the far North End, including Richmond Heights. The Catholic teams corresponded to parishes and were associated with the amateur athletic clubs which operated from their gymnasiums. Twilight League matches on the Commons were free of charge and attracted as many as 2,000 fans.

In contrast to the success of the Twilight League was the decline of the Halifax Senior Amateur Baseball League. The league was organized in 1920 and was composed of four teams representing two of the city's amateur athletic clubs, the Wanderers and the Crescents, the Great War Veteran's Association and a Dartmouth team. Games, held in the Wanderer's Grounds with 25 cents charged and an extra ten cent fee to sit in the grandstand or bleachers, were barely able to attract 500 fans. The Crescents dropped out of the league in 1925 and in the following season the league did not

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82 A Stairs Street man played for the west end Federals and St. Agnes team.

83 Daily Echo, 30 May 1925 reported 1,800 people. 1 June 1925 reported 1500 fans. Halifax Chronicle, 25 May 1927 a crowd of 2,000.

84 Daily Echo, 21, 28 April 1925.

85 Daily Echo, 28 April, 1 June 1925.
operate. The Twilight League was able to attract the fans because of a combination of the free participation, the quality of baseball and the fact that many of the players on the six teams would have been known to North End residents. Two Richmond Heights residents were among these baseball stars. Leo Churchill of Livingstone Street was an athlete with the Shamrock Amateur Athletics Club and manager of the North End Soft Ball League. Similarly, Nelson Comeau, a fireman living on Stairs Street, played baseball throughout the twenties in the Twilight League on both the Federals and St. Agnes teams before a work-related accident in 1930 ended his sport career. Even when sports were supposedly separated from work, employment could touch upon leisure. Despite the tremendous appeal of organized sports, the popularity of hunting and fishing may offer special insight into local notions of manhood. Masculinity was not only tied to work and the ability to support a family, but for the

86 Daily Echo, 23 May 1925; Morning Chronicle, 10 May 1926; Halifax Chronicle, 10 May 1927.
87 Mail-Star, 6 March 1957.
88 Mail-Star, 8 March 1955.
respectable working-class masculinity was also tied to nature. Edward Rotundo has drawn attention to the relationship between the popular misunderstanding of Darwin's concept of evolution and the widespread idea that saw man as animal. Rotundo noted that some men literally accepted the idea that "they were part animal. They left their civilized urban environment for the woods and the Western plains, hoping to cultivate their own 'natural' masculine strength and aggressiveness." Total escape from their daily life was not an option for Richmond Heights men, but with the number of woods, lakes and streams nearby, battling nature with a rod or gun was a possibility.

Hunting and fishing were the antithesis of work in a warehouse or shipyard and can be regarded as an alternative to modern industrial capitalism, to the de-skilling of work, to life in the city, and to the rise of domesticity. They played upon the attractiveness of a rural nostalgia, as seen in the very idea of the garden suburb, in which man conquered nature. At the same time, hunting and fishing, like the garden, offered an escape from wide-spread domesticity. They reinforced what was manly about men in the same way that the boy scout movement also hoped to create or preserve men by teaching about nature and outdoor survival skills in the urban


Recreational hunting and fishing could be considered either work or play, and yet for men such as Bill Vallance it was their favourite leisure activity. Both sports had in fact many parallels with work as they required a specialized skill or knowledge and could feed the family in a manner similar to the pay packet. Like most forms of male employment, hunting and fishing excluded women. The sports were generally a communal activity, yet it was the achievement of the individual in the kill or the catch that was important. In this manner, hunting and fishing transform some of the characteristics of an older form of work into play.

The popularity of fishing in Richmond Heights was suggested by the large assortment of fishing gear available at the Hydrostone Hardware store and the owner's annual advertisement of this fact. Other advertisers in the labour paper indicate that the intended audience might be interested in fishing and hunting supplies. A chandlery on Water Street advertised tents, blankets and kit bags, a grocery store suitable fishing food, and sporting goods stores, guns and

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93 Citizen, 29 April, 12 May 1927, 28 April 1928, 3, 31 May 1929.
ammunition.94

Fishing was particularly widespread, since Halifax was situated close to "simply hundreds of lakes and streams... and in nearly all of them trout are plentiful."95 Fishing also had the advantage of being inexpensive to practice and, unlike shooting, could be carried out on a Sunday. The trout season lasted from May to October with the best catches in the first two weeks of May. The widespread practice of Sunday fishing was noted in the 1929 debate around Sunday tennis. The Citizen replied that "There is no more harm in that than in going blueberrying or trout fishing, but it seems to me that the class who play tennis usually have time to enjoy the game every day in the week, while the other class have but one day and it is Sunday."96 The catches of north end anglers were occasionally referred to in the newspapers but the activity may have been so great a part of daily life that it

94 Citizen, 20 April 1923, 4 October 1924, 24 April, 15 May 1925, 4 May 1928.

95 Halifax Board of Trade, "Halifax, Fishing All Summer in Lake, Stream and Sea," (Halifax, 1909). See Edward Beck, Sporting Guide to Nova Scotia (Halifax 1909) and Dominion Atlantic Railway, Hunting and Fishing in Nova Scotia (Halifax, 1919). In addition, Harry Piers' journals often describe his fishing expeditions to nearby lakes in Spryfield, Harrietsfield and Bedford. PANS, MG 1, Vols. 1046-1051.

96 Citizen, 17 May 1929.
Hunting would have been difficult for many Richmond Heights residents since shooting was forbidden on Sunday, the primary day for recreation. However, rabbits and partridges could be shot nearby and did not require an entire day outing. Moose were the ultimate prize and throughout the decade between 844 and 1,780 big game licenses were purchased annually by residents of Halifax County alone. The perception of the sportsman as tourist appears to have been exaggerated as non-resident big game hunting was minimal, and only 100 non-resident licenses were granted in the years.

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97 The Evening Mail reported that railway worker Edward Hilton, caught a five pound salmon on fishing trip. 22 May 1924. See also 25 May 1922, 12 May 1926 and Robert Daw off on a fishing trip, Daily Star, 17 April 1927.

98 Number of Big Game Licenses and Moose Reported Killed in Halifax County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Moose Killed</th>
<th>Moose Killed Prov</th>
<th>Big Game Licenses</th>
<th>Big Game Licenses Prov</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>1,480</td>
<td>1,780</td>
<td>9,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>1,156</td>
<td>1,446</td>
<td>6,279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>5,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>5,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>5,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>1,347</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>1,349</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>1,288</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

between 1924-26. Most sportsmen in the province were in fact local residents and were drawn from all classes.

Other hobbies were also connected to nature. Henry Sinclair, resident of 6 Sebastian Place, raised African owls in an owlery covering nearly the space of an entire lot on Gottingen Street. Sinclair owned approximately 125 birds in 1927 and had swept the bird competition at the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto where his owls won 26 out of the 28 categories in which they competed including best bird.100

Gardens were more common and popular among men in Richmond Heights and were actively encouraged by the HRC, local newspapers, and the Halifax-Massachusetts Health Commission.101 The HRC, in fact, presented annual prizes of $15, $10 and $5 for the best garden in the neighbourhood and local observers noted that "No sooner have fathers and husbands finished suppers that they are out planting, raking and hoeing."102 Within the Hydrostone, the virtual absence of property meant that the tiny front yards were often dug up in order to provide either vegetable or flower gardens.103

100 Daily Star, 22 January 1927.
101 Evening Mail, 23 July 1925.
102 Evening Mail, 6 May 1921, 1 June 1922.
103 Evening Mail, 11 September 1923, 12 and 19 August 1926.
Flower gardens on Livingstone Place in the summer of 1928, alive with dahlias, gladioli and sweet peas, attracted visitors to the neighbourhood and encouraged competition among male gardeners. An excited gardener spending the winter with his son in Massachusetts ended a letter to the Commission with a spirited "so roll on spring and then HO! for the Garden." The enthusiasm for gardening could also bring neighbours together as the limited space available encouraged neighbours to cooperate and join their front plots.

The popularity of gardening and the rise of domesticity for men poses an interesting question about the control of space within the household. The garden was a liminal area, distinct yet attached to the home where men could exercise independence apart from their spouse. There were also connections between gardening and rural nostalgia, apparent in the concept of the garden suburb and the continued popularity of fishing and hunting, and the independent producer ideology held by many skilled workers. Through individual skilled effort, men were able to challenge nature and cultivate the urban geography.

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105 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.748, 2 Hennessey Place.

106 Evening Mail, 21 May 1921.
There was no language available to recognize male contribution to domestic production and activities such as alcohol production, gardening, hunting and fishing were described as hobbies or leisure activities. These activities in fact contributed to the welfare of the household and improved the standard of living of its members. Even puttering, an activity which may have been restricted to the working class of Britain and North America, improved the living conditions of household members and reflected the presence of house-pride. Indeed, the work of men and women was so distinct that there was no way of conceptualizing or expressing non-waged production by the urban, working-class male within the domestic sphere.

A perception of the world which completely separated the work of men and women distorts important connections within the household. At the same time, under the economic structure of advanced industrial capitalism all men had much more in common beyond the household. The age-old characteristics of strength and skill were replaced with a new kind of manhood based on the ability to support a family, a test which depended as much on general economic trends and luck as any abilities or qualities the individual might possess. It was

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108 It is interesting to note that in the past seventy years a similar phenomenon has occurred to female activities such as baking or sewing which once would have composed a part of domestic production and now are considered hobbies.
no wonder that many men were attracted to the ideas of rural nostalgia. Heroes such as baseball star Babe Ruth, boxer Joe Louis, and pilot Charles Lindbergh continued to achieve their goals through the traditional qualities of masculinity such as bravery, skill, strength, and individualism.

By the 1920s manhood was clearly open to challenge. Femininity, of course, was also changing but women in a time of confusing ideals, could ultimately fall back on their reproductive role. Regardless of changes occurring in the economic, political and social spheres, women were still first and foremost mothers. Men and even fathers did not carry this permanent social and biological label. In times of gender confusion, the role of mother may have actually provided an anchor, offering a form of personal security for women which excluded their brothers, husbands, fathers and sons.

Leisure and work established common links among all men, even though the actual activities often continued to take place in class-based social groupings. This class-based sociability of men, preserved if not a separate class culture then a distinct male working-class social environment. These relationships coexisted with domesticity since they did not touch upon the private world of home. The strength of these social bonds was important and should not be underestimated for they did foster a feeling of community and shared

109 Stearns, Be A Man, p. 77.
experience and were able to preserve a male working class identity against the onslaught of mass culture.
Chapter Seven

Young Women

The enduring icon of the 1920s in North America is a young woman. Class does not easily adhere to images of flappers, "business girls," or boyish athletes and though class by no means disappeared, based solely upon the appearance of young working-class women, a new identity seems to have emerged which eclipsed class and focused upon age and gender. In fact, one English contemporary noted that the most important change in female fashion in the 1920s was not the bobbed hair, short skirt or "boyish" appearance, but rather the increasing difficulty of determining "what class someone belonged to by looking at their clothes".¹ Indeed, one of the reasons "the girl of the new day" attracted so much attention was the dramatic difference between her and her pre-war older sister. Did fashion trends, new ideals of feminine beauty, and the veneer of classlessness indicate anything more than new style or were they representative of a more profound societal transformation? For the daughters and female boarders of Richmond Heights, the changes in their appearance represented the most immediate effects of new opportunities.

available to them in the expanding low-white collar sector and their personal integration into mass consumer culture. As a result, many north Halifax young women looked, acted, and perhaps even spoke, differently.

The changing image of young women was tied to their position in the labour force. Female workplace participation cannot be determined in terms of the number of working women, since the percentage of women in the total labour force increased only gradually between 1911-31. (Table 7.1) In fact, the Halifax experience for wage-earning women between 1920 and 1930 concurs with the conclusions of American historian Lisa Duggan who has stated that during the decade, the expansion of the female work force slowed to a virtual stop destroying the possibility of continuing growth towards economic self-sufficiency for women.2 Historians have emphasized female participation in the labour market during the 1920s, but the Halifax example suggests an actual decline in employment for the under 25 year old age group who composed nearly half of the female work-force.3 Any growth in female employment was


Table 7.1
Female Labour and the Halifax Workforce, 1911-31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>population of Halifax</td>
<td>46,619</td>
<td>58,372</td>
<td>59,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total workforce</td>
<td>13,784</td>
<td>23,063</td>
<td>23,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total female workforce</td>
<td>4,487</td>
<td>5,888</td>
<td>6,188*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of workforce female</td>
<td>32.55%</td>
<td>25.53%</td>
<td>26.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female workforce 15-24</td>
<td>2,320</td>
<td>3,053</td>
<td>2,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of female workforce 15-24</td>
<td>51.70%</td>
<td>51.85%</td>
<td>41.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

achieved by women over the age of 25.

Concentration on the number of employed women has obscured the most influential trend in the structure of the female labour market between 1911 and 1931, the shift in the occupational sectors most likely to employ women. (Table 7.2)

In 1911, 23 per cent of wage-earning women were employed in manufacturing, a sector which by 1931 accounted for only eight per cent of wage-earning women. Fewer women still were involved in the actual manufacturing occupations within the industry. When the 1931 census provided for the first time a distinction between employment in economic and occupational sectors, the category "clerical" immediately claimed 23.90 per cent of Halifax female wage earners. (Table 7.3)

New opportunities emerging in the clerical, retail and service sectors by 1931, did not dislodge domestic service from its long-established position as single most important female occupation. 4 Private domestic service still employed nearly a third of the under twenty-five female work-force in 1931. This dominance contributes to a false impression of the employment opportunities available for urban working-class daughters. It appears to have been the case that few women

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4 In England the number of domestic servants also remained high and increased 1920-1931 to 23 per cent of wage earning women. Pam Taylor, "Daughter and Mothers - Maids and Mistresses: Domestic Service Between the Wars" in John Clarke, Chas Critcher, and Richard Johnson, e.s., Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory (New York, 1979), p. 121.
Table 7.25

Female Employment in Halifax by Economic Sector, 1911-1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>.15%</td>
<td>.02%</td>
<td>.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manufacturing</td>
<td>22.96%</td>
<td>13.03%</td>
<td>8.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power &amp; light</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
<td>5.72%</td>
<td>5.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construction</td>
<td>.31%</td>
<td>.63%</td>
<td>.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trade</td>
<td>16.54%</td>
<td>19.38%</td>
<td>17.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finance</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>4.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>service</td>
<td>58.37%</td>
<td>51.68%</td>
<td>62.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.35%</td>
<td>.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.36
Female Employment in Halifax by Occupational Sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>.15%</td>
<td>.04%</td>
<td>.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manufacturing</td>
<td>22.63%</td>
<td>10.39%</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clerical</td>
<td>8.59%</td>
<td>23.64%</td>
<td>23.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
<td>3.21%</td>
<td>2.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warehousing</td>
<td>12.67%</td>
<td>14.79%</td>
<td>10.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finance</td>
<td>.08%</td>
<td>.13%</td>
<td>.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>service</td>
<td>54.78%</td>
<td>47.40%</td>
<td>54.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>.30%</td>
<td>.50%</td>
<td>.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

from Richmond Heights were involved in the largest female occupation. Of the 327 female career listings which appeared in the city directories between 1920 and 1929, only 17 women were listed in domestic service though this figure is probably artificially low since some women may have engaged in this type of work on a part-time or temporary basis, and so may not have shown up in the count. Notwithstanding, the majority of women in domestic service were probably resident housekeepers for unmarried male relatives and the six women listed as "maids" with employment addresses represented only the smallest proportion of wage earning women.

Most young women employed in domestic service were probably migrants from rural areas of the region without family in the city. The pull of women to Halifax created a surplus between the ages of 15 and 30 and in 1921, these women composed nearly a third of all women in the city. No doubt this figure is inflated by male out-migration. Joanne Meyerowitz's study of Chicago women has pointed to a large body of literature demonstrating the dominance of young women in short-distance migrations from rural to urban centres.7 The same no doubt holds true for Halifax and Richmond Heights.

since low wages meant it was difficult for young women without family to subsidize room and board to support themselves, but domestic servants who received room and board could survive on their 1921 average annual salary of $230. The low prestige and isolation of domestic service would not have appealed to Halifax women who had the option of living inexpensively with their family and surviving on low wages.

The decline of domestic service reinforced perceptions of classlessness since wage employees could claim an independence unattainable by those in service. The transfer of women from domestic service also elevated women as consumers because they received all of their earnings in cash rather than in a combination of cash and subsistence. Finally, occupational change permitted the development of a collective workplace culture.

Other employment opportunities were less isolated, and by their communal nature

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9 For this trend in a slightly earlier period see PANS, MG 20, Halifax Local Council of Women, Vol. 539, 3, 1909-1911, "Application for Position" section in the Halifax Local Council of Women's Welcome Hostel Registry.

inadvertently promoted a sociability impossible in the isolation of private homes.

If the daughters and boarders of Richmond Heights were unlikely to be found in domestic service, where were they employed? Did the employment of female labour in a residential working-class neighbourhood differ from the overall city statistics? To answer these questions we must turn to an unsatisfactory source, that of the annual city directories. Undoubtedly, these directories missed many male heads of household among this transitory population and their attention to young women was probably even more remiss. Nevertheless, the directories do provide the names, occupations and addresses of 327 individual employed females between 1920 and 1929. The largest number of women, approximately one in three, was engaged in trade or retail. Employment in manufacturing was concentrated at Moirs which employed 66 women. In addition, 13 women were listed as tailoresses, nine as laundry workers, eight in other assorted manufacturing positions, and six in the skilled trades of bookbinding or printing. The growing importance of clerical positions was demonstrated by the 31 women listed as stenographers, 25 as operators, and 17 as assorted non-retail clerks. Not all women were employed in traditional working class occupations, as the directory lists seven teachers, six nurses and one doctor. These occupations indicated specialized training and possible upward mobility, but perhaps
most importantly the continuing residency of young women with their families.

Breakdown of directory listings on a year by year basis provides 625 listings. When these are further broken down into occupational sectors, they suggest the growth of service and trade at the expense of manufacturing. (Table 7.4) Service occupations include waitresses, laundry workers, government clerks, teachers and nurses. When occupations are broken down in the same manner on an annual basis, according to the alternative categories of blue collar, lower-white collar, and white collar, we see most clearly the importance of the lower-white collar sector. (Table 7.5) By the second half of the decade, half of the employed women were in lower-white collar occupations such as sales clerks, operators, and stenographers.

As the largest single employer of female labour in Richmond Heights, Moirs warrants a brief examination both because of its economic importance and its continuity with traditional opportunities offered to working-class women. Moirs was not only the most important employer for the neighbourhood but after the destruction of the cotton factory in the explosion, Moirs was the single most important employer of female labour in the city. This Halifax firm was originally founded in 1816 as a bakery. At the turn of the century, progressive management concentrated the company in
### Table 7.4

**Occupations of Richmond Heights Females Based Upon Halifax City Directories, 1920-1929.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>trad</th>
<th>man</th>
<th>tran</th>
<th>fin</th>
<th>ser</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>230</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Occupations of Richmond Heights Female by Economic Sector as Percentage Based Upon Halifax City Directories, 1920-1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>trad</th>
<th>man</th>
<th>tran</th>
<th>fin</th>
<th>ser</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 trad = trade
 man = manufacturing
 tran = transportation
 fin = finance
 ser = service
Table 7.5
Richmond Heights Women Engaged in Blue Collar, Lower-White Collar and White Collar Employment
Based Upon Halifax City Directories, 1920-1929.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>blue collar</th>
<th>lower white collar</th>
<th>white collar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the manufacture of chocolates and confectionery. This specialization succeeded and in November 1927 Moirs opened a new factory which could justly claim to be the tallest commercial building in the Maritimes and the largest candy factory in the country. The payroll of May 1929 included 1,100 employees and if census ratios remained constant at least half would have been female.

Confectionery manufacture depended on inexpensive female labour. Low wages were compounded in the industry by unpleasant working conditions. Many found the unavoidable smell of chocolate sweetly sickening and factory temperatures probably were less than 65 degrees to create the optimal conditions required for the chocolate to harden. Chocolate dipping was the most prestigious and skilled position open to women in the factory and at Moirs a two year apprenticeship was necessary. Work was evaluated by an hourly wage or piece work rate with every employee being subject to fines of ten

12 Evening Mail, 19 November 1927.
cents a pound for imperfect product. Wages at Moirs were very low: 19-year-old Annie May Cunningham was reported to have been earning $5.23 a week in 1918. Hours were irregular and depending on seasonal demand, the factory operated a night shift or long overtime or alternatively was closed with layoffs. It is difficult to trace job turnover, but in addition to the many Richmond Heights women who passed through Moirs and then disappeared from the record, at least six left positions at Moirs for alternative employment in retail, and one left the firm for waitressing. There were only two documented cases of women leaving other places of employment for Moirs, and both women were in the declining millinery trade. Parallels might be drawn between young women's rejection of work at Moirs and in domestic service. Although Moirs could offer more than the isolation of housework, its poor pay, tedious work and uncomfortable working conditions might not have been as attractive and were definitely not as prestigious as white collar work.

As a large employer during the 1920s, it is not surprising that Moirs became involved in the welfare

15 Myers, "Female Industrial Workers," p. 15.

16 PANS, MG 36, HRC, C.32.3E, Children's Department.

17 Moirs double shift day and night, Evening Mail, 18 July 1927; Nova Scotia, JHA, 1910, Appendix 26, "Report of the Commission on the Hours of Labor."

18 Halifax City Directory, 1919-1929.
capitalism movement. The particular flavour adopted reflected its largely female work-force. Most welfare programs were designed for men in order to help acquire property or to provide benefits for their families when the providers were unable to work. Property and security would create a stable work-force. Women, on the other hand, rarely held property and were not supposed to be responsible for dependents. Therefore, Moirs concentrated on the third component of welfare capitalism, recreation, providing a library, first aid room, and company orchestra and planning a lunch room where women could eat hot meals at cost. The company emphasized cultural activities and ignored potential benefit programs such as the sick benefits and pensions adopted at MT&T. Dance classes for employees were held weekly in the recreation rooms of the Moirs Welfare Bureau. During the summer on Saturday afternoon, the female employees of some departments were taken on outings. Within the

19 Evening Mail, 19 November 1927.
21 Citizen, 6 August 1927.
22 DUA, MS 4, 180, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph, H 301, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph Personnel Benefits.
23 Evening Mail, 26 January 1927.
24 Evening Mail, 19 June 1926, 11 July 1927.
company were "clubs" whose membership was based on gender and occupation. The females who constituted the Pyramid Builders (Paper Box Department) and the Triangle and Merrymakers Clubs hosted theme dances and participated in athletics. The YWCA offered its camp at Hubbards to the Moirs Welfare Bureau for the Dominion Day weekend of 1927 and forty girls played on the South Shore. Perhaps by emphasising recreational activities and creating a factory based social life, Moirs was trying to offset its unattractive working conditions and compensate workers for the low prestige of the work. Dances and picnics, however, were not sufficient counter weights and women left the factory for sales positions as clerking became available.

Within the Richmond Heights neighbourhood women found employment in a narrow range of occupations. An exception was Dr. Florence J. Murray, a recent graduate of the Dalhousie Medical School who was trying to save money to repay her family for educational expenses before leaving as a medical missionary to Korea. The presence of Murray in the neighbourhood supports its claim of respectability and demonstrates the confusion that family often brings to generalizations about class. Although Murray was a physician and employed at Dalhousie as a demonstrator in anatomy she had

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25 Evening Mail, 9 May 1927, 16 February 1927.
26 Evening Mail, 5 May 1927.
two brothers employed at the Halifax Shipyards.

The case of Murray reminds us that women's work outside the home did not exclude young women from domestic responsibilities or family pressures. Recent work by Carolyn Strange and Cynthia Wright has suggested that labour historians have neglected the domestic responsibilities of female wage earners by assuming that young single women worked a "single day". According to Strange and Wright "Campaigns over the moral and social implications of working women's leisure in early-twentieth century North America are apt to give the erroneous impression that single women's lives beyond the workplace were filled with nothing but fun."28 Certainly some female wage earners were burdened with a great deal of domestic responsibility while at the opposite extreme others may have escaped such responsibility entirely.29 Most young women probably fell somewhere in the middle.

The death of a mother or a disruption of household operations due to childbirth or illness affected the domestic


responsibilities of young women. Gladys McTier's mother died from complications after the explosion and an accident in the railway yard killed her father when she was twelve. Thereafter, Gladys McTier was raised by her mother's spinster aunt. As the eldest girl with two younger sisters, she had already begun housework at an early age, when the death of her father increased her responsibilities dramatically. According to Gladys McTier,

I didn't have too much before 'cause my father did a lot of it, but I still had some, but after that [her father's death] it was slapped on me all the scrubbing and I didn't have any weekends to play or no summer vacations to play or go out. I wasn't allowed to go out. That's the truth. That's the truth.

Annie English shared Gladys McTier's burden when her mother's death affected her career possibilities. Annie had left high school for MT&T where she rose to become chief operator of the North Halifax exchange. The death of her mother, however, made it necessary for her to resign and return home as a full-time housekeeper. Presumably, it was when her brothers and sisters became older that she was able to return to work as chief night operator of the other city exchange. Like death, childbirth also placed additional responsibility on young women. In 1922, a Yarmouth VON maternity nurse noted the actions of the eldest daughter in

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30 Gladys McTier was born in Halifax in 1871 and interviewed by the author Ottawa, Ontario, July 1986.

31 Monthly Bulletin, August 1926.
assisting the mother with infant care and household responsibilities. While these examples might be unusual, they were in no way exceptional.

Another informant noted that while everyone was expected to "pitch in" she minimized her own contribution by comparing it with the work performed by her mother.

Even for women living outside the family with full responsibility for their own laundry, cooking, and cleaning, the "double day" of waged employment and domestic upkeep was probably not as demanding as the work day of their mothers who had little freedom and were always "slaving".

It is impossible to determine the number of women in the neighbourhood who were boarders. This problem is particularly difficult as boarders were often related and shared the same surname as the household in which they stayed. Though most boarders were probably related, certainly a significant number would have been part of the urban female influx. Most women with different surnames from the household head were employed in retail or at Moirs Bakery and Confectionery.

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32 Isabel Mann, "A Day in the Life of a VON," Yarmouth, 1922. pamphlet Ontario Archives.


34 Richmond, Mary E. and Fred S. Hall, A Study of Nine Hundred and Eight-Five Widows Known to Certain Charity Organization Societies in 1910 (New York, 1913 [1974]), p. 29.
listed as retail clerks or saleswomen and 21 of the 66 employed at Moirs fell into this category. The likelihood of Moirs employees also being boarders corresponds with a report from the company that there were "quite a large number of work seekers from outside points applying at this office. The Employment Bureau reports that the major proportion of those looking for employment are girls, seeking work in factories."\textsuperscript{35} Although it has been suggested by Meyerowitz that one-fifth to one-sixth of the non-servant female population of Chicago did not live within a family\textsuperscript{36}, the figure was probably significantly less in the Hydrostone neighbourhood as a result of its isolated location away from the downtown core.

Many girls had no choice but to stay at home and take advantage of the inexpensive lodging that only their family could provide. Miss Palmer of the Young Women's Christian Association informed the 1920 Minimum Wage Commission that the average board in Halifax was between five and six dollars a week. The YWCA had been charging $6.50 but was losing money and had recently increased its rates by two dollars a week. The Commission concluded that a

Large number of girls who are living at home and working in factories, paying no room and board or only about half the usual cost.... These girls, who in many cases depend on their parents for a living, (in part or in whole) work for wages that provide

\textsuperscript{35} Evening Mail, 5 November 1927.

\textsuperscript{36} Meyerowitz, Women Adrift, p. 6.
them with little more than spending money. 37

Living away from home would have been nearly impossible for Stella Shore of Sebastian Place who worked at the Simpson's warehouse earning $5.00 a week and paid her mother $3.00 in board. 38 While she received room and board at a reduced rate, she contributed money to household coffers which would have been low in a family dependent on the seasonal wages of her father, a carpenter. Family support was a two way relationship in which dependency and independence, advantages and disadvantages, existed on both sides.

The potential earnings of young women were a common part of the family survival strategy. This importance was noted by a columnist in the local labour newspaper who praised young women for "contributing to the budget and making life a little easier for a worried father, ...helping younger sisters and brothers with their education" and "aiding the children of a brother who married young and who hasn't seemed to be able to get a real start". 39 The waged labour of women seems to have been extracted for the use of the entire family. In one specific example, the low wages and irregular hours of her husband led Mrs Werthington of


39 Citizen, 4 July 1930.
22 Columbus Place to take her girls in search of work. "I took my 2 girls down to Moirs, Bauld Bros, Tobins, Morses, Wentzells and Jensen and Mills and Mr Wilks['] store on Young St and put their name down at the 13 cents store also the 25 cents store. I have tried everywhere I took them myself...." reported Mrs Werthington. Whether or not it was usual for the mother to initiate the search for work and organize its implementation cannot be determined; however, in times of financial crisis such as failure to pay the rent it seems probable.

When the daughter lived at home, family often had ties to her workplace. Family connections could secure a position, intrude into and even end employment. Dorothy Vallance, daughter of a MT&T foreman, worked as an operator, while Florence Foot worked with her father at Brandram-Henderson. Sisters also sometimes provided a contact for employment as one Hennessey Street family had three daughters consecutively employed at Moirs. Parents could also interfere once the position was attained, as the father who wrote on his daughter's behalf regarding her entitlement to sick benefits at MT&T. Molly Artz, also an employee at MT&T, resigned from her position because of "the desire

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40 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1855, Vacated Balances, 1 December 192[1].

41 DUA, MS 4, 180, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph, H 302, Maritime Telephone and Telegraph, Employee Benefits, 1920.
of her parents, now resident in the U.S.A. who wish to have her beside them."42 Family exerted a great deal of pressure on daughters and this control has been cited as a prime motivation for escape, whether through early marriage or out-migration.43

The pressure exerted by families on daughters was not always successful, and conflict reveals the increasing intrusion of the state into family life. In April 1932, Mrs James of Columbus Place contacted the city's policewomen with concern for her daughter whose behaviour she could not govern.44 In this case, Policewoman May Virtue approached the local priest who dismissed the girl as "insane". In a similar case involving 17 year old Jessie Miller of Hennessey Place, the girl's aunt contacted Policewoman Virtue on behalf of Jessie's widowed mother who could not control her action as she stayed out all night.45 Virtue issued a warrant for the girl and the case was processed through the courts. In both cases, a family member initiated the complaint and requested the involvement of the law in an essentially private family matter. Jessie Miller

43 Meyerowitz, Women Adrift, pp. 9, 15; Peiss, Cheap Amusements, p. 45; Tentler, Wage-Earning Women, pp. 111-114.
44 PANS, RG 35, 102, City of Halifax, 16, H.3, Halifax Policewoman's Report, 1931-33, 4 April 1932.
and Mrs James' daughter remind us that the responsibilities placed upon young women were not always accepted, even if evidence of rebellion is scarce and individually based.

The pattern established for rebellion within the family was in many ways similar to action in the workplace, both reflecting the dependent nature of work and family life. Intermittent work and low pay did not encourage independence at the workplace. A 1920 survey of 49 employers who employed 2,032 female labourers in Nova Scotia reported an average work week of 50.4 hours. Although hours were sometimes long, work could also be seasonal or intermittent in nature. While waitresses might work a seven day week consisting of a total of anywhere between 73 and 81 hours, laundry workers' employment was seasonal and throughout the winter was based on a four day work week.46 The number of weeks of employment in a year also created significant variance in the total number of hours worked and the potential earnings available. While bookbinders and municipal clerks were employed for the full 52 weeks in 1921, women employed at Moirs in the manufacturing of biscuits and confectioneries worked less than 46 weeks. Six weeks of unemployment throughout the year must have been devastating on the average weekly wage of $9.09. The irregularity of work, with the extremes of overtime, night

46 Evening Mail, 29 January 1920, 6 July 1921; Citizen, 27 September 1929.
work and unemployment must have also affected young women's contribution to domestic labour in the household. Obviously, questions of the "double day" for young women were complicated and related to employment circumstances.

Most female wage-earners were young and had short employment histories. Examination of ages, numbers of years of experience, and wage levels for women leaving employment at MT&T shows that most women were concentrated at the lowest pay levels both because of youth and relatively limited experience with the company. Ninety-nine of the 487 departing women employees had been engaged for less than a year in 1921. Those employed for two years or less comprised nearly half of the total female work-force. Most women were between the ages of 17 and 20 and earned six to eleven dollars a week.

Youth and short employment periods did not mean that women accepted their low wages without question. In May 1919, unorganized women employed in Moirs chocolate factory struck for the eight hour day. A year later the box makers also struck for higher wages. Waitresses in a downtown cafe walked off their jobs on a one day strike in support of a provincial minimum wage in October 1920. These actions were unorganized and spontaneous but a few pockets

47 Eastern Federationist (New Glasgow), 10 May 1919; Citizen, 7 May 1920.

48 Evening Mail, 13 October 1920.
of female workers succeeded in unionization. Male trade
unionists occasionally mentioned the need to organize women,
but no action was taken until the 1929 arrival of Sophie
McClusky. McClusky, a Polish immigrant with experience
in the Socialist Party of Canada both in Moncton and Alberta
began to organize Halifax female retail clerks in March 1929
out of the Workmen's Circle at the Robie Street Synagogue.
Her organizational campaign expanded towards the women at
Moirs, and by the fall of 1929 had the support of some
members of the Halifax Trades and Labor Council executive
who spoke at meetings. Those attempting to attract labour
men to the cause argued that low wages for girls who lived
at home really hurt the mature male who "can ill afford to
keep grown-up daughters so that cheap labor may be supplied
to earn greater dividends for stockholders and owners." However, support from old labourites such as E.E. Pride and
William Halliday may have been the exception, for a local
police agent reported that the Halifax Trades and Labor Council was "Not enthusiastic about organizing the working
girls while there are still so many labor men

49 Citizen, 9, 16 December 1927, 1 June 1928.
50 Evening Mail, 8 March 1929; Linda Kealey, "Sophie,"
51 Citizen, 14 December 1928.
Regardless of the tepid support of the Trades Council, the campaign claimed success, with 150 women organized by the beginning of December.

Group action in general was atypical of women, whose protests were characterized by their individuality and spontaneity. The individualism of female action suggests a lack of class identity, perhaps as a result of the occupations in which they found employment, but certainly reinforced by the reserve of male trade unionists towards their adoption or incorporation into male forms of labour organization. Women, therefore, used other means to protest their conditions. Letters to the editor of Halifax newspapers publicized the shocking conditions of long hours and low wages. A woman who identified herself as S.P. wrote to the "Question and Answers" column of the Mail-Herald and asked if there was labour legislation to prevent employers demanding up to six hours of overtime and "if the Department of Labour at Ottawa has any control over this kind of slavery." Another woman used the same means to bring charges against her employer who she accused of "using improper language and acting indecently towards female

52 Equal pay for equal work had been a constant platform of the local labour parties and the Provincial Federation of Labour. Citizen, 9 May 1919, 19 September 1919, 26 September 1919; Kealey, "Sophie," p. 13.

53 Citizen, 30 November 1929.

54 Evening Mail, 3 December 1928.
employees. "One out of Work" expressed her anger after investigating an advertised position in a restaurant kitchen. The restaurant desired a cook at the wage of six dollars a week who would work seven days a week, twelve hours a day. Linking the low wage to prostitution she concluded that "Perhaps some of those poor unfortunate girls are unable to work 84 hours for $6. GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO WORK AT A FAIR WAGE AND DECENT HOURS AND CONDITIONS AND NINETY PER CENT OF OUR NIGHT WALKERS WOULD DISAPPEAR." 56 The use of media by individuals to air complaints about conditions, wages and harassment may have been important in the formation of public opinion but seems to have resulted in little change.

Individual action might also include feigning illness in order to go home early;57 but certainly the most common method of protesting working conditions and low wages was quitting, changing careers, and out-migration. The MT&T Monthly Bulletin noted the departure of a number of Halifax operators and stenographers who were off to Massachusetts to train as nurses.58 When one woman at Moirs was denied her request to be transferred from an hourly rate to piece

55 Citizen, 25 May, 1 June 1928.
56 Citizen, 1 April 1927. Emphasis in original.
57 Myers, "Female Industrial Workers," p. 85.
58 Monthly Bulletin, October 1922, October 1923, April 1926.
work she found a new position as a shop clerk. Out-migration was also an alternative. An advertisement which promised hundreds of jobs for qualified teachers in Saskatchewan and Alberta may have provided the answer for some women. Mabel and Hazel Larch of Columbus Place found employment in Boston, Hannah Hixon of Stanley Place left home for Philadelphia and Hattie Howard whose parents lived on Merkel Place nursed in Massachusetts.

Young women also entered new areas of employment such as retail, and it was from within this sector that important changes emerged which had an impact on working class life. Young girls stayed in school longer and to get the jobs in offices and department stores adopted the standard grammar, speech tones, and dress of the middle class.

As Veronica Strong-Boag points out, high school education offered the best chance at white collar

\[\text{References:}\]

59 Myers, "Female Industrial Workers," p. 82.

60 Evening Mail, 27 June 1921.

61 Evening Mail, 10 February 1921, 9 April 1926, 15 March 1928.

employment. At the north end St. Patrick's High School, girls' enrollment out-numbered that of boys. Local high school commercial courses and evening technical education were supplemented by private institutions such as Miss Murphy's Business College founded in 1918. Higher education also became possible for a few daughters of the working class. Advertisements for an "Education Endowment Policy" were not only aimed at a middle class audience.

You are planning to send your little girl to College - aren't you? She is bright and winsome - she deserves the best future you can plan for her. For social position, of course, education is a necessity. For advancement in the business world, proper preparation is ever more necessary. Uneducated stenographers earn $12 - $15 /week. Educated they become secretaries or executives at $25 to $75/week. Uneducated saleswomen earn $10 to $20/week. Educated they become buyers, department managers, etc, at $50 to $200/week. No chance at all is given to the uneducated girl in the professions, in newspaper work, as a 

64 St. Patrick's had a separate school for boys and girls and therefore the only available statistics.

Female and Male Enrollment at
St. Patrick's High School

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Young women in the Richmond Heights neighbourhood took advantage of new educational opportunities with specialized training as teachers, nurses, and business girls. Although a university education was not possible for most daughters of the Hydrostone, there were exceptions. Paul Axelrod notes that approximately 13.4 per cent of Dalhousie students in the 1930s were children of skilled or unskilled workers. Some residents of the Richmond Heights who could live at home were poised for educational upward mobility. In 1924, Albert Kelso moved his family from the Hydrostone to Morris Street for the convenience of his eldest daughter who was enrolled at Dalhousie University. The importance of education to the Kelso family went beyond their financial ability to pay since they were behind on their rent at the time of their move. Education, however, did not result in upward mobility as the daughter contracted tuberculosis and the family declined into poverty under the expense of unsuccessful sanitorium treatments. While this unhappy example may have been exceptional it was not isolated.

65 Evening Mail, 22 October 1929.
66 Paul Axelrod, "Moulding the Middle Class: Student Life at Dalhousie University in the 1930s," Acadiensis, XV, 1 (Autumn 1985), p. 91.
67 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1855, Vacated Balances; R.398, 7 Columbus Place.
New educational opportunities created their own problems. Upward mobility could alienate daughters from family, and parents who had sacrificed much for the sake of "a good education and 'a decent start' in life" found "Now, to our dismay, we are beginning to realise - she has made it clear in many ways - that she despises us, her home, our poverty and our ignorance. We have scraped and saved to get her lots of the good things of life, but now she has become 'a cut above us'."68 Class tensions within the family must have been one by-product of new models of behaviour and appearance that some working-class women found it possible to adopt through education, style, and new employment opportunities.

While the expansion of lower-white collar work for some women placed increased strain on the family, women in sales could also affect household consumption, mitigating the distance between their own household economies and new values and distribution systems brought about by an increasingly consumer society. L.D. McCann's study of R.G. Dun and Co records from 1881 to 1931 demonstrated that during the economic collapse of the 1920s branch businesses were able to survive in the midst of local businesses that were failing and thereby managed to gain a greater

68 Evening Mail, 12 September 1928.
percentage of the market share. This change in retail structure meant that young women increasingly found themselves employed by national chains such as Eaton's, Simpson's, Woolworth's, or The Metropolitan Store. These stores were expanding, the new Simpson's store and mail order warehouse was opened at Armdale in 1919 and in May 1929 Eaton's Department Store opened in a partially reconstructed six story building on Barrington Street.

The preference of young women to work in sales rather than at Moirs was not based on hours or wages. Branch or chain "five and dime" stores, such as Woolworth's, depended on a cheap rapidly changing labor force. The median earnings in 1928 in the United States were only $12 a week. Poor wages were compounded by long hours. The 1910 Commission on Hours of Labor reported that some Halifax stores closed early at 6 p.m. with a short day Saturday in the summer, but most had longer hours such as 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Wednesday or Thursday, then 7 a.m. to 8 or 9 p.m. Thursday and or Friday and finally 7 a.m. to 10 or 11 p.m. on Saturday. Drug stores in Halifax were open 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Saturday and then one hour Sunday


morning, one hour Sunday afternoon and two and a half hours Sunday evening. If wages and hours were comparable with existing factory work, it seems likely that the attraction could be found in the vaguer notion of white-collar prestige. The elevated status associated with sales work allowed young single women of slightly different class backgrounds to mix at the workplace. Unlike the private home or the factory, the office and the shop brought the daughters of the middle and working classes together and facilitated the exchange of class behaviours and attitudes. The mixing of classes in the office with no differentiation in responsibilities, treatment, or appearance offered some young women an experience unique from the rest of their family members. The narrow range of employment opportunities available for women therefore tended to de-emphasize class, while accentuating the "femaleness" of specific occupations.

While new opportunities in employment may have confused class identities, it clarified their self-perception as women. Susan Benson Porter has also argued that saleswomen were particularly important to changes in consumption. Saleswomen resented any subordination to the customer she might serve, since unlike the mistress of a house, the

72 Benson, Counter Cultures, p. 231.
saleswomen also played the role of customer when not working."\(^3\) The position of sales clerking itself often encouraged the dilution of working-class behaviour and appearance. It was necessary to blend into the middle-class or elite culture, which the stores hoped to attract as their clientele.\(^4\) Clothing took on new importance particularly for those who came in contact with customers. According to Elizabeth Ewen, "In a consumer society, the external definitions of self take on primary importance. Dress, style, the way the self is assembled became the terms of integration..."\(^5\) Once clothing was purchased rather than produced, similar styles could be reproduced at accessible prices by using cheaper material and tailoring.\(^6\) In stores, similar clothing eliminated the appearance of class differences between employee and customer.\(^7\)

Changing identities did not necessarily change young women's roles. Most young, working-class women went from being someone's daughter to being someone's wife. Waged-

\(^3\) Benson, *Counter Cultures*, p. 233.

\(^4\) Benson, *Counter Cultures*, p. 230.


\(^7\) Benson, *Counter Cultures*, p. 235.
labour was determined by the immediate needs of family, rather than the individual concerned. Women's paid work, whether in domestic service, manufacturing or in expanding areas of clerical or retail, was characterized by poor wages and high turnover. The growth of employment opportunities in lower-white collar work may have affected appearance, behaviour, aspirations and even self-image, but it did not touch the desire to escape waged work for marriage nor did it change young women's role within the family. Mass and new forms of female workplace culture combined to strengthen a universal classless ideal which was appropriate for all women. Young women, regardless of their class generally congregated in a limited stratum of opportunities. Working-class women appeared to have many things in common with their middle-class sisters, because they shared many things in common. The individualism of work protest suggests that most women did not feel part of any larger community based on class. Indeed, young working women were all lumped together and in one account emerged as a parade of high heels, silk stockings, smart coats and chic hats flooding into the downtown each morning. The same 1930 description concluded with a statement by a Parisian who observed that women in Halifax were much better dressed than women in her own city, as in Paris, it was just the wealthy who dressed well and "one sees them only in certain sections and they are in the minority .... But in Halifax all women look well
and all are most charmingly dressed."\textsuperscript{78} Traditional working-class culture was unable to incorporate the parade of young women composed of stenographers, clerks, waitresses and telephone operators into its mainstream. This was unfortunate for the future of an independent class-based culture, for it was this parade of high heels and silk stockings that led the entire class further off into the world of mass culture and homogeneous consumption.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Citizen}, 4 July 1930, emphasis mine.
Conclusion

The widow Jessie Muir rented out as much of her home as possible in order to support her eight children. Thea Buckles and her four small children were evicted from her Richmond Heights home after her husband refused to fulfill his responsibility as family breadwinner. Minnie and Joseph Smithers fought over his pay cheque. Michael O'Brien, a brakeman with the CNR, was active in the Boy Scout movement. "Big Bill" Vallance, a foreman with MT&T, was a hunter, fisherman, musician and was a member of the Halifax Fire Brigade. David Schultz, the crippled and aged boilermaker was charged and found guilty of operating a gambling operation. George Milroy was well into his 80s when he moved to Canada from Newfoundland to live with his son. Annie Hutchinson and Mrs James Lennox fought on a Stairs Place veranda, and Mary Owen disturbed her neighbours and lived with a divorced daughter. These men and women all shared the experience of living in Richmond Heights at some point during the 1920s. Throughout their sometimes precarious attempts at survival, their participation in institutional associations, and their fighting, the working-class residents of Richmond Heights were constantly challenged by a world that was changing all around them. Yet as much as they faced new challenges, they were also strengthened by the past.
experiences they brought to current events. The men and women of Richmond Heights were living out change and continuity. Through this difficult but everyday balancing act they attempted to sort out the contradictions and confusion in their daily lives.

Confusion and contradictions were the result of changes in both the public and private sphere. In the public sphere, traditional working-class occupations were being replaced by other kinds of employment. Both men and women were less likely to be involved in production as opportunities expanded in the service sector. This shift had important ramifications for skilled craftsmen who partially defined their manliness in terms of their ability to produce. Furthermore, women engaged in waged labour were not necessarily found in what might be considered traditional working-class jobs but rather in female jobs, most importantly among them the new openings in clerical work.

At the same time that working-class Haligonians were experiencing occupational change in the world of paid employment, their home life was undergoing parallel transformation. The rise of domesticity, seen in the increased physical importance of the home and the focal position of family in the lives of many Richmond Heights residents, reconstructed the definitions of masculinity and femininity as domesticity encouraged gender ideals to become more rigid. The idea of domesticity strictly delegated
different responsibilities to men and women. Men were given the responsibility as breadwinners in the public sphere while women were centred in the home as household managers and mothers. This rigidity had been experienced by other segments of the population in the nineteenth century but in the early twentieth century it conflicted with changes in mass culture which eliminated many of the extreme differences between the sexes. For many people, men and women were becoming more alike. The flapper was one example of this conjunction as her mannish bob, boyish figure and personal habits of swearing, drinking, and smoking encompassed what had been exclusively male characteristics.¹ Roles which had been male were also adopted by some women as they slowly began to move into male professions and occupations through expanded educational and cultural opportunities. In 1924, Halifax was visited by Mrs. Mattie Crawford, a "lady preacher" and faith healer who led a revival in the old skating arena on Shirley Street.² The combination of heightened domesticity and cultural change meant that many individuals were confronted at the same time with both new, limited and unspecified ideals around how a man or woman should act or think. As a result, the residents of Richmond Heights in the 1920s to a great extent lived in


Men and women of Richmond Heights had to continuously face the impossibility of attaining the ideal of either femininity or masculinity, achieving companionate marriage, and making do on inadequate wages in a household economy that was dependent on cash. Their vulnerability created a form of fatalism which denied human agency, ignored structural injustices, and placed a great deal of emphasis on the notion of luck. Not surprisingly for Richmond Heights residents, the luck was usually bad. Bad luck could come in the form of lost money or poor health such as experienced by the Shupes who explained in August 1929 that they were unable to make a payment on their arrears "on account of sickness and a little bad luck, as my wife last month had the misfortune to lose $60.00 out of her bag money which was intended to have been paid to the commission." Others describe their current state as a "bad year" or a "rainy day".

The concept of bad luck provided tenants with a way of coping with their world and at the same time rarely feeling personally responsible for their misfortune. Mrs Chisholm took no responsibility for her household's financial problems.

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3 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.424 [2 files], 33 Columbus Place, 13 August 1929. A tenant of 6 Kane Place also noted the misfortune of losing a 20 dollar bill. R.834, 6 Kane Place.

4 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.424 [2 files], 33 Columbus Place, 8 November 1929.
clearly stating, "it is not my fault." Similarly, C.A. Watson, a bookkeeper wrote, "if you can't wait till i get [a]round to pay it, you can put me in prison for the crime of being unfortunate. I shall not care what happens then." While Watson may have had a flair for the dramatic, other households were content with a more accepting, "We have been up against it good" or we "have been up against a bit of bad luck." The importance of luck also appeared in the words of a North End workingman who explained his household's survival and his role as primary breadwinner in terms of life's being "nothing but speculation. In my case holding down my job at a mighty poor wage, with a wife and six children to keep, it is just speculation that helps us both along." To this philosophy of life he added, "and I don't spend a cent on rum."8

Misfortune may have been the most common fate experienced and appealed to as a justification for one's economic, social and marital position, but there was also a belief in good luck. Stories about lost heirs, and books advertising valuable instructions about tracking down such possibilities

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5 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.424 [2 files], 33 Columbus Place, 8 November 1929.


7 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1382, 3 Stairs Place, 8 July no year, 2 November no year.

8 Evening Mail, 25 February 1926.
appeared in the Halifax newspapers' classified sections. Luck also played a role in romance and was prominent in the rituals surrounding weddings. For example, luck influenced everything from the season or day of the week that the wedding occurred to the colour of the bride's dress. The tenacity of luck in Richmond Heights can be seen as an element of continuity with the past but also as an important survival strategy for coping with the present.

Although bad luck was not necessarily taken personally it could reinforce working-class feelings of powerlessness particularly when misfortune disrupted the operation of gender ideals within the household. In 1920 an unemployed tenant who was failing in his responsibility to provide for his family explained that his debt to the HRC "worries me as much as you ... until I can find work I am powerless to pay." Similarly, Mrs Phinney, a former tenant trying to settle her Commission debts despite the fact that ill health prevented her husband from regular work was overwhelmed by the hopelessness of her predicament and pleaded "I dont want any more trouble for I feel I have more now than I can stand up under." Not all tenants were beaten by their poor fortune.

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9 For example see Evening Mail, 9 September 1922.
11 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.1382, 3 Stairs Place, 14 May no year.
The defiant Minnie Smithers vowed "I will soon have it straightened out then I can please myself, [do] what I [want to] do, when I owe nobody." The optimism of Minnie Smithers rose above her dismal finances and dissolving marriage and rested on her desire to "please" herself.

This thesis has examined the impact of shifting gender ideals on a respectable working-class neighbourhood in Halifax in the 1920s. It has suggested connections between the way in which men and women perceived masculinity and femininity, and the decline of a distinct local working-class culture in the third decade of this century. Traditional working-class culture was shaped by and reflected a male world view and it proved unable to easily absorb new gender ideals of men and women. Gender ideals were not universal even within the neighbourhood or individual households, nor were they static as personal concerns and perception were based on life experience with generational differences. The breadth of experience within the community meant that gender ideals embodied both continuity and change. During the 1920s, the basic household gender ideals remained constant, with men assigned the role of breadwinner who was to have been engaged in waged-labour outside the home, and with women primarily responsible for household management and mothering. But working-class Canadians at this time were also introduced to

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12 PANS, MG 36, HRC, R.276, 34 Cabot Place, 1930.
new ideals and conceptions of femininity and masculinity through mass culture, new occupational patterns, novel forms of state intervention and heightened consumer expectations. The inability of working-class culture to incorporate these changes was particularly telling for some women, who came to believe they had more in common with other women than with male members of their own class.

The most obvious examples of a distinct working-class culture remained exclusively male and removed from the home. Trade unions, political activism, and sports continued to succeed in combining masculinity and working-class culture in situations away from the home. This trend continued, despite the fact that home in combination with the family appears to have increased its importance for many working-class men and their families. The exclusion of women from this culture, along the lines of skill and gender, or by the sheer weight of custom, weakened the entire class. Given that working-class identity remained largely synonymous with being a man, it was difficult for a broader class consciousness to emerge. A distinct working-class culture continued to survive, but often in subtler forms that could survive and reproduce themselves comfortably within the new context of the household. The home, dominated by women and removed from institutional working-class culture, partially aligned itself with mass culture, resulting in important ramifications for the next generation of working-class Haligonians.
This shift to the home and the tension it generated successfully camouflaged much of the class conflict in twentieth-century Canada. At the very least, aspects of class conflict became submerged within the conflict between men and women. One need only think of the tension-ridden relationships of fictional working-class couples portrayed in the media. From Punch and Judy, through Maggie and Jiggs of the 1920s, to Alice and Ralph Kramden, Edith and Archie Bunker and Roseanne and Dan Connors, these working-class couples have battled through conflicting aspirations and expectations based upon the way in which they all tried to live out their manliness or femininity. In late twentieth century Canada, the daily clash between class and gender is nowhere more apparent than on soap operas.

An advertisement for wax paper in 1929 promised "A Revolution in the Kitchen." It was significant that revolution, a word rarely used since the dramatic Red Scare propaganda of a decade earlier, should appear in this context. But after all, perhaps the real post-war revolution for the working-class residents of Richmond Heights did occur in the kitchen in as much as the kitchen symbolized the household and the reformation of gender ideals within it.

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