

Université de Montréal

Migration, Family, and Gender: A Longitudinal  
Analysis of French-Canadian Immigrants  
in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1900-1920

par

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Département d'histoire  
Faculté des arts et des sciences

Thèse présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures  
en vue de l'obtention du grade de  
Philosophiae Doctor (Ph.D.)  
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Johann Tjebk

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Analysis of French-Canadian Immigrants  
in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1900-1920

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## ABSTRACT

*Migration, Family, and Gender: A Longitudinal Study of French-Canadian Immigrants in Lowell, Massachusetts: 1900-1920*, examine la migration des Canadiens français vers un centre urbain de l'industrie textile, Lowell, Massachusetts. Pendant la période à l'étude, le Québec et la Nouvelle-Angleterre ont subi une série de transformations socioéconomiques importantes. Cette recherche analyse les impacts de ces changements sur le processus de l'immigration et de l'insertion. Aussi, cette thèse éclaire diverses façons dont les hommes, les femmes et les enfants canadiens-français ont répondu aux réalités nouvelles dans une société urbaine industrielle. Dans le but de répondre à ces questions, il nous est nécessaire de considérer cette immigration comme un phénomène qui consiste en une série de processus et non en une progression linéaire vers une assimilation inévitable ou une américanisation. Il nous apparaît aussi essentiel d'introduire une perspective de "genre", afin de nous rendre compte de la diversité des stratégies que ces immigrants et immigrantes ont inventées, ainsi que de la coopération et des tensions qu'ils et elles ont vécues dans les processus de l'immigration et de l'établissement.

Cette thèse rejoint les études récentes qui critiquent la perspective selon laquelle les comportements des immigrants seraient le fait d'une série de normes culturelles et de coutumes prédéterminées. Contrairement à l'image stéréotypée des Canadiens français vus comme des habitants immobiles et fatalistes, cette analyse démontre avec évidence qu'ils étaient un peuple habituellement mobile, pour qui la migration était une solution pondérée face aux changements structurels qui ont radicalement remodelé le Québec et la Nouvelle-Angleterre. Il est soutenu que les comportements des immigrants canadiens-français à Lowell au début du vingtième siècle ne reflètent pas que la transplantation culturelle des valeurs des habitants, mais aussi les efforts des familles de la classe ouvrière pour survivre et supporter les transformations socioéconomiques qui étaient en cours au Québec et en Nouvelle-Angleterre. La diversité dans les itinéraires géographiques enregistrés de la part des Canadiens français indique une marge d'autonomie stratégique et une flexibilité ainsi que la recherche d'un accommodement aux nouvelles réalités socioéconomiques.

Cette étude cherche à corriger un déséquilibre majeur en ce qui concerne les relations de *genre* dans la littérature historique sur l'immigration canadienne-française. Pour réaliser cet objectif, l'oeuvre accorde une attention considérable aux immigrantes. Bien que la famille ait un rôle essentiel au moment du départ des immigrants des villages et villes québécois ainsi qu'à leur arrivée dans le milieu urbain et industriel de Lowell, les hommes et les femmes, les garçons et les filles qui constituaient ces familles canadiennes-françaises, n'ont pas nécessairement partagé les mêmes expériences. Non seulement les vécus des immigrantes sont-ils distincts de ceux des immigrants, mais aussi y a-t-il une variation importante des expériences, dans la mesure où les femmes conjuguent travail rémunéré et tâches domestiques. Les modes de travail rémunéré des femmes étaient définis non seulement par leur

âge ou statut matrimonial, mais aussi par une combinaison de facteurs tels que l'organisation de la maisonnée, l'arrangement résidentiel et la disponibilité des soins des enfants. Il est donc affirmé qu'il y avait des dynamiques complexes au sein des familles immigrantes où des intérêts personnels différents et, parfois, conflictuels, ont été négociés. Cette analyse met en relief cette négociation qui ne s'est pas toujours effectuée en termes d'égalité mais de pouvoir et d'autorité par les différents membres de la famille.

Ces sujets de recherche sont examinés à travers le dépouillement exhaustif des données nominatives recueillies dans les sources premières telles que les listes des recensements fédéraux des Etats-Unis (1910 et 1920), le *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A*, ainsi que les dossiers de *Case History* enregistrés par le contremaître des pauvres de la ville de Lowell. Il est important de souligner l'avantage d'utiliser ces sources. Alors que les histoires orales, traditionnellement employées, contiennent des renseignements rétrospectifs sur le passé d'un immigrant, les dernières deux sources nominatives (*Border Entries* et *Case History*), combinées avec des manuscrits de recensement, nous fournissent des données longitudinales rapportées aux différents moments de la vie d'un immigrant. Bien sûr, cet intérêt n'invalide pas l'emploi des histoires de vie. Néanmoins, les données longitudinales de ces sources nominatives nous révèlent des aspects nouveaux des itinéraires de ces migrants canadiens-français pour lesquels peu d'attention académique, eu égard à leur importance, n'avait été accordée jusqu'à récemment. Afin de capturer certaines subtilités qui dépassent l'analyse quantitative, d'autres sources qualitatives sont également dépouillées. Ces dernières incluent le journal français publié à Lowell, *l'Etoile de Lowell*, le journal anglais de la ville, *Courier Citizen*, ainsi que des transcriptions des histoires de vie publiées (éditée par Mary Blewett, *The Last Generation* et par Brigitte Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions and Popular Culture in a*

*Former Milltown*) ainsi que du matériel non publié (la collection des entrevues abritée au Morgan Center à l'University of Massachusetts à Lowell).

## ABSTRACT

*Migration, Family, and Gender: A Longitudinal Study of French-Canadian Immigrants in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1900-1920*, explores migration from French Canada to a New England urban centre of the textile industry, Lowell, Massachusetts. During the period under study, both Quebec and New England underwent significant socioeconomic transformation. This work analyses the impact of these changes on the process of migration and settlement. It also sheds light on the diverse ways in which French-Canadian men, women, and children responded to new realities in an urban industrial society. In order to investigate these issues, it is necessary to consider this migration as a phenomenon which consisted of a series of processes and not as a linear progression towards inevitable assimilation or Americanization. It is also crucial to emphasize the importance of introducing a gendered perspective in order to recognize the diversity of strategies devised by immigrant men and women as well as the cooperation and tensions they experienced in the process of migration and settlement.



This thesis joins recent scholarship in criticizing a perspective that has described all immigrant behaviour as necessarily reflecting one set of culturally predetermined norms and customs. Contrary to the stereotyped image of French Canadians as immobile and fatalistic *habitants*, evidence from this study shows that they were a highly mobile people for whom migration was a pondered response to the structural changes that were radically reshaping Quebec and New England societies. It is argued that the behaviour of Lowell's French-Canadian immigrants in the early twentieth century did not merely reflect the cultural transplantation of *habitant* values, but also the attempts of working-class immigrant families to survive and cope with significant socioeconomic transformation occurring to both Quebec and New England. The diversity in the recorded patterns of movements on the part of French Canadians is indicative of their strategic autonomy and flexibility in adjusting to new socioeconomic realities.

This study also seeks to redress a major gender imbalance in the historical studies of immigrants by devoting considerable attention to women. Although the family played a crucial role in the migrants' departure from Quebec villages and towns and their adjustment to the urban industrial environment of Lowell, the French-Canadian men and women, boys and girls who constituted these families did not necessarily share the same immigrant experiences. Not only did women's lives differ from those of their male counterparts; there was also great variation in the extent to which women assumed financial and domestic tasks. Such diversity, I assert, in the patterns of women's paid work was defined not only by age or marital status, but also by a combination of factors such as household organization, living arrangements, and the availability of child care. Immigrant families harboured complex interpersonal dynamics where different and, at times, conflicting interests had to be negotiated in not necessarily equal terms, but in accordance to

each member's power and authority within the family and the larger society.

These themes are examined through the extensive use of nominal data derived from primary sources such as the *U. S. Federal Census* manuscript schedules (1910 and 1920), the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* and files of *Case History* recorded by the Overseer of the Poor in the city of Lowell. It is important to emphasize an advantage of using these sources. Unlike traditional oral histories, which contain retrospective information of a migrant's past, these two nominative sources, used in combination with census schedules, provide researchers with longitudinal data recorded at different moments of a migrant's life. This does not invalidate the use of oral history accounts. Yet the longitudinal data collected from these nominative sources reveal new aspects of the French-Canadian migrants' itineraries which have until recently received little scholarly attention. In order to capture the subtleties that fall outside of the realm of quantitative analysis, qualitative sources are also consulted. These latter materials include the French-language daily published in Lowell, *L'Etoile de Lowell*, the English daily of the city, *Courier Citizen*, and transcriptions of oral histories, both published (Mary Blewett ed., *The Last Generation* and Brigitte Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions and Popular Culture in a Former Milltown*) and unpublished (collections of interviews housed in the Morgan Center, University of Massachusetts in Lowell).

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## INTRODUCTION

This study is about French-Canadian men, women, and children who left their homes in search of a better life and subsequently struggled to achieve this in early twentieth-century Lowell, Massachusetts. The questions posed in this study are simple ones. What was the role of the family in the course of migration and how did different members of the family respond to new realities in the process of movement to, and settlement in, Lowell? To answer these questions, I argue that it is necessary to consider this migration as a phenomenon which consisted of a series of processes and not as a linear progression towards inevitable assimilation or Americanization. I also emphasize the importance of introducing a gendered perspective in order to recognize the diversity of strategies devised by immigrant men and women as well as the cooperation and tensions they experienced in the process of migration and settlement.

In this study I argue that although the family played a crucial role in the migrants' departure from Quebec villages and towns and their adjustment to the urban industrial environment of Lowell, the French-Canadian men and women, boys and girls who constituted

these families did not necessarily share the same immigrant experiences. Not only did women's lives differ from those of their male counterparts; there was also great variation in the extent to which women assumed financial and domestic tasks. Such diversity, I assert, in the patterns of women's paid work was defined not only by age or marital status, but also by a combination of factors such as household organization, living arrangements, and the availability of child care. I also point out that the family played a decisive role in the process of migration. Moreover, evidence from this study shows that French Canadians were a highly mobile people for whom migration was a pondered response to the structural changes that were radically reshaping Quebec and New England societies. The diversity in the recorded patterns of movements on the part of French Canadians is indicative of their strategic autonomy and flexibility in adjusting to new socioeconomic realities.

This study has two objectives. The first is to redress the truncated view of migration prevalent until recently in immigration history and ethnic studies. The decision to migrate was a well-informed one and largely embedded in the matrix of family and other social connections. This does not mean, however, that the immigrant's journey was necessarily unidirectional or that Lowell was the only ultimate destination. For most French Canadians, the move from Quebec villages to Lowell's tenements was one among other viable options. Some had left their native villages in Quebec some time before crossing the border to the south. Once in Lowell, many stayed while others left again for a neighbouring locale or to go back to Canada. The high geographic mobility of French Canadians in this study reveals a more complex and continuous process of migration than the one long assumed to be the paradigmatic itinerary of poverty-stricken *habitants* desperate to find a place to make their living. Their mobility also points to the inadequacy of the dichotomized distinction between pre- and post-

migration, the one posited as traditional and preindustrial, the other modern and industrial. These categories are too static to describe Quebec on the eve of migration and the world that immigrants encountered in urban New England. More importantly, these artificial divisions fail to capture the multidirectional movements across the border that French Canadians effected. (See Figure 1.)

The present study tackles the limitations posed by this dichotomized view of immigration. Recent historical efforts have questioned these rigid separations and, to a great extent, have successfully incorporated an analysis of the society of origin into the study of migration. Today a growing number of studies substantiate Asa Briggs' observation: "to understand how people respond to change it is important to understand what kind of people they were at the beginning of the process."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there remains a conspicuous gap in our understanding of the process of geographical mobility and the extent of informal networks of family and kin supporting these movements. This study is an attempt to fill this lacuna by focusing on the multidirectional feature of French-Canadian population movements.

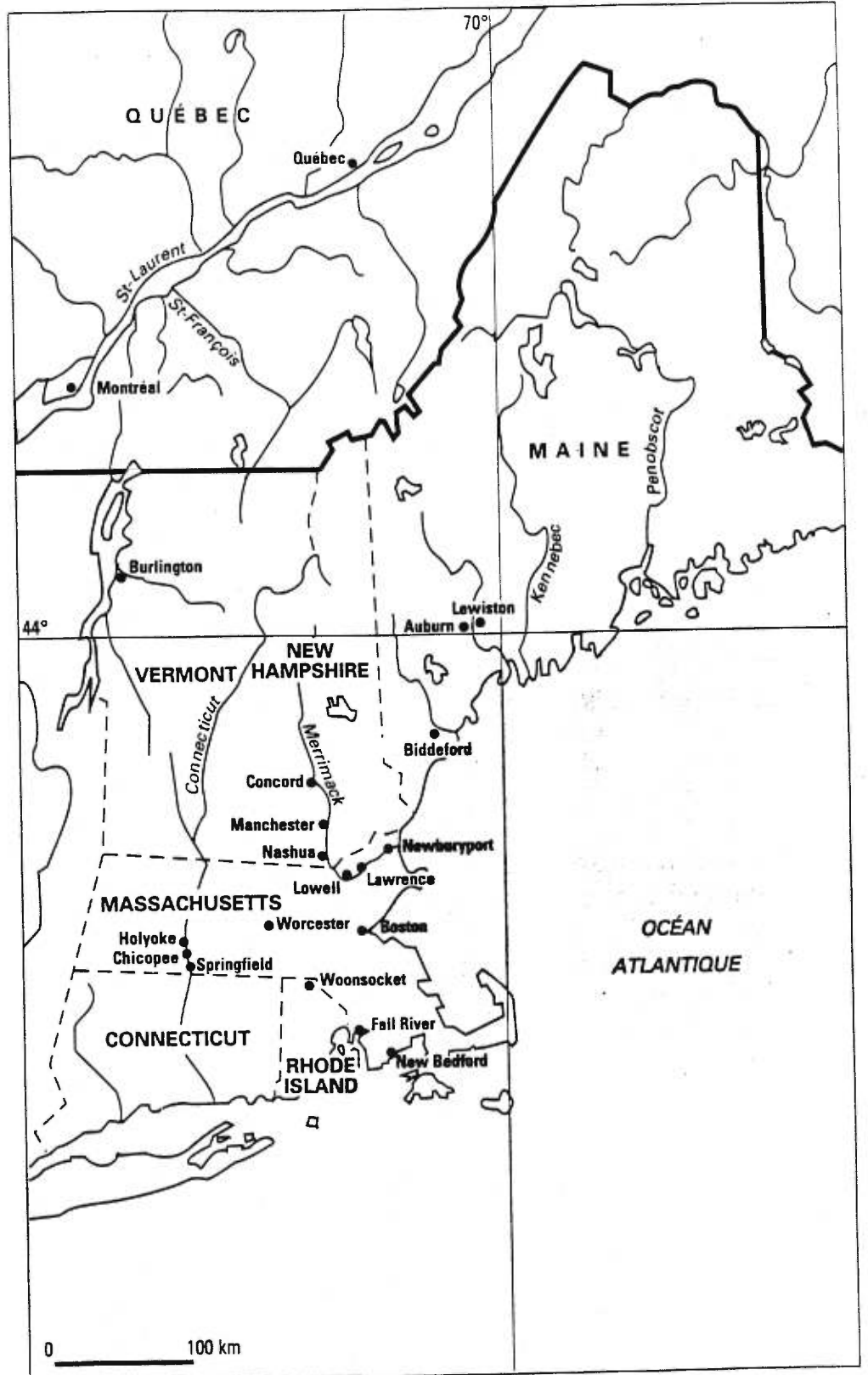
The second objective of this study is to challenge the image of the harmonious French-Canadian family that permeates much of the previous literature. The perspective of this study stems principally from the insight developed by specialists of women's history who have revealed that the family is more than a cooperating unit, and that women within a family often held attitudes and engaged in activities which differentiated them from men.<sup>2</sup> Although the

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<sup>1</sup>Asa Briggs, review of *Making of English Working Class*, by E. P. Thomson, *Labor History* 6 (Winter 1965): 84.

<sup>2</sup>It should be noted that well before historians recognized women's distinctive roles, anthropologists had begun the analysis of women's roles in their studies of culture. More recently, feminist anthropologists have closely

Figure 1.  
Major Destinations of French-Canadian Immigrants in New England



Source: François Weil, *Les Franco-Américains*, 8.



writings of historians exploring the French-Canadian family economy do pay attention to the functions of family as a survival unit and to the economic roles of women in the changing New England economy, there is a tendency in these studies to view families rather than individuals as historical actors. As Thomas Dublin points out, the very title of Tamara Hareven's seminal work, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, is indicative of this propensity to consider the family as an active historical subject rather than as an arena in which individuals struggle through cooperation and conflict.<sup>3</sup> As a result, to date, despite a number of important research studies on the family economy, labour participation, and sociocultural transformations, as well as on the persistence of French-Canadian culture in a dozen New England communities, little consideration has been given to the distinctive roles of French-Canadian women within or outside the home.

The complexities of the family and the distinctive roles played by women, while recognized by specialists of women's history, have long been ignored in social history in general. As Sydney Stahl Weinberg has observed, women generally have been subsumed

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examined this subject. For instance, as early as the 1970s, Jane Collier looked at the family not as a unified entity, but as a political arena. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 8-9, 18-19, 31-32, 99-100.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), introduction, especially 11-13; Amartya Sen, "Gender and Cooperative Conflicts," in *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development*, ed. Irene Tinker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123-49; Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

under "family" in family history.<sup>4</sup> Immigration history, too, has a tendency to incorporate this genderless, harmonious view of the family. In the wake of the American ethnic revival of the late 1960s and 70s, the "new immigration history" rejected the teleological image of uprooted immigrants arriving alone, without the support of family and kin, and passively submitting to the process of Americanization. As in sociology and anthropology, historical research has stressed the persistence of cultural diversity and immigrants' adaptability to the urban industrial environment in the United States. In these studies, families are often viewed as a source of cultural resilience and cohesion within ethnic communities. Underlying this interpretation is an assumption that men and women shared the same ethnic cultures and benefited equally from them. Such presumptions resulted in ignoring the differences between the experience of immigrant men and women, thus undermining the significance of studying the lives of the latter.

*Migration, Family, and Gender* seeks to redress this dearth of a gendered perspective in the historical literature on immigration and particularly on French-Canadian immigrants. To this end, this study analyzes women's experiences separately from, but in connection with, those of men. In so doing, it aims to draw a more comprehensive portrait of the lives of French-Canadian immigrants and of the ways in which French-Canadian families coped with the difficulties which arose from the considerable structural changes that occurred in early twentieth-century Lowell.

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<sup>4</sup>Sydney Stahl Weinberg, "The Treatment of Women in Immigration History: A Call for Change." in *Seeking Common Grounds: Multidisciplinary Studies of Immigrant Women in the United States*, ed. Donna Gabaccia (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992), 3-22, especially 8.

It is important to emphasize here that a meaningful inclusion of women in immigration history cannot be achieved without examining their interactions with men. In other words, the purpose of incorporating a gender perspective into my analysis is not to create or legitimate immigrant women's history as just another field of investigation or "an appendage of the real thing."<sup>5</sup> The examination of women's roles must be integrated into the analytic framework of immigration research as a whole.<sup>6</sup> To this end, it is indispensable for the present study to closely explore women's experiences both at home and at work separately, but not in isolation, from men's lives.

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<sup>5</sup>Weinberg, "The Treatment of Women," 12.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

## Research Design

In many ways Lowell is an attractive setting in which to explore the dynamics of migration, family, and gender. Early twentieth-century Lowell was a highly multiethnic city with at least forty different nationalities represented within its population. The percentage of foreign-born residents was one of the highest in the United States — 41.0% in 1910, as compared to the national average of 14.7%.<sup>7</sup> Among the foreign-born population, French Canadians formed by far the largest group: more than one out of four (28%) foreign-born whites in Lowell were French Canadians, followed by the Irish (23%). The ethnic diversity of the city allows for comparisons between the migratory experiences of French-Canadian men and women, and those of other groups — in particular, Americans,<sup>8</sup> the Irish, the Portuguese, and the Greeks. The rationale for selecting these four groups for comparison is two fold. Firstly, after French Canadians these were the four largest ethnic groups in Lowell. More importantly, however, these groups represented different stages in the chronology of immigrant settlement in Lowell. After the American-born of American parentage, the Irish were the first to immigrate to Lowell and constituted the city's predominant foreign-born population from the 1850s to the 1870s, at which point French Canadians took their place. The Portuguese and the Greeks were among the most recent arrivals at the turn of the century, their number increasing rapidly in the early twentieth century. Given these characteristics, comparisons between French Canadians and these four immigrant/ethnic groups serve to unveil

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<sup>7</sup>The Massachusetts average for the same year was 31.5%. Computation based on the U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1912-13), 228, 716.

<sup>8</sup>This category refers to the U.S.-born individuals of U.S.-born parents.

some of the salient characteristics of Lowell's French-Canadian population in the period under study.

The temporal limits of this study are determined by two factors: the intent of the study and the availability of source materials. The decades from 1900 to 1920 are crucial for an analysis which examines the interaction of French-Canadian migratory practices and the structural transformations of the regional economy. During these two decades, French-Canadian net emigration to the United States declined to nearly half the level recorded in the peak years of migration. As demographer Yolande Lavoie has shown, the number of Quebecers crossing the border to the United States fell to 80,000 in 1910-20 from 150,000 in 1880-1890.<sup>9</sup> By the turn of the century, the majority of French Canadians in Lowell were of the second (U.S.-born) generation.

The first two decades of the century are also important because of the significant changes that occurred in the New England textile industry and its labour force. Confronted with ever-increasing competition from its southern counterparts, New England textile firms, by then long past the age of paternalism, were impelled to seek cost-efficient production policies with greater fervour. At the same time, the massive arrival of "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe provided this industry with much needed cheap and diligent workers. Furthermore, the temporary prosperity of World War I created another economic fluctuation and unprecedented inflation, which made it difficult for the working-class immigrants to make ends meet. Early twentieth-century Lowell thus provides a local focus for exploring the interaction of French

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<sup>9</sup>Yolande Lavoie, *L'émigration des Québécois aux Etats-Unis de 1840 à 1930* (Québec: Les Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1979), 45, Tableau 7.

Canadians' migratory practices and economic strategies with these broad socioeconomic transformations and conjunctures.

My decision to study the first two decades of the twentieth century was also determined by the availability of sources. The most recent U.S. Federal decennial census open to consultation is that of 1920. This set the closing date for the analysis. Data derived from this nominative source are supplemented by other sources, such as the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* and the *Case History* files of Lowell residents who petitioned for social assistance. Furthermore, I consulted qualitative sources in order to capture the subtleties that fall outside of the realm of quantitative analysis. These qualitative materials include the French-language daily published in Lowell, *L'Etoile de Lowell*, the English daily of the city, *Courier Citizen*, and transcriptions of oral histories, both published (*The Last Generation*) and unpublished (collections of interviews available in Morgan Center, University of Massachusetts in Lowell).<sup>10</sup>

The first chapter of *Migration, Family, and Gender* begins with a historiographical review at the crossroads of immigration, family and gender history. It is followed by discussion of my sources and methodology. Chapters Two and Three explore the economic and social contexts of life and labour in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Quebec and Lowell, Massachusetts. Chapter Four offers a longitudinal analysis of French Canadians' migratory

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<sup>10</sup>Mary Blewett, *Surviving the Hard Times* (Lowell: Lowell Museum, 1982); Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990); Brigitte Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions and Popular Culture in a Former Milltown: Aspects of Ethnic Urban Folklore and The Dynamics of Folklore Change in Lowell, Massachusetts* (New York: Garland, 1990).

itineraries to Lowell. Their geographic movements were often multidirectional and Lowell, although a destination for their planned moves, was not always the ultimate place of settlement. Their movements were largely embedded in family and kin networks. Chapter five assesses the occupational positions of French-Canadian men in early twentieth century Lowell. Their limited upward mobility and increased occupational range confirm the analytical notion of "playing within the structure." As in the late nineteenth century, French-Canadian men continued to demonstrate a tendency to concentrate in the manual industrial sector and in particular, the textile industry. At the same time, a small nuclei of the ethnic middle-class ran a variety of small businesses. Finally, Chapter Six explores the paid and unpaid work of French-Canadian women. Age and marital status alone did not determine their financial responsibilities. Rather, the latter were defined by a combination of the above-mentioned variables with additional factors, such as living arrangements and household organization, and in particular the distribution of wage labour and household chores among family members.

It is easier to raise simple questions than to supply answers to them. My efforts to introduce a gendered perspective into the present study are at times constrained and frustrated by the sources (or lack of them) created in the past. In order to recover the voices of women, specialists of women's history and women's studies have undertaken careful re-reading of existing sources (notably, the census schedules). Increasingly, they have also explored a variety of sources that lend themselves to a clearer understanding of the function of gender. These latter documents include biographies, letters, diaries, social workers' files, and civil and criminal trial records. Among such sources, this study has drawn upon municipal records of the assistance for the destitute, the *Case History Records for the Overseers of the Poor*. Yet, because only a part of these files

was available for my consultation at the time of my research, the migratory itineraries reconstructed from this source pertain only to a limited segment of the migrating population.

In the light of the narrow breath of the data derived from the *Case History Records*, the analysis of the role of gender in this study largely draws on the information collected from the Federal decennial census schedules. My endeavour to reconstruct the past from this quantitative source has been challenged by some limitations inherent to the very nature of this record. The quantitative records tell little about matters such as the authority of the male household head, conflicts between parents and children, and tensions among siblings — some of the central issues in investigating the gender relations within the family. Oral history accounts drawn from the collections of the Lowell History Project directed by Mary Blewett as well as the transcripts produced by an ethnologist, Brigitte Lane, are most helpful in compensating for the gap in knowledge that is left by the quantitative sources. Clearly, the dimensions of gender and family remain to be more fully explored in the future research by a sustained quest for new sources and methodologies. The present study is thus a partial attempt to tackle the questions of gender in the lives of French-Canadian immigrants.



# CHAPTER ONE

## HISTORIOGRAPHY, SOURCES, AND METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

A majority of the over 24,000 French-Canadian<sup>1</sup> residents in early twentieth century Lowell had left for that city in the previous century or were born there of Canadian-born parents. For these French Canadians on the move, family was both a unit of migration and a source of information about U.S. destinations. The family-

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<sup>1</sup>In this study the term "French-Canadian" refers to immigrants and their descendants of French-Canadian background. The immigrant group was largely composed of individuals who or whose ancestors were from Quebec, although it also included a significant minority of Acadians from the Maritimes provinces of Canada as well as French Canadians from eastern Ontario. Yves Roby points to an important historical change that occurred in the designation of this group. In the course of 1890s, these people progressively came to call themselves Franco-Americans. This shift reflected the emergence of a new sense of identity, due in large part to the increasing numbers of the American-born in the group. See Yves Roby "De Canadiens français des Etats-Unis à Franco-Américains: une analyse des discours de l'élite franco-américaine," in *Identité et cultures nationales: l'Amérique française en mutation*, ed. Simon Langlois, 207-232. In the present work, unless otherwise specified, I employ the expression "French Canadians" to refer to both those born in Canada and in the United States, thereby conforming to a usage common in U.S. government documents of the early twentieth century.

supported dimension of migration constitutes, therefore, a central focus of the present study. In order to understand the complexity of the process of immigration, family evolution, and gender relations, this chapter first traces how immigration history incorporated the perspectives and research methodologies developed by historians of family and women. It then discusses the sources and methodologies used in this study.

### 1.1. HISTORIOGRAPHY: MIGRATION, FAMILY, AND GENDER

Family is a contested terrain. It can be simultaneously a site of support and oppression, particularly for women.<sup>2</sup> This historiographical study of French-Canadian and other immigrant life demonstrates that this was the case for people who moved to the United States and Canada in the early part of this century. Since the late 1970s, practitioners of the "new immigration history" have made significant efforts to integrate immigration history and family history. The rethinking of perspectives, research agendas, and methodology has, for the most part, successfully brought together these two fields. As a result, many studies in immigration history tend to echo arguments developed by family historians. For instance, immigration historians often view many immigrant and American families as bound by collective interests. This tendency to underline the cooperative aspect of the family has obscured its non-egalitarian make-up. My own study takes this last insight as its point of departure.

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<sup>2</sup>Franca Iacovetta, *The Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History*, Canada's Ethnic Group Series, no. 22 (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1997), 16.

The present study of French-Canadian immigrants reveals the diverse ways in which French-Canadian men and women in Lowell cooperated, negotiated, and at times contested with each other for the sake of the family's well-being. The following are three major themes of this work: the migratory process from Quebec to New England; the occupational experience of French-Canadian men within the ethnically hierarchical labour market of Lowell; and the diverse responsibilities of women within the household in assuming paid and unpaid work.

Before proceeding with the analysis of these three points, this chapter presents an overview of historical writing on the experiences of French-Canadian and other ethnic groups with regard to family, gender, and migration. First, some past trends characterized by their institutional orientation and elite perspectives are reviewed. Secondly, important shifts in paradigm that occurred in immigration history in the 1960s are addressed. These paradigm shifts provoked repercussions on conceptual and methodological developments. Thirdly, efforts made by immigration historians to integrate two sub-fields of social history, immigration and family history, are analyzed. Lastly, immigration history's new direction in emphasizing the gender perspective is pointed out.

### *1.1.1. Some Past Trends: Institutional Orientation and Elite Perspectives*

Most of the early writing on the French-Canadian *exodus* was done by political and religious leaders for specific purposes. Priests, government officials, and journalists in Quebec and the United States were the first to broach the subject. This literature reflected the political opinions of writers, who sought variously to condemn, defend, or rationalize emigration. Moreover, these early writers

approached the subject with an institutional bias, particularly as it concerned parish schools and favoured the elite of the Catholic clergy. Their writings provided a top-down vision of the national problem of migration. For instance, Quebec's political and religious leaders feared that this exodus would depopulate the province and morally degenerate French Canadians. They denounced emigration in an effort to slow down and possibly end the exodus. Americans, on the other hand, criticized the French-speaking migrants as impoverished and transient "birds of passage" who had little respect for American institutions or laws. In reaction to such accusations, Franco-American leaders proclaimed their alleged loyalty towards American institutions.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the literature on French-Canadian migration in Quebec began to change. Instead of denouncing the emigrating population, the province's elite adopted a more conciliatory view which defended emigration as the "providential mission of French Canadians" to propagate the Catholic faith south of the border. The exodus, once condemned as a cause of cultural and moral degeneration, was then conceived as means of spreading Catholicism to the United States.<sup>4</sup> With this change in discourse, cultural survival became a central theme in the works of historians such as Edouard Hamon and Alexandre Belisle.<sup>5</sup> This focus

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<sup>3</sup>François Weil, *Les Franco-Américains 1860-1980* (Paris: Éditions Bélin, 1989), 9-11.

<sup>4</sup>Sylvie Beaudreau is the first scholar to point out that this attitude towards emigration existed as early as the 1840s. Sylvie Beaudreau, "Quebec and the Problem of French Canadian Emigration to the United States, 1840-1896," (Ph.D. diss., York University, 1992). On the other hand, Yves Roby dates this change in attitude to a later period. See for Yves Roby, "De Canadiens français des Etats-Unis à Franco-Américains," especially 209-10.

<sup>5</sup>Early governmental inquiries include Canada (Province), Parlement, Assemblée législative, Comité spécial nommé pour s'enquérir des causes de l'emigration du Canada aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique ou ailleurs, *Rapport du*

on the emigrants' *survivance* emphasized the minority experience of French-Canadian immigrants in supposedly ghettoized Little Canadas. These studies singled out the Catholic faith, the family, and the French language as major factors which could help the French Canadians survive in the sinful, immoral English-speaking world of America.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, while the French-Canadian exodus continued, a total of fourteen million trans-Atlantic migrants came to the U.S.A. Earlier migrants had come from northern and western European countries such as England, Germany, Scandinavia, and Ireland, whereas later arrivals, the so-called "new immigrants," originated from southern and eastern

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*Comité spécial nommé pour s'enquérir des causes de l'emigration du Canada aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique ou ailleurs*, (Montreal, 1849). Among other earlier works, there was a clear tendency to romanticize the migratory experiences and to have a filiopietistic bent expressed in celebratory lists of members, usually men, who built the community. These works presented a culturally determinist characterization of the French-Canadian people. Largely imbued with the essentialist view of their own people, the authors of these studies generally emphasized the French Canadians' fatalistic vision of life, their pride in their endurance as well as their faith when confronting difficulties. See Edouard Hamon, *Les Canadiens français de la Nouvelle-Angleterre* (Quebec, n.s.: Hardy éditeur 1891); Alexandre Belisle, *Histoire de la presse franco-américaine* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Ateliers typographiques de *L'Opinion publique*, 1911); and D.-M.-A. Magnan, *Histoire de la race française aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Librairie Vic et Amat, 1912). The theme of *survivance* persists throughout the twentieth century. See Marie-Louise Bonier, *Début de la colonie franco-américaine de Woonsocket, Rhode Island* (Framingham, Mass.: Lakeview Press, 1920); Jacques Ducharme, *The Shadow of the Trees* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943); Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains* (Montréal, 1958); Michael Guignard, *La Foi-La Langue-La Culture: The Franco-Americans of Biddeford, Maine* (Privately printed, 1984); Gérard Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986); Armand Chartier, *Histoire des Franco-Américains de la Nouvelle-Angleterre, 1775-1900* (Sillery, Québec: Septentrion, 1991); Richard Santerre, *Historique de la célébration de la fête Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Lowell, Massachusetts, 1868 à 1968* (Lowell: Imprimerie L'Etoile, 1968); and Santerre, *The Franco-Americans of Lowell, Massachusetts* (Lowell: Franco-American Day Committee, 1972).

European countries, namely from Italy, Portugal, Greece, Poland, and Hungary. Most of the latecomers initially settled down in the crowded quarters of industrial cities and became part of the new urban working class. French Canadians shared certain characteristics with both the old and new immigrants. Like their Irish predecessors, French Canadians were Catholics in a Protestant country.<sup>6</sup> Like more recent arrivals, French Canadians spoke a language which Americans did not comprehend. In addition, they were accused of lowering wage levels by agreeing to work at extremely low wages and undermining the union movement by working as scabs. Americans conceived of these alleged characteristics as threats which would erode traditional American values. Nurtured by such fears, nativist feelings among Americans culminated in a wave of anti-Catholicism at the end of the nineteenth century and with the "one hundred-percent-Americanism" movement during World War I and in the postwar period.<sup>7</sup>

Against a backdrop of strong nativist sentiments, Colonel Carrol Wright of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor published *The Twelfth Annual Report* in 1881. The Wright Report singled out French-Canadian immigrants as a principal cause for the authorities' difficulties in enforcing labour regulations such as the ten-hour workday laws and anti-child labour laws. This report drew attention to a tendency among French Canadians to relocate back and

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<sup>6</sup>Ironically, these two Catholic immigrant groups, Irish and French-Canadian, often competed for similar jobs and French-Canadian parishioners occasionally conflicted with the Irish Catholic religious hierarchy.

<sup>7</sup>John Higham, *Strangers in the Land, Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955); Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants, A Changing New England Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956). See also Yves Roby, "Quebec in the United States: A Historiographical Survey," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (Winter 1987): 126-59, especially 130.

forth between the two countries, their frequent moves throughout New England industrial cities, and their alleged lack of loyalty to American institutions. Colonel Wright derogatorily denounced French-Canadian immigrants as the "Chinese of the Eastern States."<sup>8</sup>

The Wright Report provoked an angry reaction among French Canadians throughout New England. Ferdinand Gagnon, the chief editor of a Franco-American newspaper in Worcester, Massachusetts, *Le Travailleur*, presented a ground-breaking quantitative investigation based on a poll taken among French Canadians in thirty-three New England localities. Gagnon countered Colonel Wright's criticism of the French Canadians by demonstrating that immigrants went back to their province, not because they did not have any respect for American institutions, but because they simply wished to visit relatives and friends as well as to celebrate religious and national festivals such as Christmas, Easter, and Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Gagnon observed that Wright's report overlooked the fact that a large percentage of the immigrant population remained in New England.

The institutional orientation and elite perspectives of these earlier studies by Quebecers, Americans, and Franco-Americans

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<sup>8</sup>Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *The Twelfth Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor* (Boston: Rand, Avery & Co., 1881). See also Pierre Anctil, "Chinese of the Eastern States," *Recherches sociographiques* 22, no. 1 (janvier-avril, 1981): 125-130; Anctil, "L'identité de l'immigrant québécois en Nouvelle-Angleterre, le rapport Wright de 1882," *Recherches sociographiques* 22, no. 3 (septembre-décembre, 1981): 331-359. See also Ramirez, *On the Move: French-Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1860-1914* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 111-14.

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, Chinese immigrants, most of whom settled on the West Coast, were viewed as a source of cheap labour, as transients whose cultural practices and language were incomprehensible to Americans. In this socio-political context, the term "Chinese" carried obvious racist connotations.

overshadowed any efforts to illuminate the lives of the ordinary immigrant people. Until the 1960s, when French-Canadian migration caught the broader attention of academics in Canada and the United States, little attention was devoted to the lives of the majority of French-Canadian immigrants who worked in textile or shoe factories as well as the small number of professionals and independent shopkeepers.

From the 1960s onward, a new type of literature on French-Canadian migration came into being. Studies by geographers, demographers, and economic historians — such as Ralph Vicero (1968), Yolande Lavoie (1972, 1973, 1979), and Albert Faucher (1964, 1980), Gilles Paquet and W. Smith (1983) — constituted the first systematic analyses of French-Canadian migration.<sup>9</sup> Among the scholars who attempted to explore the causes and major characteristics of the emigration phenomenon, perhaps none made greater contribution than Vicero. Using manuscript schedules of the federal and state censuses, Vicero brought to light the extent of the French-Canadian migratory movement and its impact on New England society. His skillful analysis revealed the historical stages through which this migration evolved.

After long neglecting the subject, historians also began to systematically study the phenomenon of French-Canadian migration.

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<sup>9</sup>Gilles Paquet, "L'émigration des Canadiens français vers la Nouvelle-Angleterre, 1870-1910: prises de vue quantitatives," *Recherches sociographiques* 5, no. 3 (septembre-décembre 1964): 319-71; Yolande Lavoie, *L'émigration des Canadiens aux Etats-Unis avant 1930*, (Montréal: Presse de l'Université de Montréal, 1972); Lavoie, "Les mouvements migratoires des Canadiens entre leur pays et les Etats-Unis au XIXe et au XXe siècles, étude quantitative," in *La population du Québec: études rétrospectives*, ed. Hubert Charbonneau (Montreal: Boréal Express, 1973), 73-88; Lavoie, *L'émigration des Québécois*; Ralph D. Vicero, "Immigration of French-Canadians to New England, 1840-1900: A Geographical Analysis," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1968).



Albert Faucher provided an initial study which focused on the economic causes of French-Canadian migration to New England, analyzed from the perspective of the North American context.<sup>10</sup> Yves Roby was the first historian whose interpretation of out-migration was based on a thorough analysis of the problems affecting Quebec agriculture. He pointed to factors such as a growing dependence on the market economy for basic necessities and weak agricultural yields which together formed the vicious circle of debt and failing yields that plagued even the most enterprising farmers in the province. This socioeconomic condition led Quebec farmers to seek a cash income in New England rather than to take their chances by moving into the Saint-Lawrence hinterland. In his depiction of late nineteenth-century Quebec as a society in flux, undergoing a process of industrialization and urbanization, By so doing, Roby's study further advanced an economic interpretation of French-Canadian emigration that had previously been put forth by scholars such as Faucher and Vicero.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Albert Faucher, "L'évolution des Canadiens français aux Etats-Unis au XIXe siècle, position du problème et perspective," *Recherches sociographiques* 10, no.3 (septembre-décembre 1964): 277-317 and "Explications socio-économiques des migrations dans l'histoire du Québec," *Mémoire de la Société Royale du Canada*, 1975, quatrième série, vol. 13: 91-107.

<sup>11</sup>Yves Roby, "L'évolution économique du Québec et l'émigrant: 1850-1929," in *L'émigrant québécois vers les Etats-Unis: 1850-1920*, ed. Claire Quintal (Québec: Le Conseil de la Vie française en Amérique, 1982), 8-20; Roby, *Les Franco-Américains de la Nouvelle-Angleterre: 1776-1930* (Québec: Les Éditions du Septentrion, 1990), 36-41.

### 1.1.2. Change in Paradigm: "The Uprooted" Contested

Since the 1960s, American social history has undergone significant changes in perspective. In immigration history, one of the most effervescent fields of the *new* social history, a most important stimuli emerged with Rudolph Vecoli's critique of Oscar Handlin's influential thesis of "uprooting."<sup>12</sup> In his article, "Contadini in Chicago," (1964) Vecoli refuted Handlin's thesis which presented migration as a profoundly disruptive experience of cultural "uprooting." Vecoli argued that Old-World cultures not only survived the trans-Atlantic migration, but continued to exert significant influence on the ways in which migrants adapted to their new life in America. Vecoli contended that migration was not an individual adventure, but a family enterprise based on rational decisions. Vecoli's analysis thus forcefully revealed the inadequacy of the assimilation paradigm.<sup>13</sup>

Another important set of ideas that greatly contributed to the shift toward an alternative to the assimilation paradigm was delivered by Frank Thistlethwaite. In his 1960 essay entitled "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," Thistlethwaite contested the accepted myths about immigration — in particular, the notion that it represented a progress from "rags to riches," and that it involved the

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<sup>12</sup>Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Study of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston: Little Brown, 1951).

<sup>13</sup>Rudolph Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of *The Uprooted*," *Journal of American History* 51, no. 3 (1964): 404-17. For an excellent review of historiographical developments in the United States that contests the assimilation perspective, see Eva Morawska's "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration," in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 187-238.

Americanization, or cultural assimilation, of the immigrants. Thistlethwaite's most significant contribution was his attack on the scholarly stereotype of immigrants as an undifferentiated mass of peasants or indeed artisans thronging toward foreign ports from vaguely conceived countries of origin. He delineated more complex and stratified labour markets, defined by family, village, and occupational ties. A British historian, Thistlethwaite, was particularly critical of the parochialism of Americanists who tended to assume that the United States was the ultimate and final destination of all the trans-Atlantic immigrants. Instead, he urged historians to consider the entire process of migration and refrain from treating it as a truncated experience beginning only with the migrants' arrival in America.<sup>14</sup>

In the late 1960s and 70s, methodological developments spurred the emergence of a growing number of historical studies using North American sources to measure population turnover. Since Stephan Thernstrom and Merle Curti introduced record-linkage methods to evaluate the mobility of Americans, a great deal of attention has been devoted to this methodology.<sup>15</sup> The major sources

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<sup>14</sup>Frank Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," originally presented at the Eleventh International Congress of Historical Sciences, Stockholm, 1960, reprinted from Xle Congrès international des sciences historiques, rapports (Uppsala, 1960) in *A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930*, ed. Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne M. Sinke (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1991), 17-57, especially 32-37. For early studies that present an alternative to the predominant "American-centred" perspective which treats Europe as given or necessary background for U.S.-bound immigration, see for instance, Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860* (New York: Harper, 1940); Brinley Thomas, *Migration and Economic Growth: A Study of Great Britain and the Atlantic Economy*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

<sup>15</sup>Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959). See also Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-*

used in these studies are federal or state censuses and city directories. Unlike the population registries available in European countries (in particular, Scandinavia and the Mediterranean region), American and Canadian census manuscript schedules do not enable researchers to directly observe migratory movements. By using the methodology of record-linkage, scholars usually begin with a list of names consisting of either a sample or an entire population and attempt to find (link) these individuals on the lists taken five to ten years later. The number of successfully linked individuals divided by the size of the group in the initial year provides the persistence rate. This rate allows historians to measure relative population increases or decreases (net migration or population turnover) in a given locale over a specific period of time.

Despite the notable scholarly attempts to measure population "turnover," historians such as David Kertzer, Denis Hogan, and Donald Parkerson have criticized the indirect method of data

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*Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Michael Katz, Michael Doucet, and Mark Stern, "Migration and Social Order in Erie County, New York: 1855," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8, no. 4 (1978), 669-701. For studies that suggest that the high rate of residential transiency delayed the formation of class consciousness among American workers, see Clyde Griffen, "Workers Divided: The Effect of Craft and Ethnic Differences in Poughkeepsie, New York, 1855-1880," in *Nineteenth-Century Cities* ed. Stephan Thernstrom and Richard Sennett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Charles Stephenson, "A Gathering of Strangers? Mobility, Social Structure, and Political Participation in the Formation of Nineteenth-Century American Working Class Culture," in *American Working-Class Culture: Explorations in American Labor and Social History*, ed. Milton Cantor (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979). Among the works that suggest that the high turnover rate of residential transiency accelerated the economic and political stratification of society, there are Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Laurence Glasco, "Migration and Adjustment in the Nineteenth-Century City: Occupation, Poverty, and Household Structure of Native-Born Whites, Buffalo, New York, 1855," in *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Tamara Hareven and Maris Vinovskis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 154-78.

linkage.<sup>16</sup> A major problem in this linkage method stems from a methodological bias toward the so-called persisters. For instance, Kertzer argued that the invisibility of movers or "transients" had resulted in an underestimation of the migratory phenomenon in a number of historical and demographic studies. Donald Parkerson, on the other hand, observed that these studies tended to underestimate the "persistence" of late nineteenth-century Americans. Based on a re-reading of the 1855 census schedules of the State of New York, Parkerson pointed out that the reported decrease in population levels could be due to factors other than out-migration. These included death, omissions by enumerators, and inadequacies in the enumeration or research process (such as errors resulting from people changing their names, illegible hand-writing of the enumerators, or difficulty in reading the microfilmed copy).<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, imaginative efforts by some historians have overcome some of the problems in using census schedules. Scholars such as David Kertzer, Daniel Hogan, Daniel Courgeau, Gérard Bouchard, Robert Ostergren and Bruno Ramirez have developed a direct method of reconstituting residential histories of migrants from data derived from other sources, such as notarial deeds, certificates of birth, marriage, and death as well as more traditional nominative sources (state and federal census schedules and city

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<sup>16</sup>Donald H. Parkerson, "How Mobile Were Nineteenth-Century Americans?" *Historical Methods* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 99-109; Dennis P. Hogan and David I. Kertzer, "Longitudinal Approaches to Migration in Social History," *Historical Methods* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 20-30.

<sup>17</sup>An additional problem with indirect record linkage is that this method does not tell the researchers what actually happened to the "movers" in the interval, usually ten years, between two decennial censuses. This is because census lists fail to distinguish between individuals who repeatedly moved between two or more localities and those who moved out from a given city. This methodological problem reinforces the division of the population into two categories: visible "persisters" and residual, invisible "transients."

directories).<sup>18</sup> By nominally linking these data, they have empirically substantiated Thistlethwaite's ideas. These methodological innovations have had exciting conceptual repercussions which have greatly expanded our understanding of migration. My examination of Lowell's French Canadians is also greatly inspired by this development.

Historical writing on French-Canadian immigrants did not proceed separately from the remarkable shifts in paradigm which occurred in immigration history. Since the 1970s, a dozen *community studies* have examined Franco-Americans in the important industrial centres of New England.<sup>19</sup> Findings from these analyses, many of which appeared in the form of published or unpublished

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<sup>18</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*; Gérard Bouchard, "Family Structure and Geographic Mobility at Laterrière, 1851-1935," *Journal of Family History* 2, no. 4 (December 1977): 350-369; Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique: population, économie, famille au Saguenay 1838-1971* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1996); George Alter, *Family and The Female Life Course: The Women of Verviers, Belgium, 1849-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Robert Ostergren, *A Community Transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835-1915* (Uppsala: Upsaliensis Academia Alimquist & Winksell, 1988). See also Kenneth G. Willis, *Problems in Migration Analysis* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1974); Gordon Darroch, "Migrants in the Nineteenth Century: Fugitives or Families in Motion?" *Journal of Family History* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 257-77; Daniel Courgeau, *Méthodes de mesure de la mobilité spatiale: migration internes, mobilité temporaire, navette* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Institut national d'études démographiques, 1988); Paul-André Rosental, "Maintien/rupture: un nouveau couple pour l'analyse des migrations," *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisation* 45, no. 6: 1403-1432.

<sup>19</sup>Philip T. Silva Jr., "The Spindle City: Labor, Politics, and Religion in Fall River, Massachusetts, 1870-1905," (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 1973); Peter Haebler, "Habitants in Holyoke: The Development of the French-Canadian Community in a Massachusetts City, 1865-1910," (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1974); Michael Guignard, "Ethnic Survival in a New England Mill Town: The Franco-Americans of Biddeford, Maine," (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1977); Frances Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings in an American Community: Lowell, Massachusetts, 1868-1886," (Ph.D. diss., Concordia University, 1979).

doctoral dissertations, provide valuable points of reference for the present study. Despite their contribution, to a large extent, these studies remained isolated from developments in Quebec historical literature in so far as they fell short of incorporating new scholarship in Quebec history and continued to rely on the stereotypical image of Quebec as a "folk society." Consequently, they failed to take into account the influence of urbanization and industrialization on the migrating population.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>An exception to this criticism is Yves Frenette, "La genèse d'une communauté canadienne-française en Nouvelle-Angleterre: Lewiston, Maine, 1800-1880," (Ph.D. diss., Université Laval, 1988). In this work Frenette traces the geographic origins of French-Canadian immigrants in Lewiston and discusses the impact of industrialization and urbanization on their departure. See also Frenette, "Macroscopie et microscopie d'un mouvement migratoire: les Canadiens français à Lewiston au XIXe siècle," in *Les chemins de la migration en Belgique et au Québec: XVIIe-XXe siècle*, ed. Yves Landry et al. (Éditions Académia: Louvain-la-Nouve, 1995), 221-33.

### 1.1.3. Family History and Immigration History

Despite the common characteristics shared by immigration history and family history, for a long time these two fields had developed apart from one another. In the late 1970s, historians began to recognize the multidimensional aspect of historical actors: immigrants could be urban-dwellers or rural farmers and were simultaneously women, children, workers, and family members. As in other fields of social history, historians of the family and immigration began conscious efforts to integrate the two fields. For instance, new studies in immigration history incorporated some of the important analytical concepts developed in family history into their research agenda — such as household, family economy, life cycle, and the elastic nature of the family network. They also emphasized the roles of family, household members, and kin networks in the process of migration and settlement. Works on French-Canadian immigration by Frances Early and Tamara Hareven clearly reflected this new tendency in immigration history.<sup>21</sup>

Frances Early examined the ways in which French-Canadian immigrant households coped with the harsh reality of daily life in

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<sup>21</sup>Tamara K. Hareven, "Les grands thèmes de l'histoire de la famille aux Etats-Unis," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 39, no. 2 (automne 1985): 185-209. See also Daniel Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town. Iron and Cotton Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-1884* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978). Since the late 1970s, historians on the subject have published collections of oral histories recounted by French-Canadian immigrants and their descendants. A central theme of these studies is the working life of immigrant families. See Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Jacques Rouillard, *Ah les Etats! Les travailleurs canadiens-français dans l'industrie textile de la Nouvelle-Angleterre d'après le témoignage des derniers migrants* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal Express, 1985); Mary H. Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).



the urban industrial environment of Lowell from 1868 to 1886. Based on quantitative data obtained from the census manuscript lists, Early analyzed occupational structures, housing conditions, and living standard of French Canadians. With regard to the French-Canadian family economy, Early underlined the significance of the number of working children in a family in relation to those not working. This ratio, argued Early, had a decisive impact in determining whether the family's economic well-being fell above or below the poverty line.<sup>22</sup>

Studying French-Canadian workers in textile factories in Manchester, New Hampshire, Tamara Hareven contested the assumption that families and kin groups broke down under the impact of migration to urban industrial centres and under the pressures of industrial work. Evidence from her study showed that in early twentieth-century Manchester, the family most capable of coping with the factory system was not an isolated nuclear type but rather one of extended family ties. The family functioned as a crucial intermediary for recruiting workers from Quebec rural areas, providing newly arrived French-Canadian immigrants with initial housing and assistance, and preparing them for industrial work. In fulfilling these functions, argued Hareven, the French-Canadian family facilitated the adjustment of its migrating members to the modern industrial system.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding the contributions of these two historians in revealing the central role of the family in French-Canadian

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<sup>22</sup>Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings."

<sup>23</sup>Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*; Hareven, "Family and Work Patterns of Immigrant Laborers in A Planned Industrial Town, 1900-1930," in *Immigrants in Industrial America, 1850-1920*, ed. Richard L. Ehrlich (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977).

immigration and settlement processes, their studies still depicted Quebec as a static folk society and thus failed to incorporate the new developments in rural Quebec historiography. In the past, historians maintained a strict division between pre-industrial and post-industrial periods.<sup>24</sup> The first represented the pre-industrial world of the *habitants*; the second the urban industrial society. Ramirez criticized the inadequacy of such dichotomized notions, particularly in the study of French-Canadian immigration. The French-Canadian immigrant population contained a large number of individuals who frequently moved between Canada and the United States long before they made the decision to settle permanently in a host society.<sup>25</sup> The notions of "pre-" and "post-migration" thus failed to capture the subtlety and complexity of such population movements.

Since the 1980s, a growing number of historians who questioned this sharp dichotomy between pre-industrial and industrial society have examined migrant families. These historians include among others, John Bodnar, Roger Simon, Michael Wever, Judith Smith, Gary Mormino, George Pozzetta, Robert Harney, Bruno Ramirez, and Robert Ostergren.<sup>26</sup> With the exception of Ostergren,

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<sup>24</sup>Despite her fine analysis which stressed the critical role families played in the migration process, Virginia Yans-McLaughlin's early works on Italian immigrants in Buffalo was also criticized in the same fashion as the above-mentioned studies by Early and Hareven. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, "Patterns of Work and Family Organization: Buffalo's Italians," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1971): 299-314, especially 301; Yans-McLaughlin, "A Flexible Tradition: Immigrant Families Confront New Work Experiences," *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 429-45; Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1978). See the critiques of Yans-McLaughlin by Alice Kessler-Harris and Louise Tilly, "Comments on the Yans-McLaughlin and Davidoff Papers," *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 446-51.

<sup>25</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*: 14-15.

<sup>26</sup>Judith Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian & Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900-1940* (Albany: State

who has examined the Swedish immigrants in Mid-Western farming communities, these scholars focused on the central importance of the family economy, kinship bonds, and mutual aid societies in the everyday life of migrants in the urban industrial centres of the United States. They have forcefully argued that terms such as *traditional* and *modern* cultures are too static to grasp and failed to convey the dynamism evident in the migrants' societies of origin and destination.

Many of these historians, inspired by the work of Thistlethwaite, have shed further light on the enduring links between the immigrant's past and present. In particular, Ramirez's work successfully expanded on Thistlethwaite's agenda by advancing a hypothesis on the "selection mechanism." By this mechanism, migrants sought to match their resources and conditions, such as age, family structure, and family life cycle, to the exigencies of the local labour markets of potential destinations, through informal information-gathering processes involving wide networks of family

members, friends, and fellow villagers.<sup>27</sup> Findings from Ramirez's analysis also revealed that such selection criteria were not static but changed over time according to the various socioeconomic conditions of the region concerned. By using this notion of selection mechanism, Ramirez's work effectively linked macro-level structural transformation to the various changes in the migrants' immediate universe. Furthermore, Ramirez placed two population movements — French-Canadian and Italian — within the analytical framework of the North Atlantic economy, and thus revealed the unique role that Quebec played both as society of origin and of destination.

The efforts of immigration historians to incorporate the perspectives developed by family historians have greatly extended our understanding of the life of immigrants. Yet, because of their very efforts, which tend to downplay the gender differences in migratory experiences, immigration specialists have also fallen victim to some of the weaknesses peculiar to the studies of family historians. In order to unveil the unequal yet complementary relations within the family, immigration studies needed to incorporate insights from yet another field of study.

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University of New York Press, 1985); John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987); Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Robert F. Harney ed., *Gathering Place* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985); Harney and Vincenza J. Scarpaci eds., *Little Italies in North America* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981); Ramirez, *On the Move*; Ostergren, *A Community Transplanted*.

<sup>27</sup>For a further discussion on this idea, see chaps. 3 and 5 of this dissertation.

#### 1.1.4. *The Gendered Perspective and Immigrant Women*

Given the emphasis that immigration historians have placed on the role of family, household, and kin networks, it is ironic that few ethnic community studies in American and Canadian historiography have treated the lives of women seriously.<sup>28</sup> Many blithely address such questions in terms of the family's decision to emigrate, its work morals, and the collective values, while tending to neglect how men, women, and children negotiated such shared responsibilities and decisions. Others have emphasized the solidarity of migrant families in facing the difficulties produced by an urban industrial milieu without considering the question of gender and power relations within families. This tendency has buttressed a view of the family as a monolithic, cooperative, and non-gendered collective that "acted in a self-interested manner."<sup>29</sup> As a result, most historians have highlighted the experiences of men.<sup>30</sup>

Recent advances in women's history and women's studies have provided new ways in which historians view immigrant families.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Donna Gabaccia, "Immigrant Women: Nowhere at Home?" *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10 (Summer 1991): 61-87. See also Iacovetta, *The Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History*, 14-16.

<sup>29</sup>Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), xxvi.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, introduction, especially xvii-xxix. This issue is further developed by Iacovetta in her work, *The Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History*.

<sup>31</sup>For American studies including the literature on women workers and radicals, see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Leslie Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women; Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1991); Sarah Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread But Give Us Roses: Working Women's Consciousness in the United States, 1890 to the First World War* (London:

These studies have shown that family decisions were not necessarily made in the best interest of all members and thus presented families as arenas of multiple relations where support and tension were mediated among members with unequal power. This recognition is as important for family history as for social history in general because one of the latter's principal purposes is to expose "the conflicts hidden behind the rhetoric of harmony."<sup>32</sup> Immigration historians, in increasingly adopting this new perspective of the family as being marked by internal tensions and conflicts, have also begun to examine the asymmetrical gender relations within families. Studies by historians such as Judith Smith, Donna Gabaccia, Ardis Cameron, and Franca Iacovetta as well as by anthropologists such as Louise Lamphere and Michaela Di Leonardo, are vibrant depictions of

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Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); Dana Frank, "Housewives, Socialists and the Politics of Food: The 1917 Cost of Living Protests," *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985); Ruth Milkman, ed., *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of US Women's Labor History* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York: Viking, 1988); Lynn Y. Weiner, *From Working Girl to Working Mother: the Female Labor Force in the United States, 1820-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). On Canada see Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993); Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1989); Alison Prentice et al., eds., *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988); Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

<sup>32</sup>Olivier Zunz, *Reliving the Past: The Worlds of Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985): 76.

migrant family life.<sup>33</sup> Their analyses are not limited to traditionally studied topics such as wage-earning patterns and labour activism, but cover neglected areas of analysis, such as child-bearing, housework, and other forms of unpaid work. Making good use of oral interviews as well as unconventional sources such as social workers' files and the proceedings of criminal and civil trials, these scholars have successfully unveiled the complex nature of immigrant families and highlighted the different roles and perceptions of men and women within migrant families.

Historical writing about French-Canadian and other immigrants in the United States has produced a large number of rich and diverse studies. Recent developments in this historiography call for a broader perspective on the phenomenon of migration. This perspective must seek to understand and to integrate the respective dynamics of both the societies of departure and of destination. It must also adopt gendered analyses of the distinctive roles played by men and women in family life, workplaces and communities. What sources and methodologies then enable one to pursue such an approach?

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<sup>33</sup>Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1984); Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Miriam Cohen, *Workshop to Office: The Generations of Italian Women in New York City, 1900-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*; Michael Di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender among California Italian-Americans* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Louise Lamphere, *From Working Daughters to Working Mothers: Immigrant Women in a New England Industrial Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

## 1.2. SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

In order to begin to understand the interplay between structural limitations and French-Canadian immigrants' autonomy, this study addresses a series of questions. Who were these immigrants? How did they organize their journey to Lowell? In what ways did they confront the everyday difficulties posed by the new environment? To answer these questions, the following analysis shares with other investigations of past immigrants a methodology which relies both on statistical analysis of manuscript census, and the direct record linkage of nominal records. In addition, the inquiry is also supplemented by a reading of oral history interviews and newspaper articles.

The census schedules record the response of individuals to questions about their age, backgrounds (birth places of the individual and of his or her parents, year of immigration), household/residential situations, occupations, and schooling. The manuscript census offers major advantages for the study of French-Canadian families in Lowell. Unlike other nominative sources such as city directories which usually provide information only on the adult male members of a given locality, the manuscript census list all the members of a household — men, women, and children — regardless of their gender or age.<sup>34</sup> The census schedules thus tell us which family members were living together, who worked for wages, who went to school, and who stayed (and worked at) home. Consequently, by treating the family as a residential unit, this data facilitates an analysis of the family economy. In addition, the U.S. federal census of 1910 and 1920 provide information on each individual's birthplace as well as that of their parents. This information makes it easy to

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<sup>34</sup>For instance, Lowell's city directories listed only the names of household heads, most of whom were males, as late as 1916. The names of wives appeared for the first time in 1917.



identify French Canadians and individuals belonging to other ethnic groups without undergoing a complicated process such as the one undertaken by scholars working with earlier sets of the censuses.<sup>35</sup> Census data for other ethnic groups allow for comparisons with the French-Canadian sample.

Despite the major advantages, the censuses have some drawbacks. First, the residential focus of the census can easily lead to an omission of family members who resided temporarily or permanently outside the household. Consequently, social and economic family ties among the family members beyond the residential unit tend to be neglected. Another problem with this source is that it provides information on the families, as family historian Bettina Bradbury has expressed, "at one moment in the evolution of their life cycle."<sup>36</sup> This means that researchers are provided with snapshot-like pictures, without longitudinal data which reveal the dynamics of family development over a period of time. In order to follow the families' evolution and to extend our understanding of family networks beyond the confinement of a residential unit — two aspects, I argue, of key importance for the study of the migratory process — one needs longitudinal data on the sampled families and individuals over the interval not covered by the census schedules.

Two quantitative sources, the *Soundex Index to the Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* (hereafter referred to as *Border Entries*) and the *Case History Records for the Overseers of the Poor* (hereafter

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<sup>35</sup>For a discussion of the time-consuming process of identifying French Canadians in the census schedules of 1870, see Early, "Beginning of French-Canadian Community," chap. 3.

<sup>36</sup>Bradbury, *Working Families*, introduction, especially 17-18.

referred to as *Case Histories*), enable us to offset some of the above-mentioned disadvantages inherent in the censuses. *Border Entries*<sup>37</sup> list all the individuals who crossed the Canada-U.S. border southward and who, just like today's travellers, provided information on their birthplace, place of departure, occupation, and accompanying members as well as identify people whom they were to meet upon their arrival at a U.S. destination. *Case History* files<sup>38</sup> contain nominal data on the individuals who received assistance from the city of Lowell. It is important to emphasize an advantage of using these sources. Whereas the traditional oral histories, which contain retrospective information of a migrant's past, these two nominative sources, used in combination with census schedules, provide researchers with longitudinal data recorded at different moments of migrant's life. This does not invalidate the use of oral history accounts. Yet, the longitudinal data collected from these nominative sources reveal new aspects of the French-Canadian migrants' itineraries which, with some exceptions, has received relatively little scholarly attention until recently.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, at the time of my research trip to this city in September 1995, these records were left unsorted or unclassified in the attic of the Lowell City Hall. Although I was able to select the documents belonging to French-Canadian immigrants who received assistance from the city from 1901 to 1905, time constraints

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<sup>37</sup> This source is available in the form of microfilmed copy. For further discussion of this source, see chap. 4 of this study.

<sup>38</sup>I thank Mr. Richard F. Leach, a researcher in the Lowell National Historical Park for having brought my attention to this source.

<sup>39</sup>In addition to the analyses by Vicero, Frenette (1988), and Ramirez (1991) mentioned above, another important study to be noted is James P. Allen, "Migration Fields of French Canadian Immigrants to Southern Maine," *Geographical Review*, 62, no. 3 (July 1972): 366-83. For a further discussion, see chap. 4 of this study.

prevented me from examining all the records. Moreover, while local historians possessed most of the *Case History* records, files for the period 1891 to 1900 had been reserved for the exclusive use of this group. Consequently, I had access to a limited portion of these records.

Notwithstanding questions regarding the limited representativity of the *Case History* files used in this study, this source contains extremely rich data which no scholar could afford to ignore. Of greatest importance for this study is the information on the residential history of financially destitute immigrants prior to their arrival in Lowell. Because these were the people who were most likely to be overlooked in other official records, the *Case Histories*, used in combination with these latter sources, enable us to reconstruct the residential histories of this largely ignored group. Linkage of the nominal data derived from these above sources to the census data provides longitudinal pictures on the family economy and their residential history for selected families. In this process, I have used, as discussed in the historiographical section of this chapter, the direct record linkage method developed by historians such as David Kertzer, Daniel Hogan, and Bruno Ramirez.<sup>40</sup>

I have confronted some difficulties in the course of my research and consequently have been obliged to modify partly the initial plan of this study. School attendance records, which might have revealed the impact of a series of anti-child labour laws introduced at the turn of the century, did not offer any information useful for this study. As a result, my analysis concerning the effects of these laws is largely limited to data drawn from aggregate

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<sup>40</sup>For more detailed discussion on these two nominal sources, see chapter 4.

records.<sup>41</sup> I have also been refused permission to consult parish records which could be used in supplementing the census data, on the grounds that baptism and marriage records which could contain references to illegitimate births or other irregularities would infringe on the parishioners' privacy. As for the marriage records housed in the City Clerk's office, because of the regulations prohibiting the consultation of these records *en masse*, I was not able to examine these documents.

In addition to the quantitative sources, qualitative data drawn from interviews and local newspapers comprise a supplementary corpus of sources. Although primarily used for supplementing the data derived from the quantitative sources, information derived from oral interviews is vital because it enables us to recapture some of the human stories that fall outside the realm of the latter documents. As will be demonstrated in the course of this study, interview transcripts allow us to catch a glimpse of immigrants' everyday life in the neighbourhood, the extent of parental authority, and at times, the bitter memories of wives or oldest daughters obliged to assume responsibility for the family. Lowell has attracted a number of historians whose projects have recorded the voices of French-Canadian immigrants and their children. The following three collections are of particular importance for this study. Mary Blewett has published two collections of the oral histories of textile workers

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<sup>41</sup> The main reason for the difficulty in locating school records is that after the several mergers of schools and the succeeding transfers of school documents, it was impossible to locate these files. Mr. Robert Johnson-Lally, archivist at the Archdiocese of Boston; Sister Ann Dominic Reach, superintendant of Schools, Catholic School Office, Department of Education, Archdiocese of Boston; and Ms. Helene Desjarlais, development director of Lowell Catholic High School until 1995, have indicated that part of the records on the elementary school pupils are housed in the Lowell Catholic High School. However, these materials only contain term grades of some of the pupils and did not show any longitudinal data on their school attendance.

in Lowell as a collaborative project with Donna Mailloux, an oral historian in the Lowell National Historical Park, and Martha Mayo, a librarian at the Center for Lowell History, University of Lowell (now University of Massachusetts at Lowell). These are *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990) and *Surviving Hard Times: The Working People of Lowell* (Lowell: Lowell Museum, 1982). All these transcripts are housed at the Patrick J. Morgan Cultural Center, Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts at Lowell. Ethnologist Brigitte Lane conducted another important series of oral interviews and has selectively reproduced them in her publication, *Franco-American Folk Traditions and Popular Culture in a Former Milltown: Aspects of Ethnic Urban Folklore and the Dynamics of Folklore Change in Lowell, Massachusetts* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990). For the purposes of comparison, I have also used oral histories recorded in the neighbouring cities of Fall River, Massachusetts, and Manchester, New Hampshire.<sup>42</sup>

Still other contemporary qualitative sources consulted for the present study are the French-Canadian daily published in Lowell, *l'Etoile de Lowell* (1900-1910), and the English language daily, *Lowell Courier-Citizen* (1905-1911), both housed in the Morgan Cultural Center. An investigation undertaken by George F. Kenngott, *The Record of A City: A Social Survey of Lowell* (1910), is housed in the Special Collections of the McLennan Library, McGill University.<sup>43</sup> These documents are useful in extending our understanding of the historical context of the lives of the French-Canadian immigrants in

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<sup>42</sup>Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*; Rouillard, *Ah les Etats!*.

<sup>43</sup>George F. Kenngott, *The Record of A City: A Social Survey of Lowell* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910).

Lowell and in providing internal, albeit elite-oriented, views of this ethnic community.

Finally, official records, both quantitative and qualitative, provide us with the pertinent data needed to gain a general view of the French-Canadian worker's place in Lowell's hierarchical labour market. The most important governmental material is the investigation conducted in 1908-1909 by the U.S. Immigration Commission.<sup>44</sup> In an attempt to determine the impact of immigration on American society, this commission published its extensive evidence in a forty-one volume collection. Despite the committee's racist inclinations, this report remains one of the most important sources for the study of immigration at the turn of the century. Volume ten, for example, contains detailed information on French-Canadian textile workers. In particular, the case study of community A appearing in this volume is especially important for my study. This is because factors such as population increase, physical development, and the chronology of immigrant influx, strongly suggest that city A is in actuality Lowell, Massachusetts.<sup>45</sup>

Other governmental and municipal records include the censuses compiled by the U.S. federal government for 1900, 1910, and 1920,<sup>46</sup> the census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (1905), *Massachusetts Labor Bulletin* (1910), and *City Documents of the City of Lowell, Massachusetts* (1901-1910), which are housed in the

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<sup>44</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industries*, 61st Cong., 2d Sess., Senate Doc. 633, vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911; reprint, New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1970).

<sup>45</sup>For more details on this point, see chapter 3.

<sup>46</sup> This source is available in the form of microfilmed copy.

Morgan Cultural Center.<sup>47</sup> The federal sources provide detailed demographic data on Lowell residents. The last three records, however, provide only limited information on the enforcement of the anti-child labour laws.

This chapter has reviewed conceptual and methodological developments in historical writing on French-Canadian and other immigrants. Based on this assessment, this study will incorporate new insights on gender relations into its analysis, while rejecting the "pre-migration/post-migration" dichotomy. Through an exploration of the various aforementioned sources, this study will elaborate on a perspective which recognizes the migratory phenomenon as a "complete sequence of experiences whereby the individual moves from one social identity to another,"<sup>48</sup> The next chapter begins an analysis of Quebec society that sent, according to Yolande Lavoie,<sup>49</sup> 1,000,000 French Canadian men, women, and children south of the border over the span of one hundred years from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

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<sup>47</sup>U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the year 1900. Manufactures. Part II: State and Territories*, microfilm, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1902); *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1910. Population and Manufactures*, microfilm, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1912-13); *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1920. Population and Manufactures*, microfilm, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1924-25); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Niles Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children: A Study Based on Census Statistics Relative to the Foreign born and the Native White of Foreign or Mixed Parentage* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927); The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Bureau of Statistics, *Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1905* (Boston, Wright & Potter Printing, 1908); Massachusetts, Bureau of Statistics, *Massachusetts Labor Bulletin 15, nos. 71-78, 1910* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing, 1910); City of Lowell, *City Documents of the City of Lowell, Massachusetts* (Lowell: Courier-Citizen).

<sup>48</sup>Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas," 22.

<sup>49</sup>Lavoie, "Les mouvements migratoires des Canadiens," 78.

## CHAPTER TWO

### QUEBEC AS THE IMMIGRANTS' SOCIETY OF ORIGIN

#### INTRODUCTION

In February of 1909, a local daily newspaper in Lowell took the unusual step of quoting a deputy from Quebec in the Canadian Commons, who lamented that despite increasing Canadian prosperity, the development of Quebec's agriculture in recent years, and efforts by the Government to promote colonization, "the deplorable exodus of his people from the Province to the States had not yet ceased." The Parliamentarian argued that Canada should put all her strength into repatriating the 2,000,000 "Canadians" who were "on the wrong side of the border." In the opinion of the Honourable Member, a renewed injection of subsidies for the colonization effort of the province's hinterland was in order. The Lowell daily, however, seriously questioned the efficiency of the proposed remedy to the continued population flow out of the



Province:

It is hard to see [...] where the government got its money's worth out of the colonizing agents it paid fatly to deliver glowing lectures in French-American centers on the advantages of Lake St. John or other bucolic regions. Their efforts in this town [Lowell], for one instance, were notoriously futile, and it wasn't in any case their oratory which drew back to Canada the few families which did leave ... for the old home.<sup>1</sup>

At issue was the complexity of French-Canadian emigration and the efforts of political (and religious) leaders to repatriate, and, if possible, halt this population outflow from the province. According to this Lowell newspaper, the French-Canadian exodus to New England textile centres was so strong that repatriation projects would not have any significant effect in changing the course of this population movement.

The long-lasting outflow of French Canadians largely confirms John Bodnar's thesis that immigrants were a product of an economic system that penetrated their homeland.<sup>2</sup> Still, these immigrants were not passively pushed out of their society of origin. Before migrating they considered other possibilities, gathered information, and at times even tried alternatives. Nonetheless, the dynamics of population movement can only be understood in the context of the radical structural changes that occurred in the socioeconomy of the immigrants' society of origin. In Quebec, during the last third of the nineteenth century, commercial farming became predominant in the rural economy in terms of the

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<sup>1</sup>An article from an unnamed Lowell newspaper, published February 19, 1909, and reproduced by the U.S. Senate, Immigration Commission, in *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 228.

<sup>2</sup>Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 1.

volume of production, and throughout the early twentieth century, a growing segment of the population became rural wage-earners. Far from resolving long-standing agricultural problems, these shifts had the effect of exacerbating them by unsettling Quebec's socioeconomy, hitherto based largely on subsistence farming and minimal wage-earnings. As Quebec farmers shifted their production from subsistence towards market-oriented and specialized agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century, they became susceptible to fluctuating prices. Moreover, as cheap manufactured products became available in more remote regions of the province, rural Quebecers slowly grew to depend on cash to buy certain commercial goods which formerly they had produced themselves, such as bread, cotton clothes, and soap. These gradual yet profound socioeconomic changes were contemporaneous with an expanding demand for labour in urban industrial centres south of the border, making migration to New England textile cities a logical choice for many French Canadians.<sup>3</sup>

Rural French Canadians had to choose from limited options. Emigration to the U.S.A. was not the only solution, nor was it inevitably the ultimate one. Another alternative for a significant

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<sup>3</sup>Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, and Jean-Claude Robert, *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. 1, *De la Confédération à la crise (1867-1929)*, rev. ed. (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1989), 79-80; 132-37; 197-201. See also Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, *Le monde rural québécois au XIXe siècle*, Brochure historique, no. 47 (Ottawa: La Société historique du Canada, 1989); Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby, *Histoire économique du Québec, 1851-1896* (Montréal: Fides, 1971), Troisième partie, chaps I, II, and III; John McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario Until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). For discussion of Quebec's agriculture in the nineteenth century, see Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Le Bas-Canada au début du XIXe siècle: une hypothèse," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 25, no. 1 (juin 1971): 39-61; Christian Dessureault, "Crise ou modernisation? La société maskoutaine durant le premier tiers du XIXe siècle," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 42, no. 3 (hiver 1989): 359-88.

number of French Canadians was to settle in regions newly opened for *colonisation*. However, this option turned out to be less viable for two reasons. First, settling in the colonization regions was not an economically sound choice for families with a large number of children because of limited yields and few chances for employment, and secondly, this option meant harsh and lonely years living as *défricheurs*. In contrast, cities such as Lowell, despite their industrial problems, provided rural Quebecers with economic advantages — the promise of earning cash — as well as a community life, neither of which was easily found in colonization regions. This chapter emphasizes that immigrants did not encounter industrial capitalism for the first time in New England cities. They had already encountered it before their departure and had decided how it should be confronted. In established rural parishes, frontier settlements, and commercial and industrial centres of late nineteenth-century Quebec, French Canadians were experiencing the diverse forms of evolving industrial capitalism. In particular, rural Quebecers found themselves enmeshed in long-term processes that were radically transforming their world.

## 2.1. THE UNSETTLING OF THE TRADITIONAL EQUILIBRIUM IN RURAL QUEBEC

The French-Canadian exodus was largely a response to structural changes that had radically transformed Quebec's rural economy. A number of factors led a great number of French-Canadian families to leave the province and go south of the border in the late nineteenth century. Rapid population increase resulted in a shortage of land and the shift toward commercialized farming precipitated a rise in the number of rural wage-earners who were vulnerable to fluctuating prices and yields. On the peripheries, the

settlers' life was no less precarious, characterized as it was by isolation, rugged conditions, and limited opportunities for ensuring subsistence. In the face of these difficulties, the families of farmers, settlers, and day labourers were motivated to modify their survival strategies.

### *2.1.1. The Socio-economic Crisis of Lower Canada: 1815-1860*

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the population of Lower Canada (now Quebec) increased rapidly, from 335,000 in 1815 to 600,000 in 1840. This rapid growth was partly the result of waves of immigration that brought settlers from the British Isles, particularly Ireland, from other European countries, and from the United States. From 1815 to 1840, approximately 300,000 immigrants entered the port of Quebec. A sizable proportion of them left again for other parts of Canada or for the United States.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, however, the demographic growth largely reflected Quebec's high rates of natural population increase, which varied between twenty-four and twenty-eight births per thousand. Compared to other Western societies of the time, Quebec showed a higher birth rate (between fifty and fifty-four births per thousand from 1815 to 1839) and a lower mortality rate. The latter was especially low among children (between twenty-two and twenty-five deaths per thousand for the same period, except for the years 1830-34, which were marked by cholera during which the rate jumped to thirty-one deaths per thousand). These figures meant that simply through the process of natural reproduction, Quebec's population would double in size approximately every twenty-five

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<sup>4</sup>Until 1825, more than one third settled in the Saint-Laurent valley. See Courville and Séguin, *Le monde rural québécois au XIXe siècle*, 4.

years, or even less.<sup>5</sup> It was therefore in the early nineteenth century that demographic pressure began to create acute problems in rural Quebec, making it increasingly difficult for French Canadians to gain access to available arable land.

In the eighteenth century, peasants employed both informal and legal methods to secure the viability of family farms passed on through inheritance.<sup>6</sup> The availability of land also enabled sons or sons-in-law to settle in the vicinity without too much difficulty. By the early nineteenth century, however, because of demographic pressures, the ensuing land shortage, and the consequent rise in its value, rural French Canadians were increasingly faced with an

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* See also Marcel Trudel, *Introduction à la Nouvelle-France* (Montréal: HRW, 1971), 15; Gérard Bouchard, "Family Reproduction in New Rural Areas: Outline of a North American Model," *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (1994): 475-510, especially 481; Bouchard and Raymond Roy, "Fécondité et alphabétisation au Saguenay et au Québec, XIXe-XXe siècles," *Annales de démographie historique* (1991): 173-201. The rapid demographic growth in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly among French Canadians living in rural agricultural areas, was not a new phenomenon, but had already begun as early as the second half of the preceding century. See Robert Armstrong, *Structure and Change: An Economic History of Quebec* (Toronto: Gage Publishing, 1984), 60.

Demographic pressure alone did not explain the extent or duration of the French-Canadian population outflow, although it should not be dismissed as a negligible factor. According to Gérard Bouchard, in the mid-nineteenth century, as far as the demographic environment and the nature of the burden it placed upon family production were concerned, there was nothing unique about rural Quebec. The high fertility rate was characteristic of the other provinces in Canada as well as New England, the northeastern Atlantic region and west-central United States. See Bouchard and Richard Lalou, "La surfécondité des couples québécois depuis le 17e siècle: essai de mesure et d'interprétation," *Recherches sociographiques* 34, no. 1 (1993): 9-44, esp. 37, Annex 1.

<sup>6</sup>Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 71-81; Sylvie Dépatie, "La transmission du patrimoine dans les territoires en expansion: un exemple canadien au XIIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 44, no. 2 (1990): 171-98.

acute problem of access to land. This situation resulted in the following two movements, apparently in contradiction to one another, in the rural universe. In the old parishes, structural changes at the time favoured accumulation and consolidation of the land: a smaller number of farmers likely gained a larger acreage of land. Yet, in the settlement frontiers, there was, in general, a notable shift towards smaller landholding. Such transformations that shaped and fragmented the rural space were "a social and economic game" by which more solidly established farming families acquired and accumulated land that other families were obliged to abandon.<sup>7</sup> This new dynamism caused greater social differentiation among the peasantry in rural Quebec. A growing number of smallholding families found it difficult to live by subsistence farming alone. The near-impossibility of producing crops adequate for a family's subsistence led to the emergence of a new territorial unit (*emplacement*), a small plot of land with a shack. However, the size of the *emplacement* was only sufficient to produce supplementary products, usually not enough to ensure a

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<sup>7</sup>Dessureault, "Crise ou modernisation?": 371-77. Christian Dessureault argues that this transformation was not a result of inheritance practices based on the principle of equal division, which, according to the argument advanced by Fernand Ouellet, led to the fragmentation of the land. Fernand Ouellet, *Histoire économique et sociale du Québec, 1760-1850* (Montréal: Fides, 1966). For other studies which complement Dessureault's explanation, see Louis Michel, "Varennés et Verchères des origines au milieu du XIXe siècle," in *Evolution et éclatement du monde rural: structures, fonctionnement et évolution différentielle des sociétés rurales françaises et québécoises, XVIIe XXe siècles*, ed. Joséph Goy and Jean-Pierre Wallot (Paris and Montréal: Les Éditions de l'École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales and Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1986), 325-40; Pauline Desjardins, "La coutume de Paris et la transmission des terres: le rang de la Beauce à Calixa-Lavallée de 1730 à 1975," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 34, no. 2 (décembre 1980): 331-339; Serge Courville, "Le marché des 'subsistances': l'exemple de la plaine de Montréal au début des années 1830: une perspective géographique," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 42, no. 2 (automne 1988): 283-31; Courville, "Un monde rural en mutation: le Bas-Canada dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 40, no. 2 (1987): 237-58.

family's subsistence. This harsh reality gradually transformed farmers into agricultural day labourers (*journaliers agricoles*) who had to offer their services for wages,<sup>8</sup> and subsequently, the number of migrants who left their parishes of origin multiplied.

In addition to the intense pressure of population growth, the shortage of available arable land, and the subsequent increase of landless farmers, natural disasters — such as frost in early August, wheat rust, and wheat flies — ravaged Quebec's agriculture. Since the 1960s, historians have debated the causes of this socio-economic transformation. Despite controversy, the majority of scholars agree on one point: that structural and conjunctural factors, rather than the alleged conservatism of French Canadians, or "repli sur soi," led to the decline in wheat production in the province.<sup>9</sup> These factors included the impoverishment of the land which resulted from the monoculture of wheat in Eastern Canada, principally for export to trans-Atlantic markets; the gradual settlement of Western Ontario and of land farther west; and, as discussed above, the intense population pressure in rural Quebec.<sup>10</sup>

While wheat production in Quebec slowly decreased, other *grandes cultures* — hay, oats, barley, potatoes, buckwheat — rapidly increased. The new orientation of the province's agriculture, with its focus on livestock and daily production, largely reflected the fact that Quebec's agriculture became closely tied to urban markets in

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<sup>8</sup>Ralph D. Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians," 62, 66.

<sup>9</sup>Jean Lamarre, "La migration des Canadiens français vers le Michigan, 1840-1914: Leur contribution au développement socioéconomique de la région," (Ph.D. diss., Université de Montréal, 1995), 82.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Armstrong, *Structure and Change: An Economic History of Quebec* (Toronto: Gage Press, 1984), 79-82. See also Lamarre, "La migration des Canadiens français," 82-87.

the province, in the rest of Canada, and abroad. The 1854 Reciprocity Treaty with the United States as well as the American Civil War (1861 to 1865) served to stimulate Quebec's agricultural production. After the latter, the period of reciprocity trade in 1865-66, and the closing of the American market, Quebec's agriculture found another opening in Great Britain. Because of this new market's demand for butter and cheese and a growing domestic market resulting from urban expansion, Quebec farmers were encouraged to reorient their production efforts toward commercialization and specialization.<sup>11</sup>

### *2.1.2. A New Orientation: 1870-1910*

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Quebec farmers proceeded further with commercialization and specialization. During this period, the production of hay nearly doubled, largely because of the increase in dairy-farming and horse-breeding in Bellechasse and Montmagny for export to the American market.<sup>12</sup> Dairy farming came to dominate the province's agriculture. Cheese exports from Quebec and Ontario amounted to less than \$100,000 before 1865, but reached \$1.1 million by 1871. The increase in butter production was less dramatic. Before 1856, the yearly value of butter exports from Quebec and Ontario never exceeded \$200,000 but surpassed \$500,000 by 1859 and, with the opening of the British market, rose to \$1.3 million by 1865 and to

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<sup>11</sup>For the rates of Quebec's urban development, see Linteau et al. eds., *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. 1, 170.

<sup>12</sup>There was also animal-husbandry in the Eastern Townships, the cultivation of vegetables and fruits in the rural belts surrounding Montreal and Quebec City, and the cultivation of tobacco in the region of Joliette.



\$2.9 million by 1871.<sup>13</sup> Then, during the period from 1871 to 1921, the butter production doubled, passing from 24,289 pounds to 48,630 pounds per annum.<sup>14</sup>

In the province of Quebec, the production of cheese and, to a lesser extent, butter, which had until then been a back-breaking task usually assigned to women, was gradually taken over by factories.<sup>15</sup> Whereas butter production in the rest of the country largely remained in the hands of women, with only a third being produced in factories, in Quebec, factory production of butter had already exceeded home production by 1911.<sup>16</sup> Ontario was also undergoing a shift from home to factory-produced butter, but the process was not as rapid as in Quebec. It should be noted, however, that this transformation in agricultural production was not uniform throughout Quebec. For example, in regions with limited access to outside markets, subsistence farming persisted.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings*, 49-50.

<sup>14</sup>Normand Perron, "Genèse des activités laitières 1850-1960," in *Agriculture et colonisation au Québec: aspects historiques*, ed. Normand Séguin (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1980), 113-140, especially 121, Tableau 4.

<sup>15</sup>The number of butter and cheese manufactories increased rapidly: it more than doubled, going from 728 in 1891 to 1,867 in 1919. The total value of manufactured products also increased: for the same period it went from \$2,919,000 to \$15,305,488 for cheese, and from \$268,000 to \$1,369,384 for butter. See Marjorie Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988): 109. Chapter 5 of this study focuses on Quebec's agriculture. See also an article by the same author, Cohen, "The Decline of Women in Canadian Dairying," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 17, no. 34 (1984): 307-34.

<sup>16</sup>Cohen, *Women's Work*, 109.

<sup>17</sup>Linteau et al, *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. 1, 129-35. The years from 1890 to 1910 marked a high point for Quebec's agriculture. The number of milk cows increased rapidly by more than 200,000 in the 1890s. According to Courville and Séguin, it fell slightly in the following decade, a sign that this was a fairly new specialty in Quebec's agriculture. Pig-raising

The transition from subsistence to commercialized farming initiated profound social changes and was undeniably one of the factors behind out-migration from the province. Commercialized agriculture with its concomitant trend toward specialization meant not only that farmers were vulnerable to the fluctuating needs of the market, but also that they became more dependent on the market for products which they had hitherto produced themselves. Moreover, in order to maximize their profits, a proportion of farmers expanded their operations and invested in expensive machinery. In doing so, they accumulated huge debts which, according to Yves Roby, forced a significant number of them to borrow from notaries and general store owners.<sup>18</sup> Under the combined effects of successive devastating crop failures (in 1888, 1889, and 1890), acute international competition in the marketplace, and restrictions on market access imposed by protectionist measures such as the McKinley Tariff in the United States, some farmers had to turn to usurers in an attempt to repay creditors. Others sought to escape this vicious cycle of mounting debts by temporarily leaving the countryside in search of employment in the industrial centres of the United States.<sup>19</sup>

Bruno Ramirez has developed another perspective with respect to Roby's view of a direct causal relationship between indebtedness and emigration. Ramirez has classified Quebec

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progressed rapidly, and pork became the second largest animal product in Quebec, while poultry doubled in number. The rapid increase in pork and poultry production indicates the impact of a growing domestic market. See Courville et Séguin, *Le monde rural québécois*, 19.

<sup>18</sup>Yves Roby reminds us that the majority of farmers continued to farm in the style of their fathers or grandfathers until the early twentieth century. See Yves Roby, *Les Franco-Américains*, 341, footnote 17.

<sup>19</sup>Hamelin and Roby, *Histoire économique du Québec*, 88-98; McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings*, 5.

farmers from the Berthier county of the time into two categories: a small group of commercial farmers and a larger expanding group of small farmholders. As the first category of prosperous farmers acquired a growing acreage of farm land and practiced considerable agricultural specialization, they provided seasonal wages for the second category of small farmholders and landless farmers. The majority of the emigrating population came from the latter category — *journaliers* and small landholders, a substantial number of whom were both.<sup>20</sup> Given their precarious economic conditions, they were not likely to invest massively in agricultural modernization. The survival strategies of these day labourers and their families rested on their ability, especially that of women, to combine subsistence farming and minimal wage earning brought home by their husbands and children. When this proved insufficient to ensure their survival and that of their families, these French Canadians — without land and unable to sell their labour power regularly in the labour market — became a "floating labour force."<sup>21</sup> Lacking any form of security, they were the best

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<sup>20</sup>Small holdings of fifty acres made up about one third of the county's acreage, and the relatively low income of their owners may be inferred by the fact that one out of three worked as *journaliers* to supplement their earnings. Ramirez, *On the Move*, 25. *Journaliers'* work included haying, harvesting, and the off-season work of hauling on family-owned farms. It also included public construction as well as maintenance work at nearby urban centres and work sites outside the city. Their employment was irregular by nature, and the salary was not sufficient to compensate for the loss of subsistence farming. In agriculture, the demand for wage-labour from individuals other than family members was limited and seasonal, mainly because few Quebec farmers could afford to employ wage-labourers on a permanent basis. Having limited production and financial resources, farming families preferred to manage with their family members alone rather than employ wage workers. Moreover, work for agricultural labourers was highly seasonal — mostly in spring for sowing and at the end of summer for harvesting — so they remained without work throughout summer and winter. For some statistics, see section 3 of this chapter.

<sup>21</sup>Lamarre, "La migration des Canadiens français," 81.

candidates for temporary migration outside their rural villages and towns in search of jobs.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1850s and 1860s, in most of the rural counties where economic development rested on the commercial activities of the large and mid-sized farms, small landholders and landless farmers had become a common and increasingly permanent feature of the province's rural scene. In his study on the Richelieu district during the 1852-71 period, for instance, Yves Otis has estimated that thirteen to twenty-two percent of all family units in the region were headed by *journaliers*.<sup>23</sup> As Serge Courville and Normand Séguin have pointed out, as early as 1851, the occupation of *journalier*, which had once been considered temporary employment for young people, had become a job that could last a lifetime. In the village of St. Eustache, for instance, there were almost as many male labourers between the ages of 40 and 60 as there were those between the ages of 15 and 30.<sup>23-a</sup> Moreover, close to eighteen percent of the *journaliers* were women, of whom about two-thirds were over thirty years old. In Berthier County, too, *journalier* was far from being an occupation monopolized by young single men. In St. Cuthbert, as many as fifty-seven percent of all

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<sup>22</sup>Prior to Ramirez's work, in a demographic study on the out-migrating families from the parish of Saint-Damase, Quebec, from 1852 to 1861, Daniel Maisonneuve observed demographic and socioeconomic selectivity. Maisonneuve has shown that the households headed by *journaliers* were the most susceptible to migrate with their entire family members. See Daniel Maisonneuve, "Structure familiale et exode rural: le cas de Saint-Damase (1852-186)" (M.A. thesis, Université de Montréal, 1983), chap. 3.

<sup>23</sup>Yves Otis, "Famille et exploitations agricoles: quatre paroisses de la rive sud de Montréal, 1852-1871" (M.A. thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1985), 61, 63; Courville and Séguin, *Entre ville et campagne*, 143; Ramirez, *On the Move*, 27, 28.

<sup>23-a</sup>Allan Greer has observed this phenomenon as early as the 1830s. Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 184-88, 226-28.

*journaliers* recorded in 1871 were forty years or older, and a still larger proportion were family heads. These figures confirm that the day labourers were not exclusively young farmers' sons deprived of the means to settle on a subsistence farm. Adversely affected by the process of commercialization and the more general thrust of capitalism — two forces that were moulding the socioeconomy of Quebec's rural universe — these people left their rural parishes in huge numbers to seek a better economic lot, not only south of the border, but also in the province's hinterlands.<sup>23-b</sup>

## 2.2. COLONISATION: A LESS VIABLE OPTION

Although the economic and social transformation of rural Quebec led to the departure of a significant number of marginalized rural Quebecers for the U.S.A., emigration should not be viewed as their only option. Even when constraints were prevalent, French Canadians did not behave in ways that were directly determined by the environment. In an attempt to address the causes of emigration — overpopulation and the structural transformation of agriculture — the provincial government and the Catholic clergy initiated a "colonisation" campaign, which aimed to direct the province's surplus population towards the hinterlands of the St. Lawrence Valley. Despite their efforts, the impact of the colonization movement on French-Canadian emigration has been largely overlooked in historical studies about French-Canadian immigration. One exception is Yves Frenette's study of French Canadians in Lewiston, Maine, in which he estimates that as many as one third of the city's French-Canadian immigrants came from

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<sup>23-b</sup> Ramirez, *On the Move*, 24-32.

the *colonisation* regions.<sup>24</sup> Another exception is Bruno Ramirez's research on Rimouski County. By revealing that the choice either to emigrate or to settle in a colonization region was largely contingent upon their family life cycle. Ramirez has shed important light on the interaction between the two phenomena.<sup>24-a</sup> Evidence from the analyses of these two scholars indicates that despite the policies of colonization and, later, repatriation, a significant proportion of settlers left for the industrial centres in the United States after having spent some time in the province's hinterlands. Given that colonization was the most important alternative to emigration — both in its extent and in the implications on the development of the rural Quebec economy — it is crucial to investigate the context in which colonization policies developed. The following pages will therefore focus on the connection between colonization and emigration.

From the second half of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, colonization was confined largely to the seigneurial domains. These were the areas first established by the seigneurs under the French Régime, usually close to the rivers where it was easy to take up agriculture. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, when the best lands in the Laurentian Valley became almost completely occupied, settlers began to head for peripheral areas on the outskirts of the Laurentian and Appalachian Mountains. It was at about this time that a policy of peopling the hinterlands of the St. Lawrence River was adopted as a

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<sup>24</sup>Frenette, "La genèse d'une communauté canadienne-française," 170-71.

<sup>24-a</sup> Ramirez, *On the Move*, 80-84, Yves Frenette further discusses the importance of family life cycle upon French Canadian's decision-making choosing either to emigrate or go to the settlement regions. See Yves Frenette, "Macroscopie et microscopie", 221-33.

solution to overpopulation and the agricultural problems besetting Quebec's rural areas.<sup>25</sup>

The colonization policy had three clear objectives: to promote agriculture in the hinterlands, to populate these areas, and to transform them into sites of repatriation or alternative migration for Quebecers. It must be stressed that the last objective did not constitute the initial cause of colonization. As growing numbers of French Canadians left their parishes for the United States, however, this objective became a central goal of the policy of colonization.<sup>26</sup> Underlying the rhetoric of peopling the hinterlands were the political and religious elite's motives for colonization — motives that defined the nature of this social and national project. Colonization was more than just a settlement policy: it was a social project by which French-Canadian leaders attempted to incite rural Quebecers to fulfill the duty of the "French-Canadian race." The political elite and the Catholic clergy believed that taming Quebec's forests would preserve a civilization against the threats of Protestantism, secularization, marginalization, and anglicization. In this sense, French-Canadian frontier settlement was "Turner's frontier thesis in reverse."<sup>27</sup> Whereas the American frontier, according to Frederick Jackson Turner, would produce "new, freer, proto-democratic men,"<sup>28</sup> the French-Canadian settlement frontier

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<sup>25</sup>Linteau et al., *Histoire contemporaine du Québec*, vol. 1, 137-45; See also Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians," 50-59.

<sup>26</sup>In fact, the proponents of colonization envisaged the establishment of French Canadians in other regions as well, such as the Canadian Prairies. However, the Laurentian hinterlands remained the primary focus of concrete colonization schemes.

<sup>27</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*, 84.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

would preserve cherished elements of a traditional society: Catholicism, the French language, and the family. The regions north of Montreal, the Mauricie, the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, the inland of the Bas-Saint-Laurent, the Eastern Townships, and, later, the Témiscamingue region — all came under the plough of colonization.<sup>29</sup>

As the departure of Quebecers to New England's manufacturing centres reached its peak in the 1870s and 1880s, supporters of the colonization policy emphasized the need to keep the French-Canadian population in the province. In the opinion of the province's nationalist elites — including Premier Honoré Mercier and Father François-Xavier-Antoine Labelle from Saint-Jérôme-de-Terrebonne — colonization would become the principal means of slowing and, if possible, halting the population flow to the south. These leaders feared that migration toward the cities, especially the urban centres of the United States would result in the moral corruption of rural Quebecers who would be unable to withstand the pressures of assimilation and secularization. Expatriates in the United States, it was argued, had to be rescued from cultural extermination; thus, repatriation of the population already residing outside of the province became an integral part of the colonization policy.<sup>30</sup>

In the Saguenay region, settlement began with the expiration of the fur trade lease of the Hudson's Bay Company. Settlers from the overcrowded rural parishes of Charlevoix rushed

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<sup>29</sup>Linteau et al, *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. 1, 137-45.

<sup>30</sup>Robert G. LeBlanc, "Regional Competition for Franco-American Repatriates, 1870-1930," *Quebec Studies* 1, no. 1 (1983): 110-29.



northward along the Saguenay River.<sup>31</sup> By the early 1850s, several thousand settlers inhabited one of the province's earliest-established regions of colonization. In regions such as the Bas-Saint-Laurent and the Mauricie, colonization followed in the wake of the lumber companies' operational expansion as well as railroad construction in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Colonization settlements were established wherever it was deemed agriculturally viable, in most cases in isolated regions, but often where the soil was of poor quality. In addition, long winters (usually lasting from late October to mid-April) limited the potential for agricultural activities. As a consequence, agriculture alone was generally not sufficient to provide for the subsistence of the settlers' families.

The reliance on both subsistence agriculture and seasonal labour in the forestry industry was a central feature of the colonization regions. In this mixed economy, which Gérard Bouchard describes as a model of "co-integration," French-Canadian families lived in the presence of two dynamics of reproduction and collective integration. One system operated at the local level (parish, sub-region, region), the other at an "extraregional" level, and each interacted with the other. The logic of reciprocity linking these two systems, however, did not imply their equality. On the contrary, Séguin and Hardy have argued, as viewed from the

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<sup>31</sup>Normand Séguin, *La conquête du sol au 19e siècle* (Montreal: Éditions du Boréal, 1977), 49.

<sup>32</sup>René Hardy and Normand Séguin, *Forêt et société en Mauricie: La formation de la région de Trois-Rivières, 1830-1930* (Montréal: Éditions du Boréal, 1984); John Willis, "Urbanization, Colonization and Underdevelopment in the Bas-Saint-Laurent: Fraserville and the Témiscouata in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Cahier de géographie du Québec* 27, no. 73-74 (1984): 125-61. Lumber companies also attracted seasonal workers from distant regions, for instance from the Mauricie, as well as from overseas.

outside, the functioning of these two systems was characterized by the exploitation and dominance of the local economy. For instance, the so-called lumber barons, who had significant power in local politics, supported the project of populating the province's hinterland because it was highly profitable for them.<sup>33</sup> The lumber companies relied heavily on a seasonal work force drawn largely from settlers in nearby areas and kept them barely above the subsistence level. The companies did so by rendering the *colons* dependent on cash income, the rate of which was unilaterally determined by the industry.<sup>34</sup> In the Témiscouata region, the virgin forests to the north and east were deliberately kept intact by the proprietors, many of whom were involved in the lumber industry, in order to prevent settlers from exploiting these areas economically.<sup>35</sup> Séguin and Hardy thus conclude that the agro-forestry system was one of the major causes of underdevelopment in rural Quebec.

Based on studies by the SOREP, which focuses on the micro-dynamics of the social and economic sustenance and reproduction in the Saguenay region, Bouchard has forcefully challenged the argument advanced by Séguin and Hardy. Bouchard asserts that when viewed from inside the local economy, the mechanism of the

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<sup>33</sup>In his work on the colonization area in the upper St. Francis district in the Eastern Townships, John Little argues against Séguin's agro-forestry theory of underdevelopment. First, in terms of the seasonal labour supply and food provisions, settlers depended on the major lumber companies to a lesser extent than suggested by Séguin. Thus, timber capital had little to gain from settlement in logging sites. Secondly, environmental limitations of agricultural commercialization, rather than restrictions set by lumber barons, dictated that a mixed agro-forestry economy was essential to the long-term survival of the settler community. Little, *Nationalism*, chap. 1.

<sup>34</sup>René Hardy and Normand Séguin, *Forêt et société*, 152-54; Willis, "Urbanization": 125-61.

<sup>35</sup>Willis, "Urbanization": 138.

above-mentioned two systems can be interpreted as a process by which the rural residents perpetuated the cultural and economic traits proper to their society. For example, the parental family strove to establish a maximum number of children on the family land and in the vicinity and by so doing, the families maintained their inheritance practice which privileged their solidarity. At the same time, the family had recourse to diverse economic activities complementary to agriculture, the most important of which was seasonal work in the forestry. It was within this logic, for instance, that agricultural settlers sent young male members of their families out to the forestry camps during the winter months while ensuring that there would be sufficient manpower left behind to take care of the family farm, which in any event was relatively inactive during that season. The seasonal nature of forestry work made it complementary to the agricultural activities of the settlers' families. Extra cash income procured in this manner allowed these *habitant* families to buy additional land for their children or made it possible for *journaliers* to settle on a land. Consequently, forestry earnings, together with incomes engendered from other activities, enabled these families to sustain, reinforce, and even extend "traditional" practices proper to their local economy while serving the "modern" and developed industries and services. Insofar as the latter relied on the former in a similar manner, these systems operated in a relative "structural harmony."<sup>36</sup>

Colonization proceeded hand in hand with the construction of railroads into the hinterlands. As early as the 1850s, the Grand

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<sup>36</sup>Gérard Bouchard, "Co-intégration et reproduction de la société rurale. Pour un modèle saguenayen de la marginalité," *Recherches sociographiques* 29, no. 2-3, (1988): 283-305; Bouchard and Lise Bergeron, "Aux origines d'une population régionale: mythes et réalités démographiques et sociales," *Revue d'histoire d'Amérique française* 42, no. 3 (hiver 1989): 389-409.

Trunk Railroad linked Rivière-du-Loup with Montréal, Toronto, and Sarnia to the east. A fork branch, expanding the network southward, further connected Richmond in the Eastern Townships to Portland, Maine. In the 1870s and 1880s this railroad network was further extended to the east by the construction of regional lines such as the one between Quebec and Lac-Saint-Jean, the Intercolonial in the Bas-Saint-Laurent, and the Témiscouata line. The completion of these lines further connected distant regions to the Laurentian route, which was linked to the Great Lakes as well as to urban commercial centres such as Halifax and Philadelphia (see Figure 2.1).<sup>37</sup>

The results of the colonization efforts were at best mixed. If colonization had the short-term benefit of alleviating the pressures of overpopulation in the province's seigneurial parishes, it also had the long-term advantage of establishing new regions in the province's hinterland. Nevertheless, as a means of stemming the tide of emigration to the United States, colonization failed. For instance, although in the Saguenay, one of the most important colonization regions, the population grew from 17,000 to 37,000 between 1871 and 1901,<sup>38</sup> this was only marginally higher than the French-Canadian population increase in a New England textile city such as Lowell or Fall River.<sup>39</sup> The population increase in the

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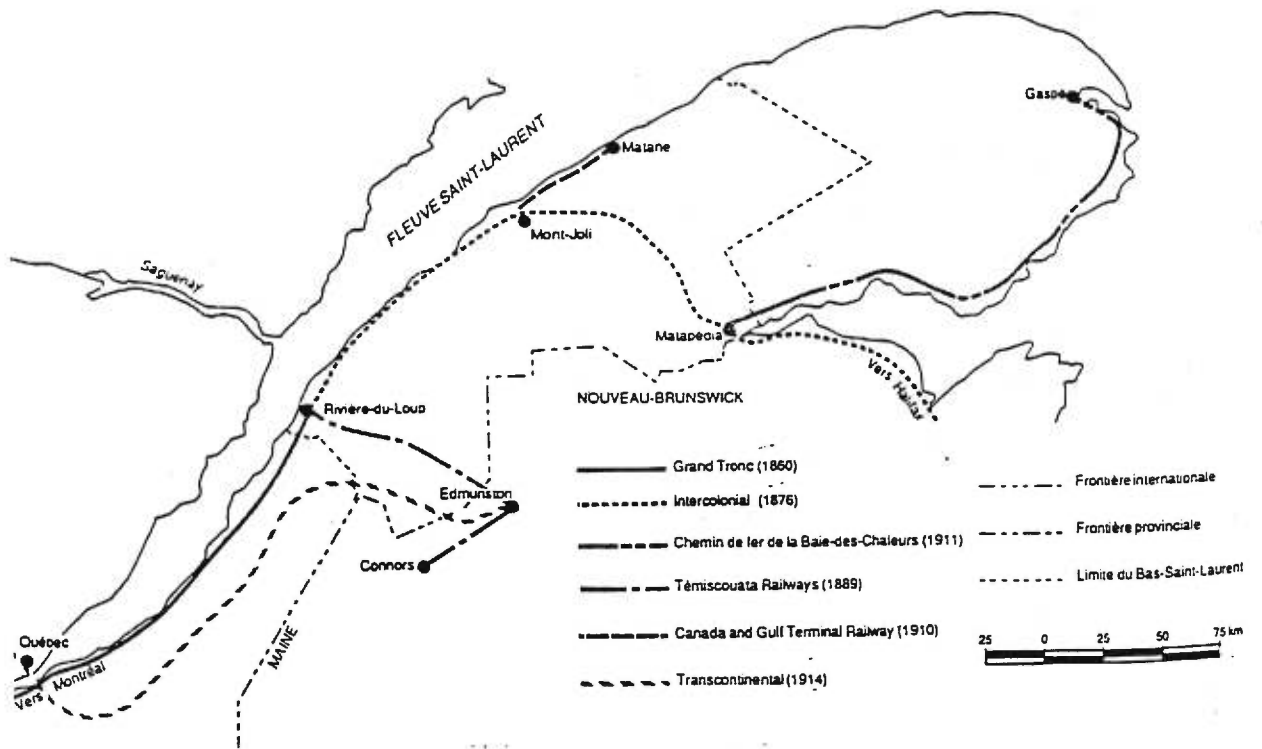
<sup>37</sup>Jean-Claude Fortin and Antonio Lechasseur, *Histoire du Bas-Saint-Laurent*, (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1993), 297-302. With the initiative of the provincial government, road construction also reached some colonization regions.

<sup>38</sup>Christian Pouyez et al., *Les Saguenayens: introduction à l'histoire des populations du Saguenay XIXe XXe siècles* (Québec: Presses de l'Université de Québec, 1983), 236, tableau 6.2.

<sup>39</sup>In 1900, Canadian-born alone numbered 14,674 in Lowell and 20,172 in Fall River. By 1910, French Canadians (including both Canadian-born and U.S.-born) in Lowell numbered 23,208; French Canadians in Fall River, 32,033. Figures for the French-Canadian population (both Canadian-born and U.S.-

Figure 2.1

Railroad Lines in the Saint-Lawrence Peninsula, Québec, in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries



Source: Antonio Lechasseur, *Histoire du Bas-Saint-Laurent*, 298.

Mauricie region, from 98,294 to 124,328 during the same period, was more significant than that of the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, yet this increase largely reflected the development of regional commercial/industrial centres such as Trois-Rivières and Grand'Mère.<sup>40</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a significant number of people drifted out of the colonization regions. In the Bas-Saint-Laurent, for instance, outward migration began to exceed inward migration as early as the 1860s. In the 1880s, out-migration had reached a peak of 16,924 in a population of 59,128.<sup>41</sup> The phenomenon was not unique to the Bas-Saint-Laurent but was also found in other major colonization regions. At the turn of the century, Dr. T. A. Brisson of the Société Générale de Colonisation et Rapatriement conceded that, as far as the Saguenay region was concerned, repatriation efforts had failed. A large number of those who had returned from the United States and settled in the colonization regions had decided to leave the province once again. Some even convinced friends and family members to join them in going back to the United States. In his annual report of 1905, Brisson observed:

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born) in 1900 are not available. U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 868. See also chap. 3 of this thesis. See also Ramirez, "The Crossroad Province: Quebec's Place in International Migrations: 1870-1915," in *A Century of European Migration, 1830-1930*, ed. Rudolph Vecoli and Suzanne Sinke (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 247.

<sup>40</sup>Canada, *Census of 1901*, vol. 1, 4-5; Linteau et al., *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. I, 41 and 170.

<sup>41</sup>Fortin and Lechasseur, *Histoire du Bas-Saint-Laurent*, 203, Table 5.5.

When the crisis came in the United States three years ago, a larger number than one would believe of our emigrated compatriots returned to Canada. In spite of attempts to retain them, a larger number of those who had come back to us returned, or are now returning to foreign parts... as the opportunity occurs from them to take advantage of the reopening of the American manufacturies... The greater part of those who are leaving now are those who had already been away, and it is feared that no efforts can wholly prevent this.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, a significant number of French Canadians crossed the border several times during their life. Because of this practice, according to Robert Leblanc, the French-Canadian migrants deserved the nickname: "coureurs de factorie."<sup>43</sup>

The failure of colonization and repatriation attempts is largely explained by the relative attractiveness of emigration. Emigration presented the promise of immediate and tangible economic rewards at the end of the day, week, or month. Becoming a wage-earner in the United States also meant higher wages in comparison to Quebec. In contrast, working on one's own plot of land in Quebec's hinterlands might have provided one with the pride of ownership, yet it also meant waiting for one entire agricultural season before income could be obtained from crop yields. The towns of New England could be reached after a day trip by train. As well, the American option provided the migrants with

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<sup>42</sup>Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1896, no. 29, 10; Canada, Report of the Department of Interior, 1895, 54-56. See also Robert LeBlanc, "Colonisation et rapatriement au Lac-Saint-Jean: 1895-1905" *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 38, no. 3 (hiver 1985): 379-408, especially 392.

<sup>43</sup>Robert LeBlanc, "La Franco-Américainie ou le Québec d'en bas," *Cahier de Géographie du Québec* 23 (1979): 39-52. According to LeBlanc, this designation was first used by Pierre Anctil, a French-Canadian resident in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. See also Leblanc, "Colonisation et rapatriement": 392.

important sociocultural assets — the chance to build and develop their Church and parish schools in a close-knit community. The advantages offered by the New England manufacturing centres must often have outweighed the disadvantages.<sup>44</sup>

According to Séguin and Hardy, the fluctuations in the population of the colonization regions, both in long-settled and newly established areas, largely resulted from factors concerning age and family life-cycles. Harsh conditions in the colonization areas — extreme cold, back-breaking work, and isolation from family — could arguably be endured by young rural Quebecers, whether single men or members of small families, but not by older individuals or larger families. Typically, young rural Quebecers left for a colonization region and stayed there for a while, living on a combination of subsistence farming and seasonal forestry employment. Once their families had become too large to be sustained with available resources that the land could only poorly produce, they left the area and were replaced by younger settlers.<sup>45</sup>

In a similar vein, Ramirez argues that the high turnover in the population of the colonization regions was determined less by a greater thirst for land or willingness to endure physical hardships than by the individual aptitude of settlers. Those best suited for a life in the colonization regions were *colons défricheurs* who had been engaged in clearing forests, as distinct from *colons cultivateurs*. Not all the settlers had the work experience, skill, and endurance of a *colon défricheur*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Yves Roby, "Quebec in the United States": 126-59.

<sup>45</sup>Hardy and Séguin, *Forêt et société*, 150-51.

<sup>46</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*, 79.



In addition to the above explanation, it can be argued that the high turnover in the population of the colonization regions was a consequence of the regions' inability to effectively absorb the incoming settlers. After the developmental boom created by railroad and road construction ended, the *colonisation* regions simply could not generate enough employment, or a sufficient variety of it, for all the settlers who had been attracted to the area.

In the region of Rivière-du-Loup and Témiscouata, for example, the forestry and railroad industries, which linked the region to the metropolitan market and sources of investment, initially provided the driving force for the region's development. The advent of railroads brought in workers, not only from other Quebec regions, but from as far away as Europe.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it provided regional farmers with access to outside markets and stimulated the development of the forestry industry and that of agricultural settlement.<sup>48</sup> Yet once the construction work was completed, the boom came to an abrupt end. Antonio Lechasseur estimates that in 1877, just a year after the railroad was finished, the first contingent of emigrants had left the region of the Bas-Saint-Laurent *en masse*. By the 1880s, out-migration from the Rimouski region, the hardest-hit area in the Bas-Saint-Laurent, reached its peak with a thirty-six percent drop in population over ten years.<sup>49</sup> The ultimate destination of these individuals is not known: some, no doubt, left for Montreal and other urban centres within the province, some might have migrated to western Canada,

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<sup>47</sup>Fortin and Lechasseur, *Histoire du Bas-Saint-Laurent*, 297-302.

<sup>48</sup>Willis, "Urbanization": 125-61.

<sup>49</sup>Between 1880 and 1890, 6,782 people left Rimouski out of a population of 18,809. See Fortin and Lechasseur, *Histoire du Bas-Saint-Laurent*, 203.

while others — a good proportion — must have left for the urban industrial centres of New England.

To Montreal, by railways, carriage, horse, or foot, went entire families as well as non-inheriting sons and daughters from rural areas of Quebec. Their arrival, along with that of immigrants from the British Isles and continental Europe, as well as the increase of births in families already living in the city, boosted the size of Montreal's population by nearly three times from 1851 to 1891. The most spectacular increase occurred from 1850 to 1860, when the population swelled from 56,175 to 90,323. More than eighty percent of the city's growth during this period resulted from the increase in the number of French Canadians.<sup>50</sup> Over subsequent decades, fluctuations in the economy slowed down such rapid expansion. Instead, the relatively greater attraction of employment opportunities in New England states attracted a growing number of French Canadian migrants.<sup>51</sup>

Ramirez's study of Berthier County, a part of the Lanaudière region, shows that among out-migrants from the county, the preference for the U.S. over Montreal as a destination during the

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<sup>50</sup>Jean-Claude Robert, "Urbanisation et population. Le cas de Montréal en 1861," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 35, no. 4 (March 1982): 523-35, especially 527.

<sup>51</sup>Bradbury, *Working Families*, 39; Robert, "Urbanisation et population": 523-35; France Gagnon, "Parenté et migration: le cas des Canadiens français à Montréal entre 1845 et 1875," *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers* (1988): 63-85; Johanne Burgess, "The Growth of a Craft Labour Force: Montreal Leather Artisans, 1815-1831," *Historical Papers* (1988): 48-62; Peter Bischoff, "Des forges du Saint-Maurice aux fonderies de Montréal: mobilité géographique, solidarité communautaire et action syndicale des mouleurs, 1829-1881," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 43, no. 1 (été 1989): 3-29; "Report of the Montreal Immigration Agent," *Canada, Session Papers* 1876, Paper no. 8, 11; *ibid.*, Paper no. 8, 1877; *ibid.*, Paper no. 9, 1878; Ramirez, *On the Move*, 21-49; 86-92.

last three decades of the nineteenth century was marked. This trend seems to have been reversed during the first decade of the twentieth century. As Montreal gained in importance as a major industrial and commercial centre in the region, it attracted a growing number of rural French Canadians while emigration to the U.S. declined.<sup>52</sup>

Ramirez's findings reveal another aspect of the rural exodus: using data drawn from notarial deeds, marriage certificates, and census manuscripts, he suggests that in Rimouski County, colonization may have delayed the exodus to the United States until the late 1880s. Migration did occur in Rimouski County in the 1870s and 1880s, as Lechasseur claims, yet most of the population movement during this period took place within the region. People moved from one parish to another within the same county or else to nearby counties. This pattern of movement continued until the 1880s and 1890s, by which time almost all departures were for the United States.<sup>53</sup>

The failure of political efforts to stem the tide of migration to the United States did not simply reflect the inability of the concerned provincial elite to impose its will upon the migrating population. Settlers themselves based the decision to stay or leave on their own pragmatic assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of migrating. Rather than any abstract nationalist argument about the preservation of Catholic French-Canadian culture, it may have been the settlers' perception of family needs, capacities, and their knowledge of particular local labour markets

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<sup>52</sup>Ramirez discusses the effect of these changes in Berthier county. Ramirez, *On the Move*, 36.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 38, 80.

that largely shaped the decisions of rural Quebecers to become or remain settlers in an isolated region of the province, or workers in a foreign industrial centre.<sup>54</sup> The choice was not necessarily an easy one. Life in the city meant hard work and at least a temporary stay in a foreign land. On the other hand, life in the colonization regions meant even harder work, offset perhaps by the promise of securing land — yet it was often land that had too poor a yield to ensure the survival of one's family.

While many rural Quebecers had to choose between emigration and colonization, the decision-making could be rather complex, involving years of experimentation, reconsideration, accidents, and failure. As Yves Frenette's study has shown, a significant number of rural Quebecers resorted to emigration only after they had experienced life as colonization settlers.<sup>55</sup> The experience of Félix Albert may serve to illustrate this point. Born in Iles-Verte in the Rimouski-Témiscouata region in 1843, Albert was a teenager when he and his parents left for the parish of St. Eloi in a colonization region. In 1866 he married Desneiges Michaud, also from Iles-Verte and together they had nineteen children. Despite his back-breaking efforts to succeed as an agricultural settler, he was confronted with a series of disasters such as early frosts, rusts, and droughts that ravaged the St. Eloi plain. During the long winter months he worked in remote forestry camps or cut down wood on his land to sell it to supplement his family income.

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<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>55</sup> Frenette, "La genèse d'une communauté canadienne-française, " 170-71. See also Ramirez, *On the Move*, 84-85.

One winter Albert went to Caribou, Maine, to look for work in the lumber industry. Unable to find such employment, he became a travelling salesman, selling merchandise he brought with him from Quebec. This experience, coupled with a succession of crop failures, convinced him, his wife, and nine surviving children to leave their parish and migrate to the United States.<sup>56</sup>

Albert's experience may have been typical of many rural Quebecers. A growing number of heads of families, small landholders, landless *journaliers*, or artisans, who might originally have been hesitant about emigrating, probably saw their choice not so much as a preference of the United States over Quebec, but as a choice between life in a colonization region and one in an industrial centre.

As the shift towards commercial farming and proletarianization, in tandem with the penetration of transportation networks and manufactured goods, linked the once isolated regions of the province to the financial markets of Canada, the United States, and Europe, French Canadians were obliged to choose from a small number of options. Rural Quebecers burdened with agricultural problems and pressures from population increase sought new means of survival elsewhere than in their birthplaces. Some did so by working as day labourers in older established parishes while attending to their plot of land as small landholders; others by becoming settlers in a distant colonization region and earning supplementary income through their work as *forestiers*; and still others by selling their labour in urban industrial centres

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<sup>56</sup>Félix Albert, *Histoire d'un enfant pauvre* (Nashua, New Hampshire: 1909), reprinted in *Immigrant Odyssey: A French-Canadian Habitant in New England*, Frances H. Early, introduction, Arthur L. Eno, Jr, translation (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press, 1991). It should be pointed out that Albert's wife and children had long argued in favour of migrating to the U.S.A.

either in the province or in the United States. In either case, their decisions were largely conditioned by the family life cycle.<sup>57</sup> In making such decision, the lives of French Canadians constructed their lives in ways that evoke John Bodnar's synthesis.<sup>58</sup> Like many other immigrants who left their homeland for industrializing America, rural French Canadians were affected by a series of manifestations of capitalism: first, in the expansion of the transportation network; then, in the development of commercial agriculture; and, finally, in the increased flow of manufactured goods into the province's most remote regions.<sup>58-a</sup> The relatively cheap factory-made products available to rural farmers and settlers as well as to urban dwellers, significantly changed their family economy.<sup>57-b</sup> Farmers' and settlers' families, even those with little to spend, were driven by the growing need (and desire) for cash to buy machine-made products. Consequently, they found themselves with a new problem: the lack of employment and sources of cash income.

As this section has shown, for rural French Canadians, the choice to migrate south constituted one of several, limited, options. Constraints related to such factors as the financial status of the family and the local labour market situation at the point of destination also played a role. Although a significant number of rural Quebecers migrated, they chose to do so after carefully weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the available

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<sup>57</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*, 80-84; Frenette, "Macroscopie et microscopie," 221-33.

<sup>58</sup>John Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, chap. 1, especially 54-56.

<sup>58-a</sup>Courville and Séguin, *Le monde rural québécois au XIXe siècle*, 17-24; Micheline Dumont-Johnson et al., [Le collectif Clio], *L'histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles* (Montréal: Le jour éditeur, 1992), 201-05.

options, or even after having essayed other possibilities. Such a variety of paths reveals the important fact that migration was not a move that rural Quebecers were passively pushed into, but a more complex process that involved assessment, evaluation, and decision-making based on their resources.<sup>59</sup>

The following section will examine how the prevalence of industrial capitalism affected family life for rural French Canadians. This point is pertinent to any discussion of whether traditional roles changed or remained the same after migration to a New England city, and in the event of change, to my attempts to understand the process.

### 2.3. THE FAMILY ECONOMY IN RURAL QUEBEC

Unlike the work on their urban counterparts, research on early twentieth-century rural Quebec families is still at an early stage, and the profiles that emerge from existing studies remain largely fragmented. Despite various changes in production patterns, Quebec's agriculture continued to depend upon the family for its main source of labour. The distribution of agricultural workers demonstrates this point. From 1891 to 1931 small farmholders represented over half of Quebec's entire agricultural labour force. Agricultural (non-wage) workers who were members of a family accounted for forty percent of Quebec's agricultural labour force, while non-family-member wage workers made up only ten percent. In other parts of Canada the difference between the proportion of family member workers and wage workers was slightly smaller. During the same period average figures for

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<sup>59</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*, 47.

agricultural wage workers not part of a family were, for Canada and Ontario, 15.3 percent and 17.1 percent respectively.<sup>60</sup>

In rural Quebec, which was undergoing the effects of proletarianization along with a drift away from subsistence agriculture, women in both the colonization regions and older established seigneurial parishes worked largely at home. Combining agricultural production with a limited income derived from wage earnings, household members had to work together to provide food, shelter, and clothing. Women, in particular, held a cardinal responsibility in ensuring the household's survival in aspects of production, consumption, and reproduction of goods, household services, and care for the entire family, most of the time without earning any monetary rewards.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Linteau et al., *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. 1, 489-99.

<sup>61</sup>Dumont-Johnson et al., *L'histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*, 201-05; Cohen, *Women's Work*, chap. 5. For a more general account of rural women's work in Canada, see Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women. A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 116-21. Other studies which include depiction of rural women's work are Jean Provencher, *Les Quatres saisons dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1988); Yolande Cohen, *Femmes de parole. L'Histoire des cercles de fermières du Québec, 1915-1990* (Montréal: Les Éditions du jour, 1990); Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique: population, économie, famille au Saguenay 1838-1971* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1996); Ghislaine Desjardins, "Les Cercles de fermières et l'action féminine en milieu rural, 1915-1944," in *Travailleuses et féministes. Les femmes dans la société québécoise*, ed. Marie Lavigne and Yolande Pinard, (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal Express, 1983), 271-43. For a more recent period, see Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Les origines et le développement des Cercles de fermières au Québec et des Groupements féminins en Gironde," in *Femmes et vie rurale au Québec et en Aquitaine: colloque des 10 et 11 mai 1990*, ed. Naomi Black et al. (N. p.: Les Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine, n. d.), 35-46; Bill Reimer and Frances M. Shaver, "Modernisation, rapports de production et division sexuelle du travail à la ferme, Comté de Montmagny, 1951-1981," *Recherches sociographiques* 29, no. 2-3 (1988): 329-48.



Women assumed various tasks. They prepared the daily meals, which was a demanding chore for those who had many young children and, at times, agricultural workers to feed. They also tended to the livestock, maintained family supplies by canning fruits and vegetables, and, before dairy-production was taken over by factories in the mid-1880s, made their own cheese and butter.<sup>62</sup> They not only mended but also made their own clothing, which involved either knitting or spinning, weaving, and cutting cloth. This does not mean, however, that all women in the rural regions took charge of all terms of domestic production throughout the year; instead, their activities varied from one village to another depending upon not only the season but also the family life cycle. In addition to these household tasks, they were assigned some agricultural chores. While men cut hay, women raked it. Whereas men reaped and threshed during the harvest, women gleaned the fields.<sup>63</sup> In older rural agricultural parishes, the distinction between chores allotted to men and those allotted to women stood out clearly. For the settlers' families, the division of labour became less clearly defined.

In the colonization regions, where families were dependent on both subsistence farming and forestry activities, the allocation of domestic tasks took a form different from that of the older established rural areas. The seasonal nature of the settlers' work — i.e., the practice of working the land during the summer and seeking employment in forestry during the winter — meant a long

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<sup>62</sup>Cohen, *Women's Work*, chap. 5. See also Dumont-Johnson et al., *L'histoire des femmes au Québec*, 201-05.

<sup>63</sup>Martine Tremblay, "La représentation de l'idéal féminin en milieu rural québécois au XIXe siècle" (mémoire de maîtrise: Université de Québec à Trois-Rivières, 1987); Tremblay, "La division sexuelle du travail et la modernisation de l'agriculture à travers la presse agricole, 1840-1900," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 47, no. 2 (automne 1993): 221-44.

absence away from home for the male head of family. This often resulted in increased responsibility for married women, who then had to assume the tasks traditionally carried out by men both at home and on the farm. Moreover, the women had to live in a hut on strict rations until the new farm was settled. Being separated — however temporarily — from their husbands, parents, and friends, women in the colonization regions had to recreate a new network of mutual aid.<sup>64</sup>

The isolated nature of rural life, particularly in the settlement areas, and the generally large share of responsibilities of settler women notwithstanding, it should be emphasised again that patterns of work organization varied greatly from one region to another, and within a region, from one parish to another, according to the family's life cycle stages. For instance, of the 1,126 forestry workers listed in the 1861 census for the region of the Mauricie, the majority (more than sixty percent) were single and rather young (nearly fifty-six percent were under twenty-six years old). Those between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five accounted for one fourth of the workers listed, and those aged between thirty-six and forty-five made up one eighth. From these figures, we can deduce that middle-aged or older men (those aged forty-five or older) remained to work within the family during the winter season while sending their sons to seek employment in the forestry camps. Moreover, the region of Trois-Rivières<sup>65</sup> alone provided over eighty percent of these forestry workers. An even

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<sup>64</sup>Dumont-Johnson et al., *L'histoire des femmes au Québec*, 170.

<sup>65</sup>The region of Trois-Rivières included the sub-regions of Saint-Maurice (including Trois-Rivières), Batiscau, Rivière-du-Loup, and Rive Sud. See Claire-Andrée Fortin, "Profil de la main-d'oeuvre forestière en Mauricie d'après le recensement de 1861," *Material History Bulletin/Bulletin d'histoire de la culture matérielle* 13 (automne 1981): 75-81, especially 77.

more remarkable fact was that of the listed workers who resided in the "territoires non organisés" — i.e., beyond the limits of the established parishes — over one third came from the following three parishes: Saint-Narcisse, Saint-Tite and Saint-Stanislas, where the land was still in a state of *défrichement*. These findings indicate a close relation between colonization and forestry exploitation at that time; forestry employment often constituted a strategy adopted by the settlers' families in order to earn extra cash income. The above evidence also suggests that the proportion of the rural families who had recourse to this strategy varied considerably from one parish to another and, accordingly, so did the proportion of women who spent winter months separated from their husband.<sup>66</sup>

Exact figures are not available for determining what portion of the household budget was derived from a forestry worker's earnings. However, the importance of this source of income became clearest when the market prices for lumber declined, pushing families to a status of bare subsistence. In 1876, *Le Constitutionnel*, a newspaper in the Mauricie region, observed that

Les gages des hommes de chantier cette année sont de sept ou huit piastres par mois au lieu de dix-huit et vingt qu'ils étaient il y a deux ans. Les choses nécessaires à la vie sont restées au même prix. Qu'on juge de la position de ces pauvres gens.<sup>67</sup>

It would be mistaken, however, to be left with the impression that families who derived income from the forestry economy were always in difficulty. During the period from 1869 to 1875, and from the beginning of World War I to the outbreak of the Great

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<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*; Hardy and Séguin, *Forêt et société*, 156.

<sup>67</sup>*Le Constitutionnel*, 2 février, 1876. Cited in Hardy and Séguin, *Forêt et société*, 130.

Depression (the years 1921-22 being an exception), forestry workers received acceptable wages for their hard labour. During the war wages in the forestry industry rose to an all-time record high, largely because of the greater demand for forestry products generated by the war. By 1921, however, wages dropped again by twenty-two percent.<sup>68</sup>

The working day of the forestry workers lasted "d'une noirceur à l'autre," dawn to dusk. Workers would labour as long as eleven to fourteen hours a day in extremely cold temperatures. At times, due to the thickness of the forest and the depth of the snow, they were forced to work without horses (*travailler à la "bunch"*), and so these men had to transport by hand logs weighing as much as 150 to 300 pounds over distances of 200 to 300 feet back to the accessible trail. Moreover, the workers had to deduct from their earnings the cost of necessities such as blankets, tools, and underwear, which they were forced to purchase at exorbitant prices from the company. In addition to this exploitation, the men

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<sup>68</sup>*Le Nouvelliste*, 28 septembre 1933. Cited by Hardy and Séguin in *Forêt et société*, 130. The outbreak of the Great Depression continued this downward spiral of wages so that, by 1931, the father of a family could earn as little as \$26 a month. *Le nouvelliste* stated that:

"Vingt-six dollars par mois pour 26 jours d'ouvrage. Voyons ce qu'un père de famille qui ira au chantier aura à déboursier avant de partir pour La Tuque. Disons qu'il part au commencement d'octobre pour revenir à Noël. Habits: \$20, passage aller-retour et pension: \$12, linge usé et dépenses pour fumer: \$10, en tout \$42. 69 jours d'octobre à Noël dont il faut déduire les journées de mauvais temps qu'il prendra. S'il en reste 65, il aura gagné \$65 dont il faut déduire \$42. Il lui reviendra pour trois mois d'ouvrage \$28. Est-il possible pour un père de famille de vivre pendant trois mois avec les siens avec \$28 si on considère qu'il aura à payer son loyer, son chauffage, les aliments, les vêtements, la lumière, l'eau, les assurances, etc."

<sup>68</sup>Hardy and Séguin, *Forêt et société*, 131.

had to endure three to six month-long work assignments in isolated forests far away from their families.<sup>69</sup>

The involvement of male family members in forestry work transformed the domestic roles traditionally assumed by men and women. In his study of the parish of St. Justin, Léon Gérin has observed that married women who spent a large proportion of the year alone had to assume a greater responsibility in the maintenance of the household. They had to make decisions regarding the education of their children, and were in charge of the animals as well as the cultivation of the fields.<sup>70</sup>

At a time when social services were negligible and household technology primitive, it must have been impossible for married women, particularly those in rural areas, to combine wage work with household work.<sup>71</sup> Another disincentive to seeking employment outside the household was the fact that the type and amount of work available to women were limited and the wages were quite low.<sup>72</sup> Most importantly, in order to offset fluctuations in the family income, women had to produce what they might otherwise have bought from the market. In Berthier County, for instance, a large proportion of day labourers had a small plot of land, where their wives presumably grew vegetables or raised

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<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 126-134.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 203-10.

<sup>71</sup>Courville brings to our attention the presence of wage-earning women among *journaliers* in St. Eustache in 1851. Although the data do not tell us whether these women were single or married, given the extreme difficulties in combining wage-earning domestic chores as well as the precarious employment opportunities in the rural areas, these women were probably single. Courville and Séguin, *Entre ville et campagne*, 143.

<sup>72</sup>Cohen, *Women's Work*, 128-30.

animals to supplement the household budget. The production of home-made commodities such as clothing and preserved food was indispensable to a family's survival.<sup>73</sup> The responsibilities of rural women thus included the hard work of producing and preparing goods for family consumption.

As commercial farming became the dominant form of Quebec's agriculture, as a greater number of rural Quebecers became wage-earners, and as manufactured products became more readily available and accessible, women's domestic tasks shifted, from producing goods for consumption within the family to obtaining and consuming manufactured products. This change occurred gradually and unevenly as rural French-Canadian families continued to produce some of their daily necessities such as soap, candles, canned foods, and bread on their farms yet also began to replace some with commercial products more frequently. From the 1870s onward, families in even the most remote corners of the province came to be able to purchase manufactured products through mail order.<sup>74</sup> In this process of industrialization and commercialization where "country cloth and fabrics were increasingly replaced by cotton, printed cotton, tweed, and commercial sheets,"<sup>75</sup> the traditional work of women was largely

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<sup>73</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*, 28.

<sup>74</sup>Dumont-Johnson et al., *L'histoire des femmes*, 200, 202. It should also be noted that as late as 1901, merchandise offered in the Eaton's catalogue included few electric household appliances apart from objects such as fans, bells, and lamps. There were at least as many gas and oil lamps as electric ones, electricity not yet being the main source of lighting in many Canadian homes. See also Chad Gaffield, ed., *Histoire de l'Outaouais* (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1994), especially chap. 3.

<sup>75</sup>Micheline Dumont-Johnson et al., *L'histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*, 200. The Great Depression had the effect of delaying the penetration of commercialized products in Quebec's rural parishes. For instance, as late as 1935 in Saint-Denis-de-Kamouraska, while a bread salesman went to the parish twice a week, there were still some farms where

modified. This redefinition of women's work did not decrease their responsibilities, however. While farm women were no longer burdened with spinning and weaving cloth themselves, they became dependent on cash to buy the machine-made fabrics.

Furthermore, while factory production rapidly became the major form of cheese production, women's tasks at home did not necessarily decrease. The shift from home- to factory-production of cheese meant that farm women would no longer have to do this heavy and difficult work. Yet, since farm women had a number of other extremely time-consuming work that also needed to be completed, they continued to work as much as ever. Activities such as poultry raising, gardening, and making honey and maple sugar for family use or to trade or sell remained for a long time the work of women. Moreover, in this shift of production sites, women were not immediately removed from the process of dairying; instead, they were only gradually eliminated from it. Women initially made up a significant proportion of the labour force in cheese factories: in 1871 they constituted thirty-seven percent of the workers. As cheese-producing factories increased in number, the proportion of women workers declined. By the turn of the century, not a single woman was recorded as working in cheese factories in Canada.<sup>76</sup> The shift in cheese-making represented a process by which a woman's domestic chore was transformed into a large-scale industrial enterprise.<sup>77</sup> On the whole, however the shift from

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families baked their own bread. At about the same time, hand-made soap was gradually replaced by commercial soap sold at the general store. Linteau et al., *L'histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. 1, 563.

<sup>76</sup>Cohen, *Women's Work*, 104-10.

<sup>77</sup>This shift from farm to factory production was uneven. For instance, the manufacture of butter remained for a longer time in the hands of women than cheese production. The major reason for this was that butter was more expensive to produce in the factories. Since butter production required less

subsistence production to a market-oriented economy influenced the sexual division of labour on and outside the farm, the change did not reduce the work load of women.

The children of farming families, much like their urban counterparts, were expected to contribute from an early age to the collective welfare of the household. Their participation in household work was characteristic of both subsistence-oriented and market-oriented patterns of production. Moreover, children, especially daughters, had to help their mothers with the heavy domestic chores. In almost all families, assert Denise Lemieux and Lucie Mercier, there was an unmarried daughter who was "taking care of her infirm mother or young orphan nephews, and it was considered a duty."<sup>78</sup> An example of these dutiful young women is provided in Augustine Linteau's description of his sister:

Ma soeur Hélène, doit laisser l'école pour être le bras droit de maman qui est malade. Les enfants l'appellent T'Len et tout le monde l'aime pour sa gaiété naturelle et sa grande générosité à accueillir tous ceux qui sont éloignés de la demeure familiale. Durant les vacances, maman prend des pensionnaires: des jeunes filles de bureau.<sup>79</sup>

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space and equipment, and demanded fewer specialized skills than cheese, it could be done more readily at home. See Edward Wiest, *The Butter Industry in the United States: An Economic Study of Butter and Oleomargarine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 40; Cohen, *Women's Work*, 104-10.

<sup>78</sup>Denise Lemieux and Lucie Mercier, *Les femmes au tournant du siècle 1880-1940: âge de la vie, maternité et quotidien* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1989), 90.

<sup>79</sup>Augustine M. Linteau, *Douce mémoire*, (Charlesbourg: manuscript in possession of the author, 1983), 61, reprinted in *Les femmes au tournant du siècle*, ed. Lemieux and Mercier, 90.



Hélène's devotion for her family illustrates one of the most important roles of an older daughter. Their household duties continued until the death of the parents, which left single women like Hélène at a loss, for they then had to adapt at a fairly late stage of their life to earning wages.<sup>80</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The movement of a million French Canadians to New England textile centres from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries was not simply a straight-line flight from poverty or overpopulation. Nor were French Canadians like moths attracted by the lights of American industrial cities. Well before their departure to the United States, their homeland had been transformed by the commercialization of agriculture and the proletarianization of its labour force. This chapter has shown that these forces were crucial in prompting the out-migration of rural Quebecers. Indeed, the consequences of industrial capitalism in Quebec — as manifested in the spread of commercial agriculture, manufactured goods, and wage-earning activities — were major causes of the French-Canadian emigration. Clearly, emigration was not the only possibility of survival for French Canadians. Still, many decided to opt for this choice even after they had tried the alternative of settling in the colonization regions. Forced to choose from limited possibilities, immigrants who moved south of the border had to face another economic reality which was shaped by the same forces that were transforming their homeland.

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<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*

## CHAPTER THREE

### LOWELL AFTER PATERNALISM: THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE CITY AND FRENCH CANADIANS

"The new people, the immigrants, have always been a part of Lowell."  
— Peter Blewett.<sup>1</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

As rural French Canadians chose emigration as one possible option in confronting the effects of industrial capitalism, they also had to adjust to new socioeconomic conditions, as the same forces that penetrated into Quebec also shaped New England in the early twentieth century. Increasingly fierce competition from the southern textile industry incited Lowell's industrialists to abandon their paternalistic policies and to seek cost-efficient policies with ever-growing fervour. The intensification of the labour process,

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<sup>1</sup>Peter F. Blewett, "The New People: An Introduction to the Ethnic History of Lowell," in *Cotton Was King: a History of Lowell, Massachusetts*, ed. Arthur Jr. Eno (Somersworth, New Hampshire: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1976), 190-217.

coupled with a series of laws adopted throughout New England states which curbed the number of working children in their early teens and required their compulsory schooling, had a significant impact in removing children from the work place. The young workers who had formerly provided the region's textile industry with cheap and diligent labour were replaced by an influx of "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe. These factors produced an immediate impact on the dynamics of the local labour market and on the French-Canadian migratory movement to New England.

French Canadians adjusted their migratory project in response to the changes moulding the New England labour market. In the early twentieth century, the influx of French Canadians to the region decreased significantly. Due largely to the expansion of industrial and agricultural activities in Quebec and much of Canada, from 1900 to 1920 the level of French-Canadian emigration to the United States declined to nearly half of what it had been during the highest period of emigration.<sup>2</sup> In Lowell, as in the rest of the United States, the influx of French-Canadian immigrants declined and their population growth in the city became dependent on natural growth: while the number of individuals of French-Canadian origin decreased from 24,000 in 1900 to 23,208 in 1910, and then slightly increased to 23,699 in 1920, the number of the first generation migrants for the same period continuously declined from 14,674 to 12,296, and then to 10,180.<sup>3</sup> This downward trend is partly explained

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<sup>2</sup>The number of French Canadians who left for the United States declined from 150,000 in 1880-90 to only 80,000 in 1910-20. See Lavoie, *L'émigration des Québécois*, 45, Tableau 7.

<sup>2</sup>Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 35.

<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that the figure for first generation migrants in 1900 include those born in Newfoundland. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States. Population*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1913), 825, 871, 882; U.S.

by the fact that the textile city, which once offered abundant employment to young children, was no longer attracting French-Canadian families with a large number of children in the same manner as it did in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, even before their departure, prospective French-Canadian immigrants were keenly aware of how this change was moulding the New England local labour market. This decline in the number of first generation French Canadians probably reflected their sensibility to such structural changes.

This chapter discusses Lowell's evolution as the nation's leading textile centre which entailed the passing of a previous age of paternalism. It also shows the lives, at home and at work, of French Canadians who faced the changes in Lowell's local economy in the early twentieth century. By that time, French Canadians had become a permanent feature of the city. Most of them continued to live in tenement blocks, which were often dusty, crowded, and lacked sunlight. Yet their community thrived with a number of small businesses and the intense everyday sociability of the neighbourhood and of the workplace.

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Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: Population* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1924), 926; U.S. Congress, Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industries*, 61st Cong., 2d sess. Senate Doc. 633, vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1911; reprint, New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1970), 227-28, 232.

### 3.1. LOWELL'S EVOLUTION AS A TEXTILE CENTRE

Lowell's evolution from a "sleepy little farming village"<sup>4</sup> — East Chelmsford — into a bustling urban industrial centre was neither unique nor unusual in the northeastern corner of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. A dozen small towns in the New England region — Fall River, Lawrence, Holyoke, Manchester, and Woonsocket, among others — developed into urban manufacturing centres with the growth of the textile industry. Lowell, however, was the first textile centre of its kind, and its special characteristics shaped the history of the city in a distinctive way.

Like many textile centres, Lowell owed its early development to a group of manufacturers from Boston and Salem who later came to be known as the Boston Associates. Unlike the manufacturing owners in other industrial cities such as Troy in New York State, investors in Lowell were non-residents.<sup>5</sup> Having set up the first centre for integrated textile production in Waltham, Massachusetts, the Boston Associates came to visit East Chelmsford solely with the intention of building a second production centre.<sup>6</sup> The site was ideal: it was only forty kilometres away from Boston at the junction of the Merrimack and Concord Rivers, just below the Pawtucket Falls. It was located on the Pawtucket Canal, which could easily be enlarged for

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<sup>4</sup>Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 35.

<sup>5</sup>Troy's entrepreneurs were locals. See Carole Turbin, *Working Women of Collar City: Gender, Class, and Community in Troy, New York, 1864-86* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 20-24.

<sup>6</sup>Dublin, *Women at Work*, 17-22; Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 35-36; Turbin, *Working Women of Collar City*, 22-23.

water power purposes;<sup>7</sup> and on the Middlesex Canal, which offered daily freight and passenger service to Boston.

After the purchase of the land and waterpower rights in East Chelmsford in February 1822, the Boston Associates incorporated the Merrimack Manufacturing Company and structured it on the pattern of integrated manufacturing at Waltham. Its first labour agent, Kirk Boott, brought more than five hundred Irish common labourers to the site, housed them in tent camps, and had them work at enlarging the Middlesex Canal and building the first factories and boardinghouses. By September of the following year the first wheel turned and in November the first cloth was produced.<sup>8</sup>

The immediate success of the Merrimack Manufacturing Company led to the establishment of several new firms.<sup>9</sup> By 1850 these factories were producing over one million yards of cloth per week and employed more than 10,000 workers.<sup>10</sup> Lowell became —

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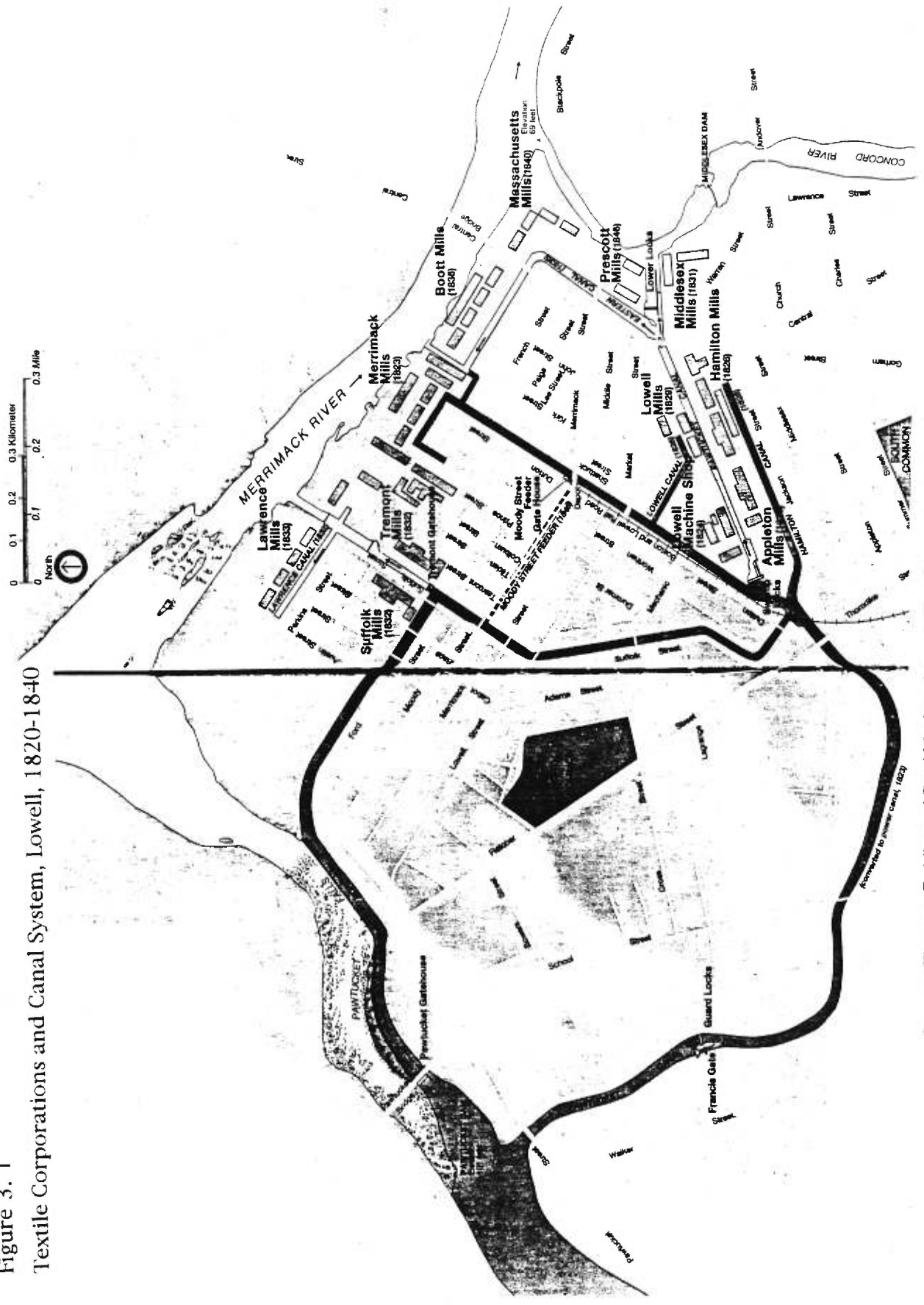
<sup>7</sup>The textile factories' machineries in Lowell as well as most other textile cities in the region were run by hydraulic power. This explains the establishment of a number of "mill towns" along the Merrimack River Valley in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. See Thomas Dublin and Paul Marion, *Lowell: The Story of an Industrial City: A Guide to Lowell National Historical Park and Lowell Heritage State Park Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington, D.C.: Division of Publications, National Park Service, 1992), 15.

<sup>8</sup>Nathan Appleton, *Introduction of the Power Loom and Origin of Lowell* (Lowell: B. H. Penhallow, 1858), 13; Dublin, *Women at Work*, 19; H. C. Meserve, *Lowell: An Industrial Dream Come True* (Boston: The National Association of Cotton Manufactures, 1923), 46-47.

<sup>9</sup>Among other firms that rapidly came into being were Hamilton (1826), Appleton (1828), Lowell (1829), Middlesex (1831), Suffolk and Tremont (1832), Lawrence (1833), Boott (1836), and Massachusetts (1832). This rapid development reflected the large returns earned investors in this industry (See Figure 3.1). See Dublin and Marion, *Lowell: The Story of an Industrial City*, 33-34.

<sup>10</sup>Dublin and Marion, *Lowell*, 39; Dublin, *Women at Work*, 20.

Figure 3. 1  
Textile Corporations and Canal System, Lowell, 1820-1840



Source: Thomas Dublin and Paul Marion, Lowell: The Story of an Industrial City, 42-43.

and until the Civil War, remained — the largest centre of textile production in the United States. During the early period of its rapid industrial expansion, the population of Lowell grew significantly: it rose from 200 in 1820 to 6,000 in 1830, to 18,000 in 1836, and to more than 33,000 in 1850, to become the second largest city in Massachusetts (See Table 3.1).<sup>11</sup> Lowell's success inspired the development of other "mill towns" throughout New England, based on the Waltham-Lowell-style operation: i.e., integrated manufacturing.<sup>12</sup>

The textile corporations had a determining influence on the growth of Lowell. They controlled development by virtue of their ownership of almost three-quarters of the city's land. As the principal taxpayers in the community, the corporations had a significant influence on the local government.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, these Lowell corporations were a somewhat unified group. By virtue of the concentration of stock ownership and commonly shared directorates, power was centralized in the hands of a relatively small number of investors. These owners did their best to minimize competition among the companies they controlled.<sup>14</sup>

The successful functioning of the "Lowell system" brought into the city a large number of workers, mostly young unmarried

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<sup>11</sup>Dublin, *Women at Work*, 20-21; Eno, *Cotton Was King*, 255.

<sup>12</sup>Laurence Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline: The Boott Cotton Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1835-1955* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 18-20; Dublin, *Women at Work*, chap. 2.

<sup>13</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 18-20.

<sup>14</sup>Dublin, *Women at Work*, 21; Dublin and Marion, *Lowell*, 39; Frances W. Gregory, *Nathan Appleton, Merchant and Entrepreneur, 1779-1861* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 196; Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 18-20.



Table 3.1  
Population of Lowell by Country of Birth, 1826-1920

	Total Population of the City	Canada, French	Canada, English	Ireland	Greece	Portugal#	Turkey	Armenia	Russia	Poland
1826	2,500									
1830	6,474									
1840	20,796									
1850	33,383									
1860	36,827									
1870	40,928									
1880	59,475	*7,758		10,670	3	26	-	-	5	6
1885	-	6,438	1,380	11,681	2	43	-	-	7	-
1890	77,696	**15,742	-	12,671	2	107	-	-	107	5
1895	-	12,843	1,565	12,550	213	310	107	-	252	113
1900	94,969	***14,674	***4,485	12,147	1,203	482	84	-	291	441
1905	94,869	11,603	2,779	11,020	2,020	924	190	135	708	463
1910	106,294	12,291	4,049	9,983	3,782	1,449	637	-	1,840	-
1920	112,759	10,180	3,682	7,453	3,733	1,666	-	357	916	2,298

Sources: Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 232; *Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census*, 1910, vol. 2, Population, 868; *Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census*, 1920, vol. 1, Population, 229, vol. 2, 854-55.

Notes: 1. \*Including Canada (English); \*\*Including Canada (English) and Newfoundland; \*\*\*Including Newfoundland; #Including the Azores islands; ##Including all those born other than in Canada (French).  
2. Figures for the population by birthplace are not available for the period before 1880.

women recruited from the surrounding countryside. These "Yankee women" were attracted to textile manufacturing by the unprecedented opportunity to earn wages. Their massive arrival in the textile city reflected the efficiency of the textile corporations' recruitment strategy, which, among other things, emphasized the high moral standards enforced by management. Instead of targeting male workers, who had higher expectations with respect to wages, textile firms looked to female workers, who were not only classified as less skilled and therefore less expensive, but also considered to be less prone to importing subversive ideas about workers' rights.<sup>15</sup> These women did not have prior experience in industrial work. More importantly, in line with a personnel policy of these corporations, these female operatives worked only for a few years before marriage: they lacked long-term career goals. Inexpensive and unlikely to organize themselves against management, they represented an ideal workforce for the industrialists.

Under the banner of corporate paternalism, the companies regulated the moral behaviour of their female factory operatives by building facilities such as boardinghouses, churches, libraries, and

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<sup>15</sup>Dublin, *Women at Work*, chap. 3; Meserve, *Lowell*, 39. The influx of a large number of young rural women to Lowell also reflected the presence of "idle" females due to rapid changes sweeping across southern New England. As the cheap factory-made cloth became available to the New England farmers, farm women were no longer burdened with spinning and weaving cloth at home, but were driven by the need for cash to buy the machine-made fabrics instead. Some rural young women found a solution to this problem by working in textile centres such as Lowell. See also Mary Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), chap. 2, especially 21-22; Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," *American Studies Journal* 10 (Spring 1969), 5-15. On outwork, see Percy Bidwell, "Agricultural Revolution": 696-97; Thomas Dublin, "Women and Outwork in a Nineteenth Century New Hampshire Town: Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays on the Social History of Rural America*, ed. Jonathan Prude and Steven Hahn (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 51-69.

lecture rooms within the premises of, and around, the factories, and by employing boardinghouse "mothers" who were put in charge of the "girls'" behaviour outside the factories.<sup>16</sup> The boardinghouses were not simply housing for young women operatives, but also a representation of the social control the textile corporations had over their workers. The corporation managers were trying at the outset to dissociate themselves from the image of "dark satanic mills" attributed to English textile factories by strictly regulating the behaviour of female workers in the factories and boardinghouses. As a result, Charles Dickens, who visited Lowell in 1840, wrote admiringly of the female operatives in his *American Notes*:

These girls [the factory operatives], as I have said were all well dressed; and that phrase necessarily includes extreme cleanliness. They had serviceable bonnets, good warm cloaks, and shawls; and were not above clogs and pattens. [...] They were healthy in appearance, many of them remarkably so, and had the manners and deportment of young women: not of degraded brutes of burden.<sup>17</sup>

The system was hardly perfect, for these women sporadically organized strikes in the 1830s to protest wage cuts. Nevertheless, in general, paternalism was very profitable for investors.<sup>18</sup> Within less

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<sup>16</sup>Meserve, *Lowell*, 47, 76. See also Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," chap. 2.

<sup>17</sup>See Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (New York: Harper & Brothers 1842). Dickens was quoted in the 1908-1909 inquiry of the Immigration Commission on the economic and social conditions of the major immigrant groups. See also the U.S. Senate, the Immigration Commission, *The Immigrants in Industries* vol. 10, hereafter referred as *Immigrants in Industries*: 280-81. For other comments by the foreign visitors to Lowell, see also Michel Chevalier, *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America* (Boston: 1839; reprint, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961), 142; Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 36-38, 40; Dublin, *Women at Work*, 77-78; Dublin and Marion, *Lowell*, 52.

<sup>18</sup>Dublin, *Women at Work*, 86-107.

than thirty years from the foundation of the first textile factories in Lowell, the city's workforce and the paternalistic policies that characterised the early years of its textile corporations began to change. Growing competition from the southern industry brought new pressures to bear on the New England textile corporations. Production costs had to be minimized in order to maintain market share. As a result, as early as the 1830s, these firms began to introduce a new labour policy which by the mid-1840s reached its fruition. In order to reduce costs they gradually closed the boardinghouses and other "amenities" for workers which once constituted a central feature of the Lowell system. As early as the 1840s, the textile factories introduced the practices of *speed-up* and *stretch-out* — increasing the operating speed of the machinery while assigning workers additional responsibility for extra looms and spinning frames.<sup>19</sup> As work loads increased while wages fell, working conditions rapidly deteriorated. The imperatives for the textile firms to increase productivity also led to the introduction of spinning mules in the late 1840s. The mule spinners were burdened with an average workload two-and-a-half times the normal workload for throstle spinners. Also, the fact that mules produced a quality yarn particularly well suited for use as filling added to the mill agents' decision to change to mule spinning.<sup>20-a</sup>

The changes mentioned thus far — the wage cuts, the speed-ups, and the stretch-outs together with technological innovation — had a profound impact on the Lowell factories in the years after 1836. These developments, as Dublin notes, steadily engendered a recomposition of the workforce of the textile industry. This

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<sup>19</sup>Dublin, *Women at Work*, footnote 4, 271; 109-110. See also Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 41-44; Piva, "Idyl Confronted," 31-32, 68.

<sup>20-a</sup> Dublin, *Women at Work*, Chap. 8, especially 138.

transformation eliminated the high degree of homogeneity that had prevailed in the earlier period. The most dramatic change in the textile labour force was the rapid and significant increase in the proportion of immigrants. This increase resulted from the decline in the number of Yankee women on the one hand, and the simultaneous increase in the numbers of immigrants, on the other, beginning with the massive arrival of the Irish after 1845.<sup>20-b</sup>

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the population of the city underwent an important transformation. Lowell's population decreased from 36,000 in 1860 to 31,000 in 1865. This was largely because of the temporary shut-down of the factories during the Civil War and the subsequent displacement of a significant proportion of the textile workers. The reopening of cotton factory operations brought in a flood of recent immigrants. In 1870 the city's population was up to 41,000, and by 1875 to slightly less than 50,000 (see Table 3.1).<sup>20</sup> With the change in the city's overall population, its population of operatives also radically changed from being overwhelmingly composed of Yankee factory women to one composed of immigrant men, women, and children.

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<sup>20-b</sup> Dublin points to three major factors which account for the declining recruitment of Yankee women in those years. First, the increasing movement of the young to urban centres and to the West reduced the population living in the rural communities that had formerly sent large numbers into the textile factories. Second, increasing opportunities in alternative occupations — teaching, for instance — gave rural young women a greater variety of wage earning options. Finally, cost efficient production policies implemented by the textile firms at the cost of deteriorating working conditions and wage cuts led many rural Yankee women to view employment in the textile factories as a less desirable option than it had been earlier. See Dublin, *Women at Work*, chap, 8, especially, 138-148.

<sup>20</sup>The exact figures for these years are 36,827 in 1860, 30,990 in 1865, 40,928 in 1870, 49,688 in 1875. Massachusetts, Bureau of the Statistics of Labor, *Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1875: Population and Social Statistics*, vol. 1 (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing, n. d.), 743.

The transformation of Lowell's population merely solidified a process already underway at mid-century. Changes in the population of the city and among cotton operatives were brought about by the combined factors of the departure of rural-born American operatives from the textile factories, technological innovations, and arrivals of immigrants first from Ireland and then from French Canada. For instance, as in Massachusetts and Rhode Island generally, the Irish flooded into the city, especially after the devastating potato famine of the 1840s. From 1850 to 1890 they formed the largest foreign-born population of the city.<sup>21</sup> The Civil War had ended Lowell's "Golden Age" of expansion from 1823 to 1850 by greatly reducing supplies of southern cotton, throwing some 10,000 people out of work.<sup>22</sup> Once the war was over, however, Lowell manufacturers once again undertook the production of cotton fabrics, but the supremacy of the New England factories was threatened by competition from their Southern counterparts. The northern industrialists sought to counter this by boosting productivity per operative.<sup>23</sup> The growth in productivity was

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<sup>21</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 226. In 1905 the state census reported that the city's largest "racial element" was made up of those born in Ireland or whose fathers were born in Ireland, accounting for 27,136 people. This figure exceeded the number of those born of American fathers, which totaled only 23,647.

<sup>22</sup>Charles Cowley, *A Handbook of Business in Lowell with a History of the City* (Lowell: E. D. Green, 1956), 60-61. See also Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 44. Woollen factories, on the other hand, thrived by producing navy-blue uniforms for the Union soldiers.

<sup>23</sup>The American economy was marked by unprecedented growth during the decades following the end of the war. The cotton textile industry was no exception to this prosperity: the number of spindles increased from one sixth of that in Great Britain in 1860 to almost half by 1905; the quantity of raw cotton used in American factories increased four times during the same period while the increase in the number of employees in the cotton factories was only threefold. During the five decades following the end of the Civil War, the number of cotton manufacturing establishments in New England steadily declined from 570 in 1860 to 308 in 1905. According to Melvin Thomas

brought about partly by technological improvements such as the modernization of machines and the introduction of electric power to replace steam power.

The increase in productivity was also made possible at the expense of the working conditions of those who entered the factories in large numbers in the years following the end of the war. More importantly, the introduction of new machinery had an immediate impact on the workforce of the cotton industry and downgraded some of the skilled jobs. For instance, as early as 1850, the introduction of the spinning mule, a far heavier machine that demanded more physical strength than the old jennies, favoured the employment of male spinners over women. "Less dependent on Yankee girls and women," notes Ardis Cameron, whose "labor had always stirred controversy and whose protests had jeopardized popular support for the new industrial order, employers turned to a growing supply of machine tenders eager for work."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in the 1870s, the mule-spinning frame, which had been operated by the relatively highly paid Anglo-American male craft workers, was replaced by the new ring-spinning machine, which could be run by female

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Copeland, however, at least until 1880, the decrease in the number of New England factories reflected a process of capital concentration rather than a declining supremacy of Northern industry. During the period from 1860 to 1905 the number of spindles produced in the North nearly quadrupled from 3,859,000 to 13,911,000. Melvin Thomas Copeland, *The Cotton Manufacturing Industry of the United States*, 2d. edition, (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1966), 20. See also Harold Faulkner et al., *American Economic History*, 9th edition, (New York: Harper & Rose, 1976), 187; Thomas C. Cochran, "Did the Civil War Retard Industrialization?" *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 48 (1961): 191-210; Harry N. Schiber, "Economic Change in the Civil War Era," *Civil War History* 11 (1965): 396-411; Stanley Engerman, "The Economic Impact of the Civil War," in Stanley Engerman and Robert Fogel eds., *The Reinterpretation of American Economic History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 369-78.

<sup>24</sup>Cameron, *Radicals*, 38.

Table 3.2

## French-Canadian Population in Selected New England Cities, 1860-1920

Year	Lowell	Fall River	Woonsocket	Holyoke	Fitchburg	Bedford	Worcester	Lawrence
*1860	266	-	794	165	-	-	386	84
*1880	10,000	9,000	5,593	6,000	500	4,301	3,500	2,500
**1885	6,438	8,219	-	5,067	741	-	2,794	1,921
***1890	16,000	17,000	9,200	-	-	8,150	-	4,459
**1895	12,843	17,079	-	6,347	2,899	-	4,219	4,837
*1900	24,000	33,000	17,000	15,500	7,200	16,500	15,300	11,500
#1910	23,208	32,033	-	-	-	-	-	-
#1920	23,699	28,368	22,189	13,785	-	-	-	-

Sources: \*Ralph Vicero, "French-Canadian Immigration," 173, 289, 294; \*\*Census of Massachusetts, 1875, vol. 1, 743, Census of Massachusetts, 1885; \*\*\*Guignard, "History of Franco-American Immigration"; #Fourteenth U.S. Federal U.S. Census, 1920, vol. 2, Population, 455, 926-29, 953-55. See also Paul Raymond Dauphinais, "Structure and Strategy," 58, table 2.



workers and unskilled male immigrant spinners. These new workers were paid lower wages than the mule spinners whom they replaced.<sup>25</sup> As in other Massachusetts textile towns, textile jobs in Lowell once exclusively performed by Yankee operatives were thus increasingly taken over by more diverse and heterogeneous groups.<sup>26</sup> As French-Canadian workers entered the industry, the earlier gender- and age- homogeneity of the textile industry's labour force virtually disappeared.

By far the largest number of newcomers to take advantage of the city's post-war boom were immigrants from French Canada. The reopening of the Lowell mills and their subsequent expansion coincided with recurrent agricultural difficulties that ravaged Quebec's rural areas.<sup>27</sup> Newly completed railways facilitated the transportation of a significant number of French-Canadian immigrant families to New England cities. Lowell's mere one hundred French Canadians in 1865 increased to 1,200 by 1868, and to 2,000, or five percent of the city's total population, in 1870 (see Table 3.2). In 1885 the state census listed 6,438 French Canadians and 1,380 English Canadians.<sup>28</sup> By 1900, the number of workers of Canadian origin in Lowell (including both those born in French Canada and those born in the U.S.) rose to 24,000. Among them, French Canadians numbered

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<sup>25</sup>Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 9-20; Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 51-52. See also Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 144. This last example illustrates the process whereby technological advancement degrades the status of some skilled workers while inducing the creation of a larger number of new unskilled or lower-paid positions. See also chap. 5 of this dissertation.

<sup>26</sup>Dublin, *Women at Work*, 140-42; Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 24; Cameron, *Radicals*, 30.

<sup>27</sup>I have discussed this point in detail in the preceding chapter.

<sup>28</sup>Dublin and Marion, *Lowell*, 67.

more than 14,000, forming the largest group of foreign-born in the city (15.5 percent).<sup>29</sup> The large influx of French Canadians into the city supplied a cheap and diligent labour force of which the textile industry was much in need. More importantly, most of these Quebec migrants came to the city in family units containing a large number of young children. This was a supplementary advantage for the textile industry in want of a great number of unskilled workers in an age when no laws prohibited the employment of children. From 1870 to 1900 the influx of French Canadians into the New England textile cities reached its highest level with 510,000 immigrants during these decades. This meant that, by this time, one in ten Quebecers was moving south.<sup>30</sup> During the decades after the Civil War, a predominantly Anglo-American town grew into a bustling immigrant city.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 232.

<sup>30</sup> Lavoie, "Les mouvements," 78.

<sup>31</sup>Lowell was not the only industrial centre in the region that saw a sudden increase in the French-Canadian population during the last three decades of the nineteenth century (see table 3.1). In Holyoke, Massachusetts, for example, the French-Canadian population was over 10,000 in 1895. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States. Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1872), 166; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States. Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1883), 209; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States. Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1895), pt.1, 180; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States. Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901), 199; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States. Population*, vol. 2, 859; Massachusetts, Bureau of the Statistics of Labor, *Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1895*, vol. 2 (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing, 1897-1899), 623. See also Haebler, "Habitants in Holyoke," 337, appendix B. Similarly, the bulk of French Canadians emigrated — the peak taking place between 1870 and 1890 — to Fall River, Woonsocket, and Lawrence as well as other textile centres. See Lavoie, "Les mouvements migratoires," 78.

In the early twentieth century, Lowell went through another significant change in the composition of its population. After immigration peaked in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the number of French Canadians coming to the city decreased. As a result, its population increase became more dependent on natural growth. At the same time, "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe began to flood into the city, which before 1890 had only a small number of such people. During the following two decades, however, a stream of immigrants poured into the city from Russia, Poland, Greece, Portugal, Turkey, Armenia, Syria, and Lithuania, increasing their number "by practically geometrical progression."<sup>32</sup> In 1910, more than three out of four (77.9%) Lowell residents had foreign-born parents. Of this foreign-born population, roughly half consisted of English-speaking people from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Canada.<sup>33</sup> Over half of the non-English-speakers were French Canadians, the city's largest immigrant group in terms of its number of foreign-born. Of the most recent arrivals, the Greeks and the Portuguese made up the largest number (4,000 and 2,000 respectively), followed by Russians (2,500) and Swedes (1,000) among others.<sup>34</sup> Despite these massive influxes of

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<sup>32</sup>*Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 232-33.

<sup>33</sup>Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States. Population*, vol. 2, 868; Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 5.

<sup>34</sup>*Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population*, vol. 2: 868. See also *Immigrants in Industries*: 229-230. These recent immigrant groups differed largely from one another and also from earlier immigrants. Unlike the case of earlier immigrants (Irish and French-Canadians), the Greek population, for instance, consisted mostly of men. In contrast to the Greek, the Portuguese, who migrated to Lowell at about the same time, had a better-balanced gender distribution. In general, they came with their wives and children. These differences in the migrating population point to significant synchronous migratory patterns: for example, migration might reflect an individual strategy or that of a family; a temporary solution, or a permanent one. I shall explore this point in more detail in chapter 5.

new immigrants, the proportion of the French-Canadian population (including both the Canadian-born and the U.S.-born) within the city's foreign-born and foreign-parent population remained constantly at a little over one quarter (or about 24,000). Clearly, by the early twentieth century, French Canadians had become a permanent feature of the city.

### 3.2. EVOLUTION IN LOWELL'S ECONOMY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the early twentieth century, textile manufacturing, particularly the cotton sector, continued to dominate the city's economic activities (see Table 3.3). The total number of those engaged in the cotton industry did not change significantly during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1910, among 100,000 Lowell residents of all ages, the largest proportion of the labour force, accounting for over 14,000 men, women, and children, was employed in the cotton textile industry. During the same decade, the number of those working in the woollen, worsted, felt goods, and wool hats production, as well as small cotton specialty thread products, rose from 2,500 to 3,100.<sup>35</sup> This means that slightly over half of the city's industrial workers were employed in the textile industry. By 1920 this figure would decrease to 46.6 percent.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year of 1910. Manufactures: 1909*, vol. 9 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1912-1913), 160-163, 527, 540; Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 5-8.

<sup>36</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year of 1910. Manufactures: 1919*, vol. 9 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1923), 160-64.

Table 3.3  
Manufacturing Sectors in Lowell, 1899-1920

Industry	Census	Number of Establishments	Number of Employees	Value of Products
Boots and shoes	1920	5	784	3,137,000
	1910	7	1,343	2,650,000
	1904	6	-	1,457,000
	1899	7	-	974,000
Cotton goods, including cotton small wares	1920	13	12,927	60,831,000
	1910	11	14,003	24,744,000
	1904	11	13,173	19,384,000
	1899	8	13,847	17,039,000
Dyeing and finishing textiles, other than those done in textile factories	1920	5	1,063	5,369,000
	1910	-	-	-
	1904	-	-	-
	1899	-	-	-
Foundry and machine-shop products	1920	17	681	2,284,000
	1910	35	2,735	4,332,000
	1904	34	2,403	3,439,000
	1899	47	3,088	4,258,000
Lumber and timber products	1920	6	130	1,131,000
	1910	17	462	1,066,171
	1904	12	450	938,000
	1899	11	379	728,000
Patent medicines, compounds, and druggists' preparations	1920	5	198	1,562,804
	1910	7	257	1,130,000
	1904	6	369	1,471,000
	1899	7	-	1,790,000
Textile machinery and parts	1920	12	2,333	7,185,000
	1910	-	-	-
	1904	35	2,294	3,438,729
	1899	-	-	-
Woolen, worsted, felt goods, and wool hats	1920	13	2,045	9,798,000
	1910	12	3,187	6,105,000
	1904	9	2,690	4,558,000
	1899	8	2,551	4,689,000

Source: 1910 U.S. Compiled by author from *Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census, Manufacturing*, 527; *Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census, Manufacturing*, 160-62; *Census of Massachusetts, 1905*, 101.

While the textile industry dominated the economic development of Lowell, other industries also grew in the city. The number of non-textile workers rose to over 17,000 in 1920.<sup>37</sup> In 1910, the value of non-textile industry products accounted for eleven million dollars, over one sixth the value of the city's textile industry products. Among non-textile industries, the most important was the textile machinery industry which was established to meet the growing demand of local companies. By 1920, twelve firms manufacturing machine parts and factory tools employed over 2,000 people. The value of their production alone was over seven million dollars. The Lowell Machine Shop did not limit its production to textile machinery; it also manufactured a number of steam locomotives for the expanding railroad networks throughout New England. In addition to such traditional industries as shoe manufacturing, the city's economic base was further enlarged by supplying a growing national market for patent medicines. The Hood and Ayer companies, as well as Father John's Medicine, were prominent in this field. Further diversification came with the development of boiler works, scale-makers, and brewing. During World War I, munition firms like the U.S. Cartridge Company thrived.<sup>38</sup> These transformations had an impact on the ethnic composition of the work force — an aspect I shall explore in chapter five.

Notwithstanding the development of diverse economic sectors, the textile industry remained the principal employer for the city's labour force. At the same time, the industry was suffering from the

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<sup>37</sup>This number does not include those working in the dyeing and the finishing textiles outside the textile factories.

<sup>38</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Manufactures*, vol. 9, 527; U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Occupations*, 172-73; Dublin and Marion, *Lowell*, 81.

impact of nation-wide competition and market restructuring. As far as production was concerned, the period from 1900 to 1924 was one of relative expansion for the U.S. textile industry. The rates of development were, however, uneven in the North and South. While in New England, the number of spindles grew from 15.1 to 20.3 million, an increase of 32 percent, the Southern textile industry saw an increase from 4.4 to 16.3 million spindles, an expansion of 270 percent.<sup>39</sup> The strength of the South as a competitor became obvious when Southern firms, which had been built largely with Northern capital, paid off their debts in the 1920s.

In the early twentieth century, economic difficulties in Lowell slowed down or even curtailed the growth of the French-Canadian population. For instance, a textile strike in the spring of 1903 culminated in the closing of factories and precipitated the re-migration of a cluster of French Canadians out of Lowell: between 1900 and 1905 the French-Canadian population decreased by some three thousand. The industrial depression of 1907 and 1908 again changed the composition of the immigrant population, driving out even more French-Canadian workers and their families as well as other immigrants.<sup>40</sup> Among those who left the city, some returned to Canada while others sought work elsewhere in the United States. Consequently, the total French-Canadian population of the city (including those born in Canada and those born in the U.S.) fell again, from 23,000 (or 24 percent of the city's population) in 1905 to 21,000 (or 21 percent) in 1909. In 1910, the number of French Canadians rose again to over 23,000, representing one quarter of the

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<sup>39</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 166.

<sup>40</sup>In his study of French Canadians in Holyoke, Peter Haebler brings to our attention an important point: those who left the city during the depression years were mostly single, while immigrants who were part of a family tended to stay in the city. Peter Haebler, "Habitants in Holyoke," 182-83.

city's population. By this time, a little less than half (48 percent) of the French Canadians in Lowell were of the second generation. A decade later, the proportion of those born in the U.S. formed the majority (57 percent) of the city's French-Canadian population.<sup>41</sup>

While World War I created a temporary boom in the textile industry of New England, the latter was also adversely affected by foreign competition. By 1918, for instance, Japan outsold the United States in the Asian market. When the war came to an end, a decrease in exports, accompanied by increases in imports of cloth, high prices for cotton, and a general depression, seriously hampered the U.S. textile industry. During the war years, the migratory influx from the European countries was temporarily interrupted. Each of these factors left the textile firms to fight over a smaller and more competitive market share. At first, corporations responded to the pressure by inciting their workers to greater productivity, but ultimately, when times became too tough to endure, they either temporarily or permanently closed down their operations in New England while moving part or all of their operations to the South.<sup>42</sup>

In this changing economy of the city, a significant proportion of Lowell's French Canadians were engaged in the textile factories. By 1909, among the labour force of the city's cotton industry, French-Canadian workers represented the largest ethnic cohort, making up to 17.1 percent of the workers in the industry.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 227-28, 232, Table 125; U.S. Department of Commerce. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population*, 745, 929; Dublin and Marion, *Lowell*, 67.

<sup>42</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 165-66. See also Charles T. Main, "Report" (1926, private collection), 1-5, cited in Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 166.

<sup>43</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 236.



Who were these French Canadians? The Immigration Commission, which collected its data during the 1908-1909 years, provides the number of years of residence of the foreign-born. In comparison to the Irish and the English, a far larger proportion (81.5 percent) of French Canadians in the city had been in the United States less than twenty years (see Table 3.4). Interestingly, in comparison to more recent immigrants (Portuguese and Greeks), a larger proportion of French Canadians indicated that they had lived in the U.S. less than five years: a little less than one-third of these French Canadians in Lowell were in this category. These figures reflect the fact that despite the decreasing number of the French-Canadian arrivals in the city, the migratory influx had not come to a standstill.<sup>44</sup> This continued influx from Canada notwithstanding, by the first decade of the twentieth century, the majority of Lowell's Canadian-born population had come to the city before 1900. Those recently arrived from Quebec were in the minority. Both the more settled French Canadians and the recent arrivals had to face a labour market that differed substantially from the one their nineteenth-century forerunners had taken advantage of.

### 3.3. PROGRESSIVE REFORMS AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE LABOUR PROCESS

By the early twentieth century, as French Canadians in Lowell became a permanent feature of the city, the labour force of the textile industry in New England had radically changed with regard to the age and ethnicity (and to a lesser degree, the gender) of workers. The number of children (males under sixteen and females

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<sup>44</sup>This is confirmed by an article published in a local daily of February 19, 1909, which reported the presence of "fully a score of these pupils, fresh arrived from Canada with their families." Cited in Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in the Industry*, vol. 10, 228.

Table 3.4  
 Distribution of Foreign-Born Persons in Lowell, Each Specified by Number of Years  
 in the U.S.A., by Birthplace of Individuals, 1908-1909

Birthplace	Number in Sample	Percentage		
		Under 5 years	Under 10 years	Under 20 years
Canada (French)	336	29.8	49.4	81.5
England	34	-	8.8	32.4
Greece	921	78.1	96.5	100.0
Ireland	122	14.8	24.6	54.9
Portugal	367	26.7	62.4	92.1
Total (N)	1,781	-	-	-
Average (Percentage)	-	52.5	73.9	90.5

Source: Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 236.

under fifteen) in the workforce of New England's cotton factories had decreased dramatically, from 17,704 in 1880 to 10,165 in 1890, and to 9,385 by 1905.<sup>45</sup> The children had begun to be replaced by adults and older adolescents drawn from the "new immigrants" of southern and eastern Europe, as well as by married women from "old immigrant" groups like the Irish and French Canadians. This restructuring of the textile labour markets in the Northeast was largely a result of a series of efforts made by progressive reformers, legislators, and labour unions, together with the effects of technological development and the intensifying labour process.<sup>46-a</sup>

The transformation of local labour market conditions had an enormous impact on the French-Canadian migratory flow. In the 1870s and 1880s, at the height of this migration, children constituted not only the largest group within its ranks but were also one of the most important resources a family possessed: the wages of children were often what made the move profitable for the family. Three decades later, French-Canadian children no longer played the same crucial role in financially contributing to their household.

In Lowell, the general decline of child labour in the first decades of the twentieth century was momentarily reversed by the sudden rise in demand generated by the World War I boom, of which the industrialists were keen to take full advantage. The textile industry, like the cartridge industry, needed to respond to this new demand by expanding its labour force, a large part of which was found not only among the newly arrived immigrants, but also among young children under sixteen years old. The demand for the

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<sup>45</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report on the Conditions of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1910), 28.

<sup>46-a</sup> Ramirez, *On the Move*, 126-28.

latter grew further as the entry of immigrants from southern and eastern European countries was temporarily halted during the war years. While the total number of wage earners over sixteen years of age hovered around 30,000 in the first two decades of the century, the number of working youth under sixteen fluctuated considerably and fell by more than half, from 1,200 in 1909 to 538 in 1914, but rose again to 1,000 in 1919.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the effects of war-time, working was a reality for only a handful of youths in early twentieth-century Lowell. In 1910, only 5.8 percent of children between ten and fourteen were wage-earners; this figure was smaller than the average for the state of Massachusetts as a whole. Even if one assumes that these census figures fail to include a significant number of working children whose parents and employers feared having to pay fines for violating the law, they nonetheless indicate a drastic decrease from the situation in the late nineteenth century when eight out of ten French-Canadian children might be found at work rather than at school. By 1920, only 2.9 percent of children between ten and fourteen were working in Lowell's industries.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Manufactures*, vol. 9, 592, Table 6.

<sup>47</sup>In 1910, the percentage of working children between ten and fourteen years of age in Massachusetts was 8.5 percent for U.S.-born children of U.S.-born parents, and 13.6 percent for U.S.-born children of foreign-born parentage. I calculated the Lowell figures myself from the sample created from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year of 1910. Federal Population Census Schedules*. City of Lowell (Middlesex County, Massachusetts) and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year of 1920. Federal Population Census Schedules*. City of Lowell (Middlesex County, Massachusetts). Hereafter, these two sources are referred to as *Thirteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1910* and *Fourteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920*. For Massachusetts figures, see U.S. Department of Commerce. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population*, 346. In 1880, more than eight out of ten French-Canadian children aged eleven to fifteen in Rhode Island were working, while only 8.5 percent

Behind this general decline in the number of young working children there had been a prolonged struggle lasting over five decades from 1870 to 1930 which, as early as the 1900s, had culminated in national efforts to enforce a series of child labour laws.<sup>48</sup> As Viviana Zelizer has noted, there were two sharply conflicting views regarding the proper place of children in American society.<sup>49</sup> On the one hand, for child labour reformers, early childhood labour represented unjustified parental exploitation. In addition to this view held by the Progressive middle-class reformers, another main source of antagonism to child labour came from union members and the politicians who represented them.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, their opponents, largely composed of industrialists and some church leaders, supported children's productive work as not only economically indispensable but also as a legitimate social practice. In this debate the material value of a useful wage-earning child, to use Zelizer's expression, was directly

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attended school. See Ramirez, *On the Move*, 120. In Quebec, the percentage of child workers aged under sixteen years is markedly higher for the same period (17 percent in 1900; 6 percent in 1910; and 12 percent in 1915). Note that the figure for the 1910 is for those aged fourteen and under. See Jacques Rouillard, *Les travailleurs du coton au Québec: 1900-1915* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1974), 54-55, especially Tableau XII.

<sup>48</sup>Efforts for replacing children from the workplace, for the large part, proceeded with the enactment of a series of protective labour legislation for the working women. See Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), especially chap. 7.

<sup>49</sup>Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), chap. 2, especially 57.

<sup>50</sup>David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: the Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 167; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 168-69.

"counterposed to the moral value of an economically useless but emotionally priceless child."<sup>51</sup>

Efforts made by the Progressive reformers at the national level paralleled a series of local campaigns to control "neglectful" mothers who kept their children out of school in order to send them to the factories. In a number of industrial cities in the United States, child labour reformers included middle-class American women who sympathized with the financial hardships of the working-class, yet rarely understood or justified working-class living strategies.<sup>52</sup> It would be mistaken, however, to conceive of the child labour reform movement in terms of a polarized struggle pitting middle-class reformers and labour unions against immigrant families.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, in general, at the root of the movement for the anti-child labour legislation was a segment of the middle class profoundly ill at ease with the lives of the working-class families. The middle-class reformers viewed child labour as a reflection of the foreign values held by immigrant parents "who have no civilization, no decency, no anything but covetousness and who would with pleasure immolate their offspring on the shrine of the golden calf."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, chap. 2, especially 57.

<sup>52</sup>Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless*, 59. See also Cameron, *Radicals*, 104-07.

<sup>53</sup>Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless*, 59.

<sup>54</sup>Editorial, *New York Times*, 17 December 1902, 8. Progressive reform for curbing the number of children in work places proceeded with legislation regulating the children's attendance at school. See Forest Chester Ensign, *Compulsory School Attendance and Child Labor: A Study of the Historical Development of Regulations Compelling Attendance and Limiting the Labor of Children in a Selected Group of States* (Iowa City, The Athens Press, 1969), chap. 4.

One should not assume that the reformers' efforts and a series of laws had the immediate and all-encompassing effect of reducing the number of working children. Despite the fervour of the protagonists of the anti-child labour movement to remove children from the work place and their success in turning these efforts into a nation-wide crusade,<sup>55</sup> the curb on child labour was far from being equally pursued across the industrial cities in the United States. Some immigrant families tried to get around the laws. In Manchester, New Hampshire, for instance, "Cora" Pellerin recounts that when she was ten, her father obtained for her an extract of a birth certificate under the name of her deceased older sister Cora, in order that she might pass as a fourteen-year-old, thereby allowing her to work legally.<sup>56</sup> As the reform progressed further, however, French-Canadian families modified their survival strategies by choosing to send married women in place of children into the labour market.<sup>57</sup> Many of them also showed their "adaptation" to the new

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<sup>55</sup>David Montgomery has observed that although middle-class reformers had dominated the campaign against child labour, the labour movement — such as unions of glassblowers, mule spinners, weavers, and coal miners — assumed a decisive role in its development by the end of the century. By then, writes Montgomery, "it had clearly become the ethical norm of working-class life that children should not be sent to work before they finished half a dozen years of elementary education, unless the death, desertion, or disability of the father made it unavoidable." However, newcomers from the rural regions of the United States and abroad neither shared, nor could afford, such beliefs. See Montgomery, *Fall of House of Labor*, 132. See also, Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community*; Florence Kelley, *Some Ethical Gains Through Legislation* (New York: The Mcmillan, 1905), 132-33.

<sup>56</sup>Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 202. See also Yves Roby, *Franco-Américains*, 70-71.

<sup>57</sup>Zelizer reminds us that the precise nature of the relationship between changes in the economic roles of women and children remains unclear. Winifred D. Wandersee, for instance, suggests that between 1920 and 1940 the decline in child labour pushed mothers into the labour force. Married women's work, therefore, represented a substitution of secondary wage earnings. Christopher Lasch presents a very different interpretation of changes in family and child life. According to Lasch, the elimination of children from the

labour market conditions even before their departure for Lowell: families with a large number of younger children, who would have migrated to New England centres in earlier decades, were now less likely to do so and instead stayed in Quebec or sent one or more family members south of the border.<sup>58</sup> These new adaptation strategies resulted in the general aging of the migratory population and, in particular, in an increase in the proportion of women who had experienced textile manufacturing in Quebec before emigration.

Probably more important than the legislative efforts to curtail the number of working children, the intensifying labour process had a decisive impact on the changing composition of the textile labour force. If the effects of anti-child labour laws in curbing the

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workplace was part of a general effort by Progressive reformers to remove children from the family influence, especially in the case of immigrant families. He contends that public policy contributed "not to the sentimentalization of domestic ties, but to their deterioration, specifically through the appropriation of parental function by *new agencies of socialized reproduction* such as educators, psychiatrists, social workers, penologists." Demographic historians' theories, on the other hand, claim that the newly emerging emotional value of children is best explained by declining birth and mortality rates in the twentieth century. See Winifred Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values, 1920-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 66; Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 13; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 105; Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960). See also Zelizer, *Priceless*, Introduction, especially 9-11. The arguments advanced by Wandersee and Lasch are not completely incompatible. While Wandersee focuses on the economic forces in play within the household, Lasch throws light on the political and cultural aspects of the process of the decline in child labour. The strength of Wandersee's interpretation is that it recognizes the strategies of the working-class families. These families, mostly immigrants, adapted their patterns of labour market participation to the transformation moulding the local economy. This point is explored in more detail in chapter 6 on French-Canadian women's labour participation patterns in early twentieth-century Lowell.

<sup>58</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*, 120-24. Changes in the migrating population will be further discussed in chapter 5.



number of working children in the factories was limited and uneven, the efforts of Progressive reformers placed additional strains on the New England and Mid-Atlantic textile industries which were already struggling against mounting competition from its Southern counterpart. Moreover, with the expansion of the cotton sector in the final decades of the nineteenth century, technological improvements did not offset the growing demand for labour, even as the supply of child labour was dwindling. Consequently, textile manufacturers forced workers to operate a greater number of outmoded, worn-out machines at an accelerated pace, no doubt under stricter supervision than in an earlier period. Child workers in their early teens hardly possessed sufficient physical strength to cope with this intensified labour process. The industry found an inexpensive replacement for child labour among the newly arriving adult immigrants, whose lack of skills, as well as the very fact of being new to the local labour market, prevented them from entering better-paid and less physically demanding jobs. These new workers from southern and eastern Europe brought about a radical re-composition of the labour force in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.4. HOUSES, STREETS, AND COMMUNITY

As changing economic conditions transformed the workplace of many of Lowell's French Canadians, a different set of challenges had to be met at home. Overcrowding was a common problem in the city's poorer neighbourhoods. In Little Canada, French Canadians were often blamed for this situation. For instance, the 1880s' *Annual Report of the Board of Health* noted the following:

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<sup>59</sup>Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, 123-24; Ramirez, *On the Move*, 127-28.

One of the newest buildings in 'Little Canada,' a huge, three-story, flatroof caravansary, 206 by 44 feet, has a population of 396. Every tenement in this building (four rooms usually, except the end ones) has two dark rooms, lighted by small high windows into the kitchen only; and totally dark unventilated rooms are not infrequent through the entire district. The inside rooms are, many of them, perfectly dark; there being no windows of any description, nor ventilation save by the door, while the numbers of their occupants remind one of Chinese.<sup>60</sup>

A physician calling on a patient in one of these "dens" found "the family and boarders in such close quarters where the two younger children had been put to bed in the kitchen sink." These sinks had no traps. One tenement of five rooms was occupied by a family of eight, and they claimed to be able to accommodate seven boarders.<sup>61</sup>

Such accusations continued well into the twentieth century. In 1920, for instance, Frederick W. Coburn, a local historian in Lowell, wrote about Little Canada as "the residential quarter of at first a majority of the Lowell French" who were "housed for the most part in flimsy structures, ranging from renovated horse sheds up to a large wooden 'block' containing thirty-two tenements."<sup>62</sup> Most French Canadians in Lowell lived in wooden tenement "blocks" lacking sufficient light and ventilation. Even in those buildings

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<sup>60</sup>City of Lowell, *Annual Report of the Board of Health of the City of Lowell* (1881), 126-27.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>Frederick W. Coburn, *History of Lowell and Its People*, vol. 1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1920), 343-44. See also Margaret T. Parker, *Lowell: a Study of Industrial Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1940): 86-88; Peter F. Blewett, "The New People," in *Cotton Was King*, ed. Eno, 209; Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 170.

which had windows, many rooms were dark at three o'clock in the afternoon because the buildings stood so close to one another. The only place to hang the laundry was over the windows of another tenement, and this practice shut off the little light that might otherwise have entered.<sup>63</sup>

The streets on which tenement buildings were built resembled a "public dump."<sup>64</sup> As early as the 1880s, a reporter from the *Lowell Daily Citizen* stated that the city had "the finest mills and the dirtiest streets" he had ever seen. Not only were the streets murky, but the atmosphere that pervaded them was "laden with the vilest of odours generated by the decaying vegetable and animal matter."<sup>65</sup> Three decades later the city street scene had hardly changed. Muddy and dusty streets in the neighbourhood of the textile factories, such as Tremont Street, remained "the common receptacles for rubbish and refuse and poor substitutes for suitable playgrounds for the children."<sup>66</sup> Backyards, in many cases, were also in a deplorable condition. "Rags, ashes, papers, potato parings, all are dumped into the yard, and often when the sink-drain is clogged, the water is thrown into the back yard until cesspools gather. Open garbage barrels in the back yards are another menace."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Kenngott, *The Record of a City*, 59.

<sup>64</sup>Martin Th  trault, "La sant   publique dans une ville manufacturi  re de la Nouvelle-Angleterre: Lowell, Massachusetts, 1865-1900" (Ph. D. diss., Universit   de Montr  al, 1985), 218.

<sup>65</sup>*Lowell Daily Citizen*, 2 September 1882.

<sup>66</sup>Kenngott, *The Record of a City*, 59.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*

Contemporary allegations with respect to the housing conditions of French Canadians, however, did not fully reflect the reality. Francis Early's study has revealed that, although Little Canada was frequently referred to as the principal living quarters of the city's French-Canadian immigrants, as early as 1880 less than one in five French Canadians lived in this section of the city. Almost 70 percent of those listed in the census were found to live in two other sections of the city: the Old and New Depots near the textile factories. Moreover, the population living in Little Canada was far from exclusively French-Canadian: one in every two households was French-Canadian, but the rest were a mixture of English, Irish, and American homes.<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately, Early's study does not cover the period after 1880. Reports of the state and municipal Bureaus of Health, however, indicate that during the following four decades, French Canadians moved further out from the city centre to new neighbourhoods, as had earlier waves of Irish immigrants. These included Pawtucketville on the north side of the Moody Street Bridge, and Centralville, a section farther east, which began at the north end of the Aiken Street Bridge. French Canadians shared this sector of the city with a good proportion of the Polish community as well as a few people from other nationalities (see Figure 3.2).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 161. A study by Martin Thétrault shows that in 1880 the French-Canadian population in Little Canada was comprised of 1,464 dwellings, 3,477 individuals, divided into 538 families. See Thétrault, "La santé publique," 215. See also Thétrault, "De la difficulté de naître et de survivre dans une ville industrielle de la Nouvelle-Angleterre au XIXe siècle: mortalité infantile, infanticide et avortement à Lowell, Massachusetts, 1870-1900," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 47, no. 1 (été 1983): 53-82.

<sup>69</sup>Peter Blewett, "The New People," in *Cotton Was King*, ed. Eno, 209.

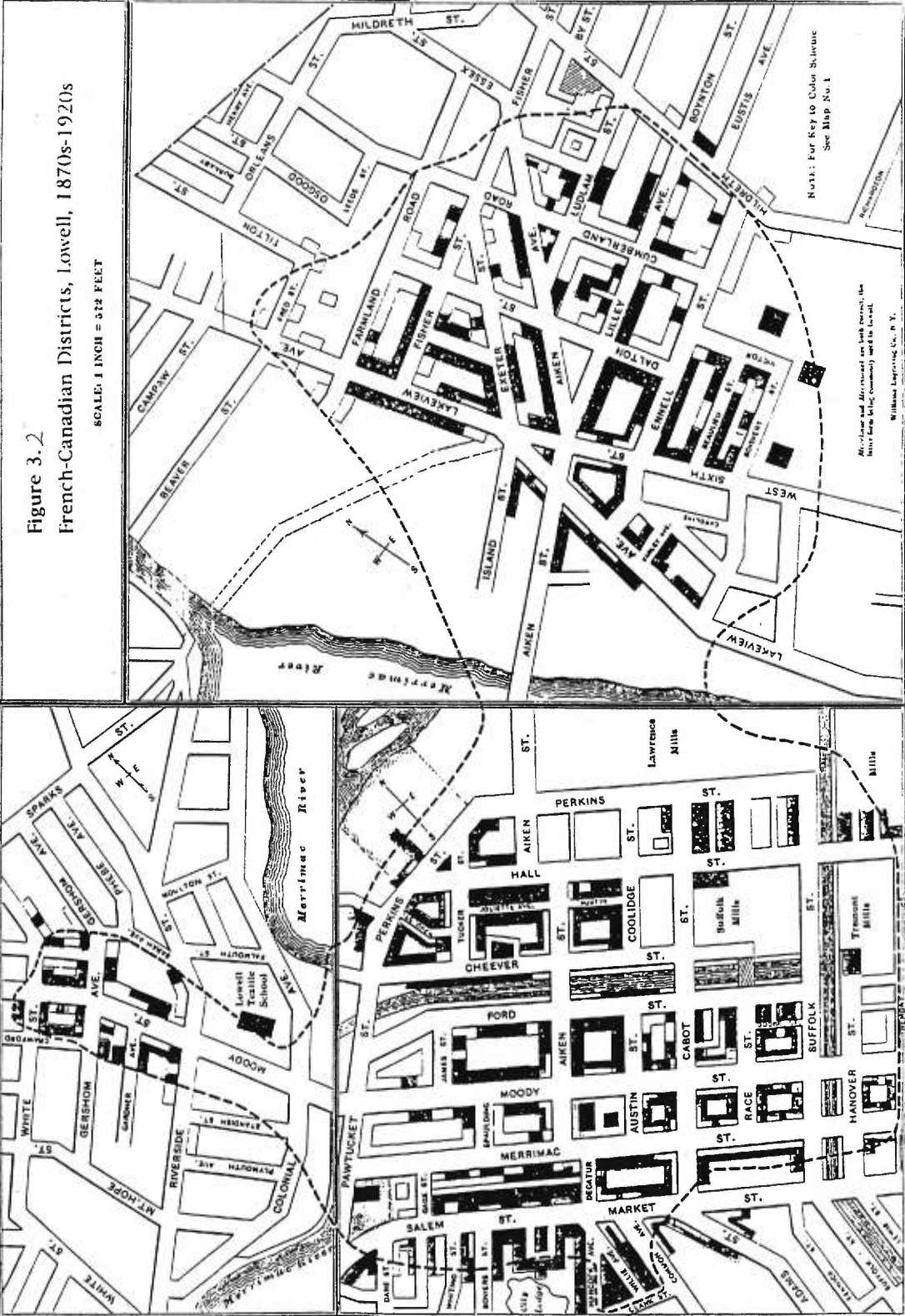


Figure 3.2  
 French-Canadian Districts, Lowell, 1870s-1920s

SCALE: 1 INCH = 322 FEET

Source: George Kenngott, *The Record of a City*, 101.

Little Canada, within walking distance of the textile factories, was particularly attractive to recently arrived workers and their families, many of whom lacked the means to afford streetcar fare. Offering a range of small stores, often run by French Canadians or other immigrants, Little Canada in the early twentieth century was a lively and culturally diverse neighbourhood, as this contemporary vignette by Father Armand Morissette shows:

La rue Moody était jadis la rue Ste.-Catherine des Canadiens de Lowell. Tout le monde y parlait Français, y compris plusieurs familles avec des noms comme O'Beirne, O'Flahavan, Moore, Murtagh, Thompson, O'Brien, Lord, Sawyer, Thurber, Sigman, Tumas, Protopapas, Brady et Grady.<sup>70</sup>

By the first decade of the twentieth century, while French Canadians continued to be criticized for their overcrowding, and as they gradually moved out of the centre to various parts of the city, their housing conditions reached a level that was, in the opinion of George Kenngott, "generally good" in comparison to the deplorable conditions of the Greeks, Portuguese, and Turks who often crammed into the old tenement buildings.<sup>71</sup> Although, as he recorded, some of the properties occupied by French Canadians were old and without

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<sup>70</sup>Father Morissette, *Journal de Lowell* (août 1977), 4, quoted in Brigitte Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions and Popular Culture in a Former Milltown: Aspects of Ethnic Urban Folklore and the Dynamics of Folklore Change in Lowell, Massachusetts* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 332. Brigitte Lane notes that, as a result of ethnically mixed living conditions, there was also a francization of names among Irish or other immigrants within the French-speaking district. Having a French-sounding name might have helped them to build a closer relationship with their French-Canadian neighbours. This must have been an important consideration especially for small business owners in the district.

<sup>71</sup>Kenngott, *The Record of a City*, 52-54.

modern conveniences (many of them lacked bathtubs or water-flushing privies), they were "comfortable" and "usually clean."<sup>72</sup>

The Immigrant Commission Report further confirmed the relatively favourable conditions of French-Canadian housing. In contrast to Greek and Portuguese households, which on average held 6.7 and 9.4 persons respectively, a French-Canadian household had 5.82 people. The figures for the English was 4.6, while that for the U.S.-born of an American father was as low as 4.33 people. As for rent, while French Canadians paid less (\$9.59) per apartment than the Portuguese (\$9.92), the amount paid per person was higher, French Canadians paying 1.6 times more than the Portuguese.<sup>73</sup> These figures suggest that, contrary to popular misconceptions, the housing conditions of French Canadians were, in actuality, above the level reached by more recently arrived immigrants to the city, who — no doubt forced by circumstances — had to crowd the maximum number of people into small apartments. In any event, the underlying reason for overcrowding and the poor living conditions of many immigrant families was the abysmally low wages paid by employers in fierce competition with one another.<sup>74</sup>

In contrast to the dark and filthy "corporation streets" near the textile factories, the nearby ever-crowded commercial streets were the stage for the more pleasurable dimensions of the everyday life of working-class families. As the testimony of its inhabitants reveals, this constellation of street vendors and small businesses,

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

<sup>73</sup>*Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 295, 297.

<sup>74</sup>For discussion on cost of living and wages, see chapter 5 of this dissertation.

together with more established institutions such as the Church<sup>75</sup> and parish schools, nurtured a sense of community in the neighbourhood. Yvonne Lagassé, who was born in 1906 and lived all her life in Lowell, depicts Little Canada as a small village where one found stores of all sorts: "la viande, les groceries, le store à meubles ... des stores à bonbons, même le store à pianos d'monsieur Délisle. J'vous dis qu'du bonheur dans l'P'tit Canada, y en ava't!" Although conventionally considered a French-Canadian enclave, "le Petit Canada" was in reality less segregated than its name suggested. Father Morissette's description of Moody Street, the "rue principale des Franco-Lowellois," indicates that Chinese-, Jewish-, and Greek-run businesses were nestled among those of French Canadians.

Il y avait des restaurants, des cafés, des épiceries, des charcuteries, des boulangeries, des magasins de variétés, petits et gros, des garages, les bicyclettes Bellerose, les beignets Rousseau, la poolroom de Philius "Garçon" Rochette, les automobiles Rochette, le bloc du maire Beaudry, le singe de Monsieur Rocheville, les chaussures Brownstein puis celles de Harvey Saucier, le vieux cireur de bottes grec, qui aussi nettoyait les chapeaux d'hommes, l'aimable cordonnier April, la buanderie chinoise.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>There were several churches in the city; each immigrant group built their own church or shared the building with another group and hold services often in their own language. For the French Canadians in Lowell, their l'Eglise Saint-Jean-Baptist, nicknamed by Jack Kerouac "the Chartres of Little Canada," undoubtedly constituted one of the most important institutions. See Peter F. Blewett, "The New People," in *Cotton Was King*, ed. Eno, 190-217; Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions*, 331.

<sup>76</sup>Father Morissette, "Faits et gestes," *Journal de Lowell* (October 1977), 4. Cited in Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions*, 332-33. According to Lane, Father Morissette describes the Petit Canada in Lowell as it "used to be." His oral history accounts include, among other things, memories from the time of the great Church (Eglise Saint-Jean-Baptiste), World War I, and Prohibition. Photographs taken between 1905 and 1919 in collection of Lowell Historical Society provide some visual evidence of the economic expansion and social consolidation that occurred in Lowell in this period. See Lewis T. Karabatsos and Robert W. McLeod, Jr., eds, *Fixed in Time: Photographs of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1860-1940* (Lowell: Lowell Historical Society, 1983),



Commodity stores were not the only businesses. There were also stores for hobbies and leisures such as "le photographe Charlie Landry" and "le Lambert's Lounge ... où l'on pouvait assister souvent à des spectacles de première classe."<sup>77</sup> In addition, the city's Petit Canada counted a great number of cafés. ("buvettes") and candy-shops ("magasins a candé").<sup>78</sup> The growth in number and range of these small businesses concentrated in Little Canada in the early twentieth century was an important change from the 1870s when, according to the study by Frances Early, "French Canadians were not providing many retail or professional services for their own people."<sup>79</sup> Thus, the community was becoming further integrated, cohesive, and diversified over time — a clear sign of maturity of the Lowell's French-Canadian population.

The lives of the Lowell's French Canadians were also punctuated and animated by the passage of *peddleurs*, or travelling salespersons. Visits by the icemen, fruit and vegetable peddlers,

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Photographs 57, 61 and 87. See also Yvonne Lagassé, interview with Brigitte Lane, reproduced in Lane, *ibid.*, App. J, I. "Les rues et les magasins," 514-25. This observation on Lowell's "Little Canada" confirms Dirk Hoerder's thesis on the mixed presence of different ethnic groups in other cities. Dirk Hoerder, "International Labor Markets and Community Building by Migrant Workers in the Atlantic Economies," in *A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930*, ed. Rudolph Vecoli and Suzanne Sinke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 78-107, especially 96-97.

<sup>77</sup>Father Morissette, cited in Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions*, 332-33.

<sup>78</sup>Another French-Canadian resident of the city, Roger Lacette, mentioned in the course of his personal conversation with Brigitte Lane that there were twenty-four *buvettes* (cafés) on the Moody and the Merrimack put together (date unspecified). See Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions*, 371, nt. 31.

<sup>79</sup>Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 159. In the 1870 census sample there were only traders, one dry goods dealer, one huckster shop owner, one saloon keeper, and three physicians among French Canadians in Lowell.

soapmen, ragmen, kindling woodmen, or umbrella fixers, notes Brigitte Lane, appeared to be "one of the great events of the everyday life."<sup>80</sup> Yvonne Lagasse's account illustrates this point.

Comme que j'vous ai dit, on avait pas besoin d'aller en ville pour acheter que c'qu'on avait besoin....L'lundi matin, pass't un gros bonhomme avec un cheval et puis une voiture. Et puis il cria't: <<Soap! Soap!>> On descenda't en bas vitelement. Il nous donna't une grosse barre de savon pour ce que c'est qu'on ava't: soit les os, la graisse ou des restants de viande qui étaient pas bons. On lui donna't ça! les not'graisse. Et parfois, c'était une sorte de potasse qu'i' vemda't, qu'il nous donna't pour not' graisse. On demanda't ça! Ça, ça lavait les planches, les passages.<sup>81</sup>

At a time when most houses did not have electricity or refrigerators, ice was an indispensable commodity for keeping food from going bad. Most families had iceboxes which had to be replenished with ice twice a day in hot weather. As working families often did their grocery shopping Saturday afternoon, the only time off from factory work, icemen passed by the same day: "Ces pauvres hommes qui travailla't surtout le samedi," remembers Yvonne.<sup>82</sup>

Some peddlars enjoyed a close relationship with certain clients and were invited into the house. Yvonne recalls Monsieur Jean-Baptiste Dalphond who sold all kinds of fruits and vegetables. He would go to grandmother Lafortune's house and, instead of calling from outside, would climb the stairs and ask Yvonne's grandmother

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<sup>80</sup>Lane, "Histoire orale des Franco-Américains de Lowell, Massachusetts: mémoire, histoire et identité(s)," *Francophonie d'Amérique* no. 5 (1995): 153-72; especially 162-64.

<sup>81</sup>Lagassé, interview with Lane, reproduced in Lane, *ibid.*, App. J, III. "The Peddlars," 528-32, especially, 525.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*

if she needed anything that day. The grandmother would let him take a seat and serve him a cup of tea and a homemade sweet, a *beigne* or *galette*. She would then say: "Ecoute Baptiste, j'veux avoir des bonnes bananes jaunes, j'veux pas avoir des bananes noires."<sup>83</sup> Yvonne added that "Canadiens aima't ces hommes-là [peddlers]."<sup>84</sup> As the time passed, they disappeared from the daily scene, no doubt replaced by the growing presence of small stores.<sup>85</sup>

Like the small store owners in Little Canada, street vendors were not exclusively French Canadians. Other immigrant vendors, such as Jewish and Syrian merchants, came to French-Canadian houses. Yvonne recalls:

On l'ava't une fois d'temps en temps des Juifs qui venaient avec une charge de bananes. Les bananes, dans c'temps-là, se vendaient pas à la livre. Ça se vendait à la douzaine. Et puis, soit une charge de tomates ou une charge de concombres. Il vend't un peu meilleur marché parce qu'il v'nait d'Boston. Mais des fois. C'était pas tout l'temps fameux! [...]

En tous cas, à part de t'ça, on avait les ragmen qu'on l'appela't: les acheteurs de guenilles! Y en a un, y en ava't beaucoup qui passa't, puis qui cria't: <<Rag! Rag!>> Et puis, y en a un qui avait pas d'chevaux, qui ava't une voiture à deux roues. On l'appelait: <<Caïf, mon Juif!>> Les enfants couraient après. C'étaient des Juifs qui achetaient des guenilles, des bouteilles, des flacons. N'avait une cent, deux cents! Des fois, les guenilles, c'était deux livres pour une cent....<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

Yvonne also pleasantly remembers visits of a Syrian woman peddler, who came to Aunt Geoffroy's tenement, calling her "Madame Afroi"<sup>87</sup> Yvonne recounts at the interview: "On avait un plaisir de l'entendre parler: <<Ajète les bonne culottes! aujourd'hui, bon lacets! Tu vas voir ça, ça va durer longtemps.>>"<sup>88</sup> Despite the haze of nostalgia, these examples remind us that the visits of street merchants enlivened, however briefly, the daily lives of Lowell's French Canadians.

Proximity to neighbours, regular visits by peddlers, and a great number of shops run by fellow French Canadians — these provided opportunities for Lowell's French-Canadian immigrants to knit a supportive neighbourhood network and to share a sense of community life. Such a network might have helped men and women within and beyond the immigrant group to share experiences and articulate common needs, difficulties, and injustices omnipresent in the workplace.

### 3.5. ILLNESS, INJURIES, AND DEATHS

If physical closeness contributed to nurturing a sense of community among French-Canadian workers, their health and welfare were often jeopardized by the disastrous effects of contaminated city water, clogged drain system, leaking privies, rubbish-strewn streets, and above all, hazardous, life-threatening workplaces. It is pertinent to examine the conditions in which these immigrants lived and worked in order to understand their lives as a whole. Infant mortality rates among French Canadians were

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<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

painfully high. By 1909, sixty percent of the total number of deaths of French Canadians were for children under six years old.<sup>89</sup> The city's horribly high rates of morbidity from tuberculosis and respiratory diseases (particularly so for the French Canadians),<sup>90</sup> were partly attributed to the housing conditions for most of the city's working-class families. The 1909 report of the Board of Health of the city of Lowell described some of the workers' and their families'

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<sup>89</sup>Kenngott, *The Record of a City*, 83-86. Kenngott points out that since it was impossible to discover the number of infants in each immigrant group examined, the figures in his study show the percentage of infant deaths of one immigrant group compared to the total population of that group. Infant mortality rates are a sensitive indicator of socioeconomic conditions. These rates largely reflect the combined effects of living standards, quality of food (especially that of milk), education, and most importantly, general sanitary conditions. See also Tétrault, "La santé publique," 218.

It should be also underlined that under similar socioeconomic conditions, an ethnic group in which mothers breast-fed their babies for a longer period of time exhibited lower rates of infant mortality in comparison to a group which practiced earlier weaning. Denyse Baillargeon has shown that in 1910 Montreal, the rate of infant mortality among French-Canadian mothers was considerably higher than among mothers of other cultural groups. Whereas among Anglo-Protestant families, the infant mortality rate was 163 per 1,000, among French-Catholic families this proportion reached 224 per 1,000, against 207 per Catholics of other origins and 94 per Jewish families. French-Canadian mothers weaned their babies at an earlier stage in comparison to other mothers. Baillargeon explains that early weaning probably led to a greater number of pregnancies among French-Canadian women, which in turn resulted in the exhaustion of mothers and increased risks for the lives of newly-borns. See Denyse Baillargeon, "Fréquenter les Gouttes de lait. L'expérience des mères montréalaises, 1910-1965," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 50, no. 1 (été 1996): 29-68, esp. 29-31. See also Martin Tétrault, "L'état de santé des Montréalais, de 1880 à 1914," (M.A. thesis, Université de Montréal, 1979); Patricia Thornton, Sherry Olson, and Quon Thuy Thach, "Dimensions sociales de la mortalité infantile à Montréal au milieu du XIXe siècle," *Annales de démographie historique* (1988): 299-325.

<sup>90</sup>According to Kenngott, from 1880 to 1909, while the mortality rates for the Irish, the English, and the native-born Americans fell significantly (2.0, 1.5, and 3.9, respectively), those of French Canadians, after a period of steady decline, rose again from 1905 to 1909. In the latter year, the French-Canadian group recorded the highest rate (2.3) among the four studied here. Kenngott, *The Record of a City*, 83.

housing as veritable "tuberculosis incubator[s]." One tenement block recorded "six deaths in five successive families."<sup>91</sup> Interview accounts reveal that French-Canadian women, like other immigrant women, tirelessly scrubbed the warped, wide-board floors and scoured the battered stairs and hallways.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, efforts to enforce high standards of domestic cleanliness were easily undermined by the crippling effects of dusty wooden tenements and garbage-strewn streets. After a workday of ten hours or more, workers came home to eat and sleep in these sunless, dark, and crowded quarters, where contagious diseases spread easily.

Exposed in their living quarters to filth and disease, immigrant workers had to face even more serious dangers at work. Before the advent of the Draper automatic looms in the 1880s, as many as 70 percent of textile operatives died of respiratory disease. (Among Massachusetts farmers, the incidence of fatal respiratory illness was only four percent.)<sup>93</sup> That the new looms contributed to a decrease in respiratory disease among workers underlines the health hazards posed by workplace conditions. Moreover, despite some improvements, textile factories in the early twentieth century remained dangerous and at times life-threatening places for the workers.

The day began early for the workers at the textile factories, where they laboured usually from six in the morning to six in the evening. An Irish immigrant describes a morning street scene in early twentieth-century "Acre" (once a predominantly Irish

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<sup>91</sup>Kenngott, *The Record of a City*, 57.

<sup>92</sup>Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 32. See also chap. 5 of this thesis.

<sup>93</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 64.

neighbourhood which was transformed into a more culturally mixed area with the arrival of new immigrants):

Every morning at quarter of six, every door in the Acre would open, and we'd all troop out, down to the Merrimack, the Prescott, the Boott, or the Tremont and Suffolk. We'd all be going down Merrimack Street in those days in the early morning. It was crowded with the mill workers going to work. No people in cars. There was no cars, and the streets were lined with people. And we'd be laughing and singing, going along. Some of us. And some of us were very upset at getting up and figuring there wasn't much to look forward to. But, so what, some of us looked at it this way. It's got to be. What else are you going to do? You can't stay home; your mother won't let you. You've got to go to work.<sup>94</sup>

Whether they liked it or not, for most immigrant workers above the legal minimum working age, spending the longest hours of their day at the factory was an undisputable fact of life.

The hardest part of the workday was not the early rise but the working conditions inside the factory gates. Although long working hours were gradually curtailed for women and children, many textile workers continued to labour in hot and humid workrooms without ventilation, where "fly," or cotton dust, permeated the air. In order to prevent the thread from breaking, operating rooms had to be kept humid. With the air sprayed regularly with water and the windows nailed shut, many workers fell victim to tuberculosis.<sup>95</sup> At

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<sup>94</sup> Mabel Delehanty Mangan, interview with Mary Blewett, reproduced in Blewett *The Last Generation*, 92-98, especially 94-95.

<sup>95</sup>As late as in the 1940s, a comber at a Boott factory describes her working and living conditions as follows:

"And it was hot. Even in the winter, it was real hot. You'd start off in the morning and leave the house, dressed up warm and you'd get to the Boott mill and it was sweltering hot. And those old shoes we wore, walking in there, and the floors were oily, and you'd be breathing that lint. Your eyelashes would be all

the beginning of the twentieth century, as the factories' outdated machinery ran even faster, the workers had to bear ever-intensifying noise and vibration. The noise level was literally deafening and caused hearing damage to workers. Vibration was so excessive that an industrial counsellor's report warned about the risk of provoking kidney infections similar to those found among street car motormen and conductors.<sup>96</sup>

Despite some improvements made in the working conditions in the textile factories, the development was slow and uneven. Some firms recognized the advantage of giving consideration to workers' comfort by setting standards for ventilation, lighting, lockers, cleanliness, and toilet facilities.<sup>97</sup> Others cared little about their employees' working conditions. The Boott factories, for instance, neglected humidity laws, child labour laws, as well as regulations for

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full of cotton. But we knew we had to make a week's pay in order to survive. And it was gloomy. I think they had twenty-five-watt [bulbs]. And the machines, the same thing over and over, and at lunchtime everybody used to rush to the old sinks, washed up in cold water, no hot water. There were about two to three hundred people in the room. Other girls would be sweeping; our hair would be covered with the cotton. We would have to go home and take a bath in galvanized tubs — no plumbing at the time — just the washbowl and that's it. And the outhouses until my father got a toilet put in. I remember coming home with our lunch pails and sleeping in those old beds of ours. Galvanized beds."

Emma Skehan, interview with Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*: 110-14, especially 111-12.

<sup>96</sup>Valentine, Tead, and Gregg, Industrial Counsellors, "The Industrial Audit of the Boott Mills, Lowell, Massachusetts" (1916), box 45, Flather Collection, Lowell Museum at Lowell University, 50-52 (hereafter, referred to as the Valentine Audit). See also Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 137-38.

<sup>97</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 137.



the changing rooms, toilets, and other facilities.<sup>98</sup> One immigrant child recalls how shocked she was to find her mother working in a factory room:

The cotton was all over. They [factory workers] were breathing this cotton. No masks; noisy. Terrible, terrible! The cotton was so thick that the nostrils would fill up with cotton. They'd be throwing up cotton; they'd come home throwing up cotton. From their noses, from their mouths. Their hair was full of cotton. Some of them would wear little caps to cover their hair. It was terrible. They worked from six to six. They never saw the sun.<sup>99</sup>

A spinner also indicated in an interview that "the sanitation was not good." Given the working environment, "not good" was something of an understatement:

We had cockroaches. One of the toolers in the velvet room that used to sharpen the [velvet-cutting] knives for us got hold of one of those cockroaches and put a string on his leg. That was his pet. He used to feed the darn thing. [...] Then there were the rats. We had a bench where we used to sit and change to our old shoes. We'd take them out from under, and the rats would hop out. [...] There was no ladies' room; they called them toilets, and they had no drinking water, only canal water. They weren't ladies' rooms, they were just toilets, and oh, the less said the better!<sup>100</sup>

Cockroach dung would cause pulmonary disorders, while rats and other insects could transfer contagious diseases. Drinking canal water was also dangerous as it might cause dysentery and

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<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Cornelia Chicklis, interview with Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 302.

<sup>100</sup> Mabel Delehanty Mangan, interview with Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 96.

tuberculosis. Concerned by this practice, the Massachusetts Mills put up the following notice in five languages (English, French, Portuguese, Polish, and Greek):

Warning!  
Do not drink this canal water — it will make you  
sick.<sup>101</sup>

Neglect of working amenities was also conspicuous. Since smoking was severely forbidden, many (male) workers turned to tobacco-chewing to soothe their dry throats, irritated from the dusty lint-filled working rooms. In the absence of sufficient cuspidors, they spat chewed tobacco on the floor; this habit stirred up bacteria into the air from dried floor dust. As the loom fixers had to kneel down — often lie down — on the dirty floors in order to make the necessary changes to even dirtier machines, they tended to breathe in the floor dust.

Until the introduction of the Draper loom, a new machine that required a self-threading shuttle, operators had to manually draw the thread through the ceramic eye in the side of the old-style shuttle. The fastest way to perform this operation was with "a quick, sucking kiss."<sup>102</sup> If the first weaver to do this operation had a communicable disease, such as tuberculosis, the second one was almost certain to contract it. Even if an operative was fortunate enough to be spared from contracting tuberculosis while working with the "kiss-of-death" shuttle, he or she continually inhaled lint, dyestuffs, and other foreign matters.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Kennigott, *The Record of a City*, 96-97.

<sup>102</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 64.

<sup>103</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 64.

Textile factories were dangerous places to work. Most French Canadian workers in Lowell were employed in the city's textile factory and ran outmoded, worn-out equipment with exposed gears and belt drives. Narrow aisles between machines and crowded conditions in the factories made cleaning and repairing difficult and prevented proper lighting. Most commonly, accidents occurred while the machinery was being cleaned, since workers then fed the machines by hand rather than with tools. Accidents also occurred when, in a bid to save time, workers attempted to remove foreign objects or replace a drive belt without stopping the machine. In almost every instance, "carelessness" was attributed to the employees and not to the factory. A young French-Canadian twister, Blanche Graham, almost lost her little finger in a twister machine when she was trying to remove something caught up in the gear. She recalls:

I used to clean mine [a twister machine] and climbed up to clean the top part — there was something caught up there....I was cleaning the gears and my little finger was stuck up. I had a habit of keeping that finger out, and it got caught in the gears. So I pulled it out quick. It was squashed. I seen [sic] stars. I came down and showed it to the boss, and he said, Oh my God! what happened? I told him, and he said, Well, you had no business getting up there!<sup>104</sup>

Stressed by the factory's policy for maximizing productivity and efficiency, Blanche probably felt hurried to remove the stuck threads from the machine while it was still in operation. As this case illustrates, workers complying with the productivity policy received condemnation rather than sympathy when doing so resulted in workplace injuries.

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<sup>104</sup> Blanche Graham, interview with Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 70-72, especially 72.

With little progress made in implementing safety measures, dangerous working conditions in textile factories remained unchanged as late as the post-World War I period. One machine oiler remembers a terrible accident that occurred to a fellow worker. During overtime, when there were only two workers assigned to a room, his co-worker got his hand caught inside a cylinder. The fellow was screaming, the machine belt squeaking, and there was no one else but the oiler in the room. He immediately shut down the machine and then stopped all the machines in the working room. He tried to get the strippers off the fellow's hand, but he couldn't do it. He ran into different rooms to get the fixer, and, finally, lifted the machine off the oiler's hand. He recalls: "I couldn't bear to look at his hand. It was just like a hamburger; you could see the bone":

After he got the man's hand out, the fixer went to call the boss to get an ambulance. So the boss says to me, *Why did you shut your machines down?* I says, what did you want me to do? Leave the machines run? With no one there, and the guy's hand caught? And have all the machines jammed up? He says, Well, you should have called the next room and got help and keep the machines going. I says, Okay. 'Cause if you talk too much, you're fired.<sup>105</sup>

Life-threatening accidents frequently occurred in the factories. A female worker, whose long hair was caught in an uncovered belt, had her scalp ripped right off.<sup>106</sup> Doffers and feeders usually ate lunch next to their machines while they were in operation. One doffer, who used to put his sandwich on top of the coil and then "start eating the wool and sandwich together," told his boss that he wanted to be an oiler. He wanted to "eat in peace." The man

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<sup>105</sup>Sidney Muskovitz, interview with Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 230-43, especially 239.

<sup>106</sup>Blanche Graham, interview with Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 72.

had the oiler's job for about six months. One day his loose shirt-tail got caught between the pulleys, turning him upside down and smashing his skull against a card. It "split his head right open." Within a year, he was dead, probably from concussion. "That's how dangerous the job was," lamented the fellow worker of the deceased.<sup>107</sup>

These incidents illustrate the trajectory of workplace conditions which characterized textile factories in Lowell. While at their inception these businesses had gone a long way to distance themselves from the negative image attached to English factories, by the early twentieth century, management strategies to maximize production at the expense of working conditions had succeeded in turning Lowell's dangerous factories into "dark satanic mills."

## CONCLUSION

The history of labour in Lowell, which first drew new workers and their families from the surrounding countryside and then, later, from distant parts of the world, exemplifies the processes described by Herbert Gutman in a seminal essay on the relationship between Americanization, factory work habits, and labour efficiency.<sup>108</sup> This chapter has examined Lowell from a number of

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<sup>107</sup>Sidney Muskovitz, interview with Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 239. Interviews were abundant in other cases of work injuries. See for instance, Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 249, 263, 271, 284; Hareven and Langenbach, *The Amoskeag*, 190-1. For records of earlier accidents, see Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*: 68-74. See also newspaper reports such as *L'Etoile*, 22 July 1905 and 11 May 1910.

<sup>108</sup>Herbert David Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Knopf, 1976; the article originally appeared in *The American Historical Review*, June 1973), 3-78.

perspectives: its economic development as the nation's leading textile centre, the changing composition of its workforce, and the daily lives of French Canadians at work and at home. From its inception, Lowell's socioeconomic structures and demographic evolution were largely defined by the textile industry. As the industry attracted a cheap and hardworking labour force, the city built and rebuilt its population out of peoples originating from different corners of the world. In the post-bellum period, French Canadians carved for themselves an important place within this diverse population, and by the early twentieth century had become a distinct and permanent element of the city's economic, social, and cultural universe.

The experiences of the city's immigrant workers and their families were not the same for all. The diverse cultural backgrounds and work experiences of the working families who became residents at different conjunctures were often major causes for the inequality in their socioeconomic status. Moreover, within any given ethnic group, distinctly different work opportunities were offered by the local labour market to men, women, and children. Transcending these differences, however, was the centrality of family in the lives of all immigrants. The family remained one of the most important institutions in the industrial city, its primordial function being to ensure day-to-day, as well as generation-to-generation, survival. Of course, not all immigrants lived with their families. Nonetheless — whether single or married — immigrant men and women, boys and girls, were all part of a family network. The following chapter examines the geographic mobility which led French Canadians from Quebec's villages and towns to the urban industrial centre of Lowell, Massachusetts.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONTINUITY AND MULTIPLICITY OF MOVEMENT: THE GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY OF FRENCH-CANADIAN IMMIGRANTS AND THE ROLE OF FAMILY NETWORKS

#### INTRODUCTION

French Canadians were a highly mobile people. Among those who migrated to Lowell, some moved directly from Quebec to that New England city. Others first moved to Montreal or to smaller industrial/commercial centres of the province before crossing the southern border. Still others migrated to other U.S. cities, in particular, New England textile centres, and subsequently moved to Lowell. After arriving in Lowell, not all French-Canadian migrants stayed in the city. Some left for a neighbouring locality while others went back to Canada. A common thread ran through these diverse and complex patterns of movement: for the most part, French Canadians based their decisions to emigrate, stay, or continue moving, on the fact that they knew people at these various destinations.

This chapter focuses on the geographic mobility of French Canadians who migrated to Lowell in the early twentieth century. Evidence presented in the following analysis confirms the findings of recent historians who have contested the classic paradigm of one-way, cross-border migration of formerly sedentary people. The migratory patterns of Lowell's French Canadians illustrate a general and continuous mobility prior to and subsequent to their arrival in the United States. It is argued that such mobility did not mean that French Canadians wandered randomly or were transient nomads buffeted about by the vicissitudes of the casual labour market. Rather, my findings suggest that their frequent moves were largely embedded in family and kin networks.

Before proceeding with my analysis of the extent and implications of French Canadians' mobility, a few words need to be said on the historical writing on this subject. Two studies, one contemporary and the other scholarly, are of particular importance. Among the various writings that discuss French-Canadian immigrants and their alleged transiency, perhaps no other official report provoked a greater controversy than Colonel Carroll Wright's *Twelfth Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labour* published in 1881. As mentioned earlier in this study, Colonel Wright's accusatory remarks about the mobility of French-Canadian immigrants provoked indignant reactions among Franco-American leaders in a number of New England communities. Beyond identifying the phenomenon and insulting the migrants, Wright's report contributed little to our understanding of this mobility.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Massachusetts, *Bureau of Statistics of Labor, Twelfth Annual Report* (Boston: Rand, Avery, & Co., 1881), 469-70. See also the discussion by Pierre Anctil in Anctil, "Chinese of the Eastern States, 1881"; Anctil, "L'identité de l'immigrant québécois en Nouvelle-Angleterre, le rapport Wright de 1882"; Ramirez, *On the Move*, 111-14.



A century after Colonel Wright, historical studies have shed new light on the issue of New England's French-Canadian mobility.<sup>2</sup> Among these works, Bruno Ramirez's analysis stands out. In it, Ramirez reveals that French-Canadian cotton workers in New England were far more stable than Colonel Wright had claimed. Using data derived from the 1908-09 Immigration Commission Report, Ramirez shows that regardless of gender and length of residence in the United States since their arrival, less than half of these Canadian-born workers had never left the United States, while about a quarter had made only one visit abroad prior to the Immigration Commission's inquiry in 1908-1909.<sup>3</sup> Ramirez's insightful observation notwithstanding, a closer examination of the migratory patterns of French-Canadian individuals remains pertinent to this and future analyses because of the limitations posed by the aggregate source upon which Ramirez relied.

In a more recent unpublished report, Ramirez and Yves Otis analyze the migratory itineraries of French Canadians at the level of the individual by using records of U.S. border crossings.<sup>4</sup> In the same vein, this chapter employs a variety of nominal longitudinal sources in conjunction with conventionally-used compiled sources (such as the U.S. Federal Census Compilation) and cross-sectional sources (the U.S. Decennial Census Schedules) to reconstruct the mobility of immigrant individuals and families. This method,

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<sup>2</sup>Anctil, "Chinese of the Eastern States"; Anctil, "L'identité de l'immigrant québécois en Nouvelle-Angleterre".

<sup>3</sup>Ramirez, "French Canadian Immigrants in the New England Cotton Industry: A Socioeconomic Profile," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 11 (Spring 1983): 125-42, especially 135-36.

<sup>4</sup>See Ramirez and Yves Otis, "French-Canadian Emigration to the USA in the 1920s. A Research Report" (Université de Montréal, Département d'histoire, November 1992).

practised on a sample of Lowell's French-Canadian population, illuminates the complex dynamic behind population movement in the early twentieth century.

The following pages begin with a survey of the new paradigms that have challenged the once predominant assimilation model of immigration. Next, the longitudinal sources and record-linkage methodology used in this study are discussed. Finally, the residential histories of the sampled Lowell-bound French-Canadian migrants are explored with regard to the following points: the chronology of migration, the origins and itineraries of migrants, the occupational histories of migrants, the incidence of previous visits to the United States, the presence (or lack) of contact with persons at their destination, and the presence of accompanying travellers. My analysis of these variables suggests that the continued geographic mobility of French Canadians before and after the cross-border voyage was predicated upon the existence of well-developed networks of family and kin spanning the Northeastern region of the continent.

#### 4.1. NEW PARADIGMS OF GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY: CONTINUITY AND MULTI-DIRECTIONALITY

The most significant development in historical and sociological writing on immigration over the last twenty years has been the unsettling of the two classical paradigms that had dominated this field of study in the United States.<sup>5</sup> One paradigm

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<sup>5</sup>Ewa Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration" in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 187-238; especially 189.

emerged in the 1920s with the work of sociologists from the Chicago school, such as Robert Park. The Chicago school proposed the classical assimilation model, which essentially assumed the progressive weakening and ultimate disappearance of Old World traits as once rural peasants adopted the cultural values and economic norms of modern urban industrial society. The second paradigm, "the human capital theory," posited that the motivations, values, skills, and educational levels possessed by individuals determined their ability to adapt and assimilate and, consequently, their level of socioeconomic achievement. These two classical conceptualizations characterized the work of influential sociologists and historians of the 1950s and early 1960s, and reinforced the popular American ideology of the "melting pot" as well as the theme of individual responsibility running through semi-mythical "rags to riches" narratives.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1970s, new research on immigration has undermined the validity of these classic models. Ewa Morawska has subsumed the new approaches in sociological and historical research under two major paradigms. One emphasizes broadly conceived structural determinants involved in the movement of immigrants and their adaptation to the new society. Analysis of the spatial, temporal, economic, and political contexts of immigration has drawn attention away from the individual towards collective experiences,

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<sup>6</sup>Robert Ezra Park, *Race Culture* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950); Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: Boston Immigrants: A Study of Acculturation* (Boston: Little Brown, 1951). These classical paradigms first appeared in the work by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1927). See also, Eva Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration," in *Immigration Reconsidered*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, 187-238, especially 187-90; Donna Gabaccia, "Comment (on Dirk Hoerder's paper)," in *German Historical Institute, Washington, D. C. 1992 Annual Lecture Series*, no. 6 (Oxford: Berg Publishers 1993), 47-50.

the web of connections among groups, and the functions and transformations of this web.<sup>7</sup> The other approach stresses the resilience of ethnicity and the analysis of the contextual and instrumental, rather than the cultural or psychological, construction and function of ethnic ties and identities.<sup>8</sup> Proponents of these two approaches, whom Virginia Yans-McLaughlin refers to as the revisionists, have incorporated new perspectives and sophisticated methodologies into their studies.<sup>9</sup> Their efforts have shifted our understanding of the phenomenon of immigration from a narrow inquiry into the host-nation's assimilation of individuals to consideration of group strategies and networks across a global field.

For the present study, probably one of the most important conceptual developments made by the revisionists is their reconsideration of the classic one-way trans-Atlantic migration model that viewed migration to the United States as the flight of "huddled masses" from poverty to the land of freedom and opportunity. From this perspective, America stood as the single, ultimate destination for all the trans-Atlantic migrants. New studies have questioned this assumption of the European migration as a singular, unidirectional movement and instead, underlined the continuity of geographical mobility as a multi-directional phenomenon within and outside of the migratory *field*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography," 189.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>9</sup>Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Immigration Reconsidered*, introduction, especially 6.

<sup>10</sup>Frank Thistlethwaite used the term international and intercontinental "field" to refer to the space in which migratory movements occurred. By using this term Thistlethwaite urged historians to be critically aware of national and political boundaries and to view migration as a multiplicity of intertwining movements which connected geographically

In order to facilitate our understanding, it is possible to divide the geographical mobility of trans-Atlantic migrants into three broad categories of time and space: a) movements within European countries before the trans-Atlantic migration, b) journeys back to Europe after various lengths of stay in the United States, and c) travels within the U.S.A. (and Canada) subsequent to the migrants' initial disembarkation. The respective works of Dirk Hoerder, Ewa Morawska, June Granatir Alexander and Peter Bischoff, represent the research advances made in each of these categories.

In his studies focusing on the internal migration of Europeans before their trans-Atlantic journeys, Dirk Hoerder argues that the traditional truncated view of migration, which assumed that the migratory phenomenon began only when migrants had crossed the ocean, cannot adequately explain the population flow between Europe and North America. Along with other scholars, Hoerder demonstrates that the flow of people from Europe to America was not an abrupt one-step transplantation of previously sedentary village and town residents. Instead, the ocean crossing was part of extensive labour migration of shorter or longer duration and distance that began well before the migrants headed to the United States.<sup>11</sup>

Ewa Morawska, on her part, has thrown light on the state of the research on return migrations in both its theoretical and

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separate localities. See Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." See also chap. 1 of this study.

<sup>11</sup>Dirk Hoerder, "People on the Move: Migration, Acculturation, and Ethnic Interaction in Europe and North America," in *Annual Lecture 1992*, 7; Hoerder, "International Labor Markets and Community Building by Migrant Workers in the Atlantic Economies" in *A Century of European Migrations*, ed. Vecoli and Sinke, 78-107; Hoerder ed., *Labor Migration in the Atlantic Economies: The European and North American Working Classes During the Period of Industrialization* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985).

empirical aspects. Migration to the United States was neither exclusively a unidirectional movement nor was America the "promised land" for all the immigrants. In her essay in which she synthesizes immigrant experiences from a significant number of studies, Morawska points out that a considerably greater proportion of turn-of-the-century immigrants to the United States returned to their home countries than was previously assumed.<sup>12</sup> Morawska recognizes that the original intention of many returning migrants was to stay only temporarily in America. This accounts for both the high return rates and the circular character of migrations between the receiving and sending societies. Nevertheless, Morawska emphasizes that this factor alone does not sufficiently explain repatriation. Instead, Morawska argues that it is necessary to explore variables affected by the economic, social, and political developments taking place on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>No less than 35 percent of Poles, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; 40 percent of Greeks; and about 50 percent of southern Italians, Magyars, and Slovaks from the northeastern part of Austro-Hungary went back to their homes. Close to one-fourth of the Slovaks residing in Western Pennsylvania at the beginning of the century reported previous visits to the United States; similar proportions were found among the South Slavs and Italians; and 20 to 30 percent of Polish peasants recorded multiple entries into the United States. See Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 39; J. G. Gould, "European Inter-Continental Emigration: The Road Home, Return Migration from the United States," *Journal of European Economic History* 9, no. 1 (1980): 41-113; Jonathan Sarna, "The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1891-1914," *American Jewish History* 71, no. 2 (1981): 256-69. See also Morawska, "Return Migrations: Theoretical and Research Agenda" in *A Century of European Migrations*, ed. Vecoli and Sinke, 277-92, especially 277-78.

<sup>13</sup>Morawska, "Return Migrations": especially 277-78; Morawska, "Sociological Ambivalence: the Case of East European Immigrant-Workers in America, 1880-1930s" *Qualitative Sociology* 10, no. 3 (1987): 225-51. See also Walter D. Kamphoefner, "The Volume and Composition of German-American Return Migrations" in *A Century of European Migration*, ed. Vecoli and Sinke, 293-311; and Ronald Rothbat, "The Mobilization of Immigrant Workers: Labor Family Formation, and Protest in Three American Industries, 1880-1920" (Ph.D. diss.: University of California at Berkeley, 1988).

In her study of Slovak workers in Pittsburgh, June Granatir Alexander argues that the successive movements of these immigrants in and out of that steel city constituted an ongoing process of chain migration, which previously has been associated usually with international migratory movements. Alexander also points out that such internal migration in the United States was not a phenomenon peculiar to the immigrant workers but was a part of the greater internal migrations that occurred among America's working classes at the turn of the century.<sup>14</sup>

By revealing the three patterns of migration, the above-mentioned studies cogently demonstrate that the "American fever" and the "push and pull" theories of immigration are both too weak and too general to explain the complexity of this phenomenon. Instead, the new scholarship provides important insights into the persistent and dynamic functions of chain migration.

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<sup>14</sup>June Granatir Alexander, "Moving into and out of Pittsburgh: Ongoing Chain Migration," in *A Century of European Migration*, ed. Vecoli and Sinke, 200-20, especially 201. Another excellent study is Peter Bischoff's detailed inquiry into the migratory itineraries of French-Canadian iron moulders. See Peter Bischoff, "D'un atelier de moulage à un autre: les migrations des mouleurs originaires des Forges du Saint-Maurice et la segmentation du marché du travail nord-américain, 1851-1884," *Labour/Le Travail* 40 (Fall 1997), 21-73. See also Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta's analysis of Italians and their Latin Neighbours in Ybor City, Tampa, Florida. Based largely on the oral histories, these two historians have successfully reconstructed the processes of sojourning, chain migration, and community building of Italian immigrants in Tampa, Florida. Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 81-92.

#### 4.2. LONGITUDINAL DATA AND THE NOMINAL RECORD-LINKAGE METHOD

The long history of research on French-Canadian migration to New England has seen relatively scant attention paid to the analysis of complex patterns of geographic mobility. Perhaps the most prominent of a few notable exceptions is Ralph Vicero's detailed picture of this migratory phenomenon from 1840 to 1900.<sup>14-a</sup> Other exceptions of note are the studies by James P. Allen and, more recently, Yves Frenette.<sup>14-b</sup> Both of these scholars have greatly benefitted from the solid evidence assembled by Vicero, and they have undertaken to elaborate some of the important notions developed earlier by specialists in migration studies and family historians, in particular. Allen's fine analysis empirically substantiates the concept of "migration field." Frenette devotes his efforts to reconstructing some of the migratory itineraries of French-Canadian immigrants in Lewiston, Maine, and developing an analysis founded on the notion of the family life cycle. These two studies, together with the one by Vicero, end with the closing decades of the nineteenth century, however. Aside from sophisticated work by Bruno Ramirez and his research team, no comparable study has yet explored the period from 1900 to 1930, a period during which the French-Canadian migration underwent significant transformations.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14-a</sup> Ralph Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England."

<sup>14-b</sup> James Allen, "Migration Fields of French Canadian Immigrants": 366-83; Yves Frenette, "Macroscopie et microscopie," 221-33.

<sup>15</sup>Ramirez conducts a longitudinal analysis by using a method of reconstructing the migratory itineraries from the birth places of immigrants' children. Another study which needs to be mentioned here is one by Peter Haebler, who successfully links longitudinal neighbourhood records obtained from city directories and field books. Ramirez, "A Socioeconomic Profile"; see also Ramirez, *The Emigration from Quebec to the USA, 1870-1915: Questions of*



This chapter is an attempt to extend innovative methods of analysis to this more recent period. Acknowledging the new paradigm that has emerged in studies on trans-Atlantic as well as French-Canadian migration, this chapter attempts to illustrate some of the dynamics of French-Canadian geographic mobility. The following analysis is largely based on the longitudinal data derived from three kinds of nominative sources: the U.S. Federal census manuscript schedules, the *Soundex Index to the Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* (hereafter, referred to as the *Border Entries*) and the *Case History Records for the Overseers of the Poor* (hereafter referred to as *Case Histories*). Nominal linkages of data from these three sources allow the reconstruction of the residential histories of a selected population. These nominal longitudinal data are supplemented by accounts of oral interviews conducted by Brigitte Lane with Lowell's French-Canadian immigrants and their descendants.

The *Border Entries* is a manuscript source which lists all those who entered the United States from Canada from 1895 onward, regardless of whether the person originated from overseas and arrived via Canada, or was a Canadian resident travelling to the United States. These nominal records taken by American officials at various border entries (St. Albans, Vermont, for example) have been consolidated into one collection and arranged in alphabetical order based on the Soundex coding system.<sup>16</sup> The following analyses are

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*Sources, Method, and Conceptualization. Rapport no. 1 Working Paper* (Université de Montréal, 1988); Peter Haebler, "Habitants in Holyoke," 174-83.

<sup>16</sup>The Soundex is a phonetic system designed to facilitate access to the federal census schedules. Each card of the Soundex contains information pertaining to a household or to an individual (if the latter lived alone or was not an immediate member of the family he/she lived with) derived from the census schedules. These cards are arranged by State or Territory, and alphabetically. However, the Soundex alphabetic list does not contain the surnames fully spelled, but a phonetic code of them intended "to keep together

based on two sets of samples created from the *Border Entries*. Taken from the entire collection of 468 microfilm reels, the first sample includes 150 French Canadians whose patronymic began with the letter A; who resided in Canada just before their emigration during the period from 1900 to 1920; and who listed Lowell, Massachusetts, as their destination.<sup>17</sup> The second sample consists of individuals who

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names of the same and similar sounds but of variant spelling." The Soundex coding is valuable in that it facilitates enormously the linkage of the U.S. census schedules with other U.S. nominative data (*Border Entries*, for example) as well as with data obtained from local nominal records in Quebec (such as parish records and the notary deeds). For a further explanation on the utility of the Soundex System, see Ramirez's *The Emigration from Quebec to the USA, 1870-1915*, 7-9. For further discussion on the *Border Entries*, see Bruno Ramirez, "L'emigration du Canada français aux Etats-Unis dans les années 1920," in *Les chemins de la migration en Belgique et au Québec. XVIIe - XXe siècles*, ed. Yves Landry et al. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions Academia, 1995), 233-46; Bruno Ramirez, "L'émigration canadienne vers les Etats-Unis, perspective continentale et comparative," in *Amérique sans frontière: Les Etats-Unis dans l'espace nord-américain*, ed. Catherine Collomp et Mario Menédez (Vincennes: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1995), 91-113.

<sup>17</sup>Bruno Ramirez and his research group have undertaken the task of creating this first data set out of the microfilmed collection of the *Border Entries*, covering the period from 1891 to 1952. The author hereby gratefully acknowledges the access to this sample accorded her by this research group. The author has compiled records for the second data set as well as additional information of the first data set, most importantly names of the sample individuals for the purpose of record linkage with data drawn from the census schedules.

appeared both in the *Border Entries* and census manuscript schedules of 1910 or 1920. The second sample is created by selecting from the census manuscripts all those who migrated to Lowell between 1900 and 1920 and, with the help of the Soundex coding system, tracing these individuals and families to the *Border Entries* files. A total of eighty-nine individuals and twenty-nine families were successfully identified.

One of the problems with the sample created from the nominal record linkage of *Border Entries* and the decennial census schedules is its limited size. The narrow breadth of the sample does not allow us to address questions concerning the proportion of "repeaters" who moved to and from Quebec; the proportion of "wanderers" who moved from one New England locality to another before and after arriving in Lowell; and the percentage of the repatriates who went back to Quebec after sojourning in Lowell. Nevertheless, this limitation does not undermine the importance of the data. They are the first of their kind to enable historians to systematically reconstruct some of the migratory itineraries of French-Canadians. For instance, by using these data, one can trace French-Canadian migrants from their birthplace to their last place of residence before crossing the border. One can also determine which other U.S. localities migrants had been to before arriving in Lowell. In so doing, a historian can render hitherto invisible migrants "visible." More importantly, the use of these nominal sources creates the possibility of a more systematic investigation of the life course of migrants, which may in turn stand in counterpoint to the retrospective information of the past revealed in oral history accounts looking back from the present time.<sup>18</sup> This certainly does

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<sup>18</sup>For discussion on the use of longitudinal data, see Glen H. Elder, Jr., Eliza K. Pavalko, and Elizabeth C. Clipp, *Working With Archival Data: Studying Lives Series: Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences* (Newbury Park,

not deny the validity of oral history accounts. Nevertheless, the longitudinal data opens a new alley in my attempt to reconstruct the itineraries of migrants.

The data listed in the *Border Entries* include a wealth of information on the migrants before their departure. Each record indicates: a) the migrant's birthplace; b) his/her last permanent residence and occupation in Canada; c) whether or not the migrant was accompanied and if so, the name of the accompanying person); and d) the name and address of the contact person (if any) at the migrant's destination. This individual's relationship to the migrant is also specified. These data enable historians to systematically follow the lives of migrants at municipal levels over a period of time in a way that no other source has previously allowed. The information on the contact person and accompanying travellers reveals the personal networks in which migrants' geographic movements were largely embedded. Some crucial moments of the migratory itineraries can be reconstructed, from the migrants' (and their children's) birthplace through to the time just before their departure (i.e., place of last permanent residence), up to the moment they entered the United States to head for their destination (in the case of this present study, Lowell).<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, the residential history of migrants who headed for Lowell after their entry into the

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California: Sage Publications, 1993). See also Elder and Robert Cairns, *Developmental Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup>This may have create some ambiguity when immigrants changed their destination after they crossed the border. Given that most French-Canadian immigrants listed a person to be met upon their arrival in the U.S. destination, one can speculate that few changed their destination after filling out the *Border Entry* form.

U.S.A. falls outside the realm of this source. The *Case Histories* files provide useful information on this point.<sup>20</sup>

The *Case Histories* contain nominal data on 8,000 families who received assistance between 1878 and 1910 from the city by way of hospitals and Poor Farms, a municipal institution for the destitute.<sup>21</sup> The *Case Histories* list each individual's name, birthplace, age, marital status, birth date or the year of their arrival in Lowell, name and address of parents or children, and most importantly, the individual residential history prior to coming to Lowell. The *Case History* files also have their shortcomings. Again, the sample created from this source is relatively small. It includes 178 French Canadians whose records were completed from the year 1900 onwards.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the individuals listed in this collection — the city's most impoverished residents — are not representative of Lowell's French-Canadian population as a whole.<sup>23</sup> Despite these limitations, it is

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<sup>20</sup>A major shortcoming of the *Border Entries* is that the number of registered individuals recorded in the early years of this source is extremely small, which leads one to question the extensiveness of the data. Nevertheless, limiting the use of data to the period 1900 onward, the *Border Entries* provides us with a wealth of information indispensable to reconstructing the migratory process, as well as family and kinship networks.

<sup>21</sup>For the Poor Farm, see Mary Blewett, *Surviving the Hard Times* (Lowell: Lowell Museum, 1982), particularly chap. 4.

<sup>22</sup>With the collaboration of the Lowell National Historical Park, a group of volunteers interested in the past of Lowell residents is computerizing the data derived from the *Case Histories*. Through the courtesy of Mr. Richard Leach of Lowell National Historical Park, the author was able to consult part of the uncompiled manuscript files housed in the Lowell City Hall.

<sup>23</sup>For a discussion on the implication of the poverty on the geographic mobility, see footnote 58 of this chapter. With regard to the geographic mobility and social status of the migrants, immigration historians have made the point that generally, the poorest of the poor who could not afford the tickets for their travel did not migrate; the migrating population was generally composed of a minority of pioneers — the craftsmen, artisans, and small independent farmers — and followed by the majority of those just below the

important to underline the advantage of using this source. Most notably, it contains information on all the previous places migrants had been to prior to their arrival in Lowell. These localities often include several U.S. towns as well as Canada. Information on where a migrant had been after crossing the U.S.-Canada border and prior to his/her arrival in Lowell is precious because it supplements the data lacking in the *Border Entries*: whereas the latter source shows the movement of French-Canadian migrants before crossing the border, the former source provides information even after migrants' entry into the United States, up until their arrival in Lowell. Thus, used in combination with the census schedules, the *Border Entries* and *Case Histories* shed new light on French-Canadian migratory itineraries which previously could only be reconstructed through the use of retrospective data culled from migrants' oral histories.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.3. THE MIGRATION PROCESS OF FRENCH CANADIANS

The following analysis reveals the complex and diverse routes by which some French Canadians made their way to Lowell in the early twentieth century. My findings point to the centrality of family and kin networks in this process, and show that a considerable proportion of the sampled French-Canadian migrants were a mobile population accustomed to moving around locally and regionally in search of work.

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level of respectable artisans and independent owners. See, among others, Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, chap. 1, especially 55-56.

<sup>24</sup>For a discussion on the advantage of using the nominal sources, see also chapter 1 of this study on recent methodological developments.

#### 4.3.1. *The Chronology of Migration: Timing One's Departure*

The great majority of French-Canadian migrants in Lowell in the early twentieth century went to the United States during the last third of the nineteenth century. Table 4.1 charts the number of French Canadians who immigrated to Lowell by year. Although the 1910 and 1920 data indicate slightly different yearly distributions of migrants' arrivals to the city, over 80 percent of the sample had migrated to the U.S.A. before 1900. Conversely, those who came to the city during the first two decades of the twentieth century were a small minority (18.7 percent in 1910 census and 10.1 percent in 1920 census). The distribution of the sample by birthplace also shows that the vast majority of Lowell's French Canadians in 1910 and 1920 were born in the United States; that is, they were the second- or third-generation children of immigrant parents. This means that the process of migration that the following pages analyze relates to the migratory history of a small contingent of French Canadians who arrived in Lowell after the peak period of immigration.

French Canadians tended to migrate to the United States at specific times of the year. One can read from Table 4.2 the monthly fluctuations of French-Canadian movement from 1904 to 1920.<sup>25</sup> According to *Border Entries*, the high season for this migratory flow to Lowell was late winter and early spring (February, March, and April). Nearly half of the sampled migrants crossed the border to the south during these three months and, in particular, over a quarter did so in March. The rest of the immigrants were spread out all year round, with the fewest arriving in June and July (6.7 percent) and in December and January (7.4 percent).

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<sup>25</sup>The sampled population does not include individuals who migrated during the first four years of the twentieth century.

Table 4.1  
 Annual Distribution of Sampled French-Canadian Immigration to  
 Lowell  
 (Number by Individuals)

French-Canadian Immigrants by Number				
Year	1910 Census		1920 Census	
	Canadian-born	U.S.-born	Canadian-born	U.S.-born
1840	1			
1846	1			
1850	1			
1858	2			
1860	2		2	
1864	1		2	
1865	1		2	
1866	4			
1867	3		1	
1868	2		2	
1869	4		2	
1870	6		5	1
1871	1		4	
1872	4		2	
1873	2		3	
1874	2			
1875	7	1	6	
1876	3		7	
1877	4		1	
1878	8		6	
1879	3	1	11	
1880	22		20	1
1881	11		7	
1882	8		6	
1883	3		5	
1884	4		7	
1885	15		14	
1886	13		11	1
1887	13		13	1
1888	20		23	
1889	12		11	1

(Continued)



Table 4.1  
(Continued)

Year	1910 Census		1920 Census	
	Canadian-born	U.S.-born	Canadian-born	U.S.-born
1890	45	2	27	
1891	8		6	1
1892	22		12	1
1893	6		10	
1894	11	1	5	
1895	25	2	5	
1896	24	1	11	
1897	4		8	
1898	15	2	6	
1899	6		13	
1900	28		19	
1901	4		6	
1902	22		3	
1903	19		3	
1904	14	1	2	
1905	3		3	
1906	17		11	1
1907	15		8	2
1908	22		16	1
1909	54		8	
1910	6		7	
1911			1	
1912			3	1
1913			3	
1914			13	
1915			3	
1916			3	
1917				
1918			2	
1919			3	
1920			1	
Unidentified	45	492	43	705
Total	599	503	437	717

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Table 4.2  
 Monthly Distribution of Sampled French-Canadian Immigration to Lowell, 1904-1920  
 (Number by Individuals)

Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
1904	1												1
1907											1		1
1908		2			2								4
1909	12	3				1	4	5					25
1910		2					1	2		3			8
1911			1										1
1912					1		5	1			1		8
1913				10									10
1914			11	1				1	1		1		15
1915	1							1		2	1		5
1916	2	5		6	1						1		15
1917	1	17						1			3		22
1918		1	1	1		1	1	3	1		1		8
1919	3	1	1	2	1	1	2	4	3	2			18
Total	6	15	39	18	6	6	3	16	14	11	13	5	152

Source: Compiled by author from the sample of the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* The sample was created by the author and Bruno Ramirez's research group.

The monthly distribution pattern discussed above likely reflected the seasonal rhythms of work regulating the lives of people in Quebec's agricultural and forestry regions. One can observe, for instance, that the low period (May to July) and the high period (February to April) of the out-migration partly corresponded to the fluctuations of the agricultural cycle of the early twentieth century: the former to the busy haymaking and the latter to the off period before any farmer could begin preparing the fields for sowing right after the melting of snow, usually in mid-April around Montreal and later in northern and eastern regions. One can also note that an increase in the number of French Canadians travelling to Lowell in August and September is contradictory to the agricultural cycle (harvesting taking place from late August to early October). My sample is too small to allow us to hazard any conclusive statement. To venture any hypothesis, one needs to consider the impact of the business cycle of Lowell's textile industry on the French-Canadian migratory movement into that city as well. More importantly, not all the recorded immigrants moved directly from rural agricultural/forestry regions to Lowell. Still, considering that the late winter months — the recorded peak season of out-migration to Lowell — also coincided in part with the high season of forestry activities, one may hypothesize that the distribution pattern drawn from my data may point to migrants from rural milieus choosing emigration over work in the forestry camps.

From the above findings one can speculate that migrants scheduled their time of departure, no doubt taking into account their financial needs, the availability of work at the time of departure, and labour market conditions at the point of destination. It can be argued that this practice — choosing when to move — was a strategy by families to ensure that the migration was successful. Clearly, the evidence is still too thin to draw any conclusive statement. If confirmed by a study of a larger sample, this hypothesis on the

selectivity of the migratory period would underline the planned and deliberate nature of this phenomenon.

#### 4.3.2. *Of Rural Origin? The Geographic Movements of French Canadians Before Migration*

The analysis of data on the birthplace and place of last permanent residence of French Canadians in Lowell challenges the assumption that this population was invariably made up of rural peasants or *habitants*.<sup>26</sup> Evidence from *Border Entries* shows that not all sampled French-Canadian migrants in early twentieth-century Lowell came from rural regions and their former occupational experiences were not limited to farming. The increased mobility of the French Canadians, which was largely due to the industrialization and urbanization of the province, made their

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<sup>26</sup>See for instance, Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*; Frances Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings." In the following discussion, the terms "rural" and "agricultural" are not used interchangeably. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Quebec was a largely rural population. The latter was not entirely made up of agricultural workers but included villagers who participated in the religious, professional, and commercial activities in a rural region. Among villagers, one can distinguish four groups of people: notables, artisans, rentiers, and day labourers. The notables or the *petite bourgeoisie* of the rural villages included notaries, physicians, priests, and local merchants. Artisans produced rare objects that farmers could not or did not want to make themselves. The rentiers were composed of retired farmers, artisans, and labourers. The category of day labourers (*journaliers*) was heterogeneous. The majority of this category was agricultural labourers who worked on a farm and were paid wages. A minority worked as *bûcherons* in the woods and did little or no agricultural activity. In addition to the variety of village residents, there were also those who lived in the rural zone that surrounded the village. Such rural residents other than *villageois* were grouped into three categories: farmers (*cultivateurs*), day labourers, and settlers (*colons*). None of these categories were homogeneous; instead, they included some more prosperous individuals as well as those who undertook a variety of activities to make ends meet. Moreover, the importance of the above-mentioned categories and activities varied from localities to localities. See P.-A. Linteau, *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. 1, 197-201.

residential and occupational backgrounds more diverse than previously assumed.

Underlying this diversity was a thread of common childhood experience: an overwhelming proportion of the sampled Lowell-bound French Canadians were born in Quebec's rural villages with populations of under three thousand.<sup>27</sup> A minority (15.8 percent) of the sampled population was born in mid-sized towns (with a population between three to six thousand) or in large cities (with a population over six thousand) in the context of the period understudy. Madame Ouellette and her family from the rural village of Sainte Elizabeth epitomize the majority of French-Canadian immigrants who moved directly to Lowell from a rural parish in Quebec. The Ouellettes migrated to Lowell when Madame Ouellette was ten (*circa* 1917-20). Her new life in the textile city was a sharp contrast to what she had known on a Quebec farm. She recalls:

Ah oui, mon Dieu! Au Canada on était sur une terre qui était si grande. Une grande terre. Mais mes parents avaient seulement que trois garçons. Et puis l'un avait

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<sup>27</sup>The criteria for distinguishing a city (with a population over 6,000) from a town (with a population over 3,000), or a village (with a population of 3,000 and less) are taken from those applied by Paul-André Linteau et al., in *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, vol. 1, 472-73. Colonization regions are not easy to determine because their frontiers moved constantly. According to estimates made by Yves Otis, in the early twentieth century, Abitibi-Témiscamingue was one of the last colonization regions of the province. Considering that by the early twentieth century most of the province's colonization frontiers were no longer *régions de colonisation* but had become agricultural regions with a growing settled population, one might safely speculate that only a small proportion of the reported rural origins had been from the colonization region. This points to an important change from the last third of the nineteenth century when a significant proportion of New England-bound French Canadians originated from the colonization regions. For instance, between 1860 and 1880, Lewiston, Maine, received 42 per cent of its immigrants from the region of Beauce-Centre of Québec, a mixed region where colonization settlements and old parishes coexisted. See Yves Frenette, "La genèse d'une communauté," 157-58.

dix-neuf ans, pis l'autre quinze ans, pis le plus jeune n'avait que cinq ans. Ça fait qu'il y avait pas assez d'garçons pour travailler la terre. Moi-même, j'l'ai travaillée, vous savez. J'avais rien qu'huit ans.<sup>28</sup>

A large number of the French-Canadian migrants in Lowell had grown up in rural parishes. Not all of them moved directly to that New England city from their birthplaces; rather, a substantial proportion of rural-born French Canadians in Lowell had moved to urban centres in Quebec before migrating to the United States. Compared to those of the sample who were born in urban centres (with populations over six thousand), a larger proportion had lived in these urban centres immediately prior to migrating to Lowell (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4). While only 15.8% of the sampled French Canadians listed urban centres such as Joliette, Lévis, Montreal, Sherbrooke, Thetford Mine, Trois Rivières, Ottawa, Berthierville, Manchester, and Lowell as their birthplace,<sup>29</sup> as many as 30.3% indicated these localities (and other towns) as their last permanent residence before migrating to Lowell.

My data further suggest that Montreal played a particularly important role as a sojourning place. Of my sample, eight individuals (representing 17.4 percent of those who lived in the urban centres) indicated Montreal was their last permanent residence before crossing the border to the south. Among these eight individuals, only Ayotte Edmont, a twenty-three-year-old machinist, was actually born in this city. Others were born in localities other than Montreal —

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<sup>28</sup>Madame Ouellette, interview with Brigitte Lane, February 16, 1983, reproduced in Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions and Popular Culture in a Former Milltown: Aspects of Ethnic Urban Folklore and the Dynamics of Folklore Change in Lowell, Massachusetts* (New York: Garland, 1990), 316.

<sup>29</sup>Four individuals are recorded as having been born in Lowell (3) and Manchester (1) and had lived in Canada before crossing the border southward to Lowell.

Table 4.3  
 Distribution of Lowell-bound French Canadians by Place  
 of Birth, 1904-1920

Birthplace	Number	Percentage
<b>Cities with a population over 6,000 in 1911</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15%</b>
Joliette	12	
Lévis	2	
Lowell	3	
Manchester	1	
Montréal	1	
Ottawa	1	
Sherbrooke	1	
Thetford Mine	1	
Trois Rivières	3	
<b>Towns with a population over 3,000 in 1911</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.3%</b>
Berthierville	2	
<b>Villages with a population of 3,000 or less</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>74.3%</b>
Acton Vale	1	
Armagh	1	
Baie St.-Paul	1	
Beaumont	1	
Belleville	1	
Berry	1	
Bic	15	
Bonscour	1	
Bury	2	
Cabano	1	
Campbellton, N.B.	1	
Cap-de-la-Madeleine	1	
Châteauguay	3	
Clermont	1	
Comwall	1	
Desormeaux (?)	1	
Dobie, Ont.	1	
Brompton	1	
Louiseville	1	
L'Assomption	1	
Matane	2	
Notre-Dame	1	
Notre-Dame-de-Pierreville	1	

(continued)

Table 4.3  
(Continued)

Birthplace	Number	Percentage
"Owosso" (?)	1	
Pierreville	1	
Pointe-aux-Trembles	1	
Rawdon (?)	1	
"Rose Pend Marie" (?)	1	
St.-Agapit	1	
St.-Basile	2	
St.-Béatrix	8	
St.-Brigide	1	
St.-Canut	1	
St.-Clément	2	
St.-Denis	1	
Ste.-Elizabeth	2	
St.-Etienne	3	
St.-Félix	2	
St.-François	1	
St.-Jean-de-Matha	12	
St.-Mathieu	1	
St.-Mélanie	1	
St.-Paulin	8	
St.-Raymond	2	
St.-Thomas-de-Joliette	1	
St.-Tite	1	
St.-Ubald	3	
St.-Wenceslas	2	
St.-Zénon	1	
Stanstead	2	
Ste.-Anne-de-la-Pocatière	1	
Ste.-Émelie de l'Énergie	1	
Stottsville, Ont	2	
Tignish	2	
Trois Pistoles	1	
Ursule	1	
Yamachiche	1	
Unidentified	14	9.2%
Total	152	100%

Sources: Compiled by author from the sample of the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* The sample was created by the author and Bruno Ramirez's research group. For the population sizes, see *Recensement du Canada, 1911*; Gouvernement du Québec, *Naissances, mariages et décès pour les années 1899, 1900, 1901 et 1902 répartie par municipalités* (Québec: L'imprimeur de la Très Excellente Majesté le Roi, 1903). See also P.-A. Linteau et al., *L'histoire du Québec contemporain*, tome I, 474-75.

Note: 1. Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

2. The percentage for those who lived in cities with a population over 6,000 is a conservative estimation. For instance, an individual who listed as having been born in Berthierville, which had 3,227 residents (1,863 in Berthier en Haut or Village de Berthier and 1,364 in Berthier en Bas, parish) in 1901, is classified under the category for towns with a population over 3,000 and under 6,000 although that locale situated across from an important trading centre, Sorel. The latter had a population of 8,420 in the same year.



Table 4.4  
 Distribution of Lowell-bound French Canadians by Place of Last Permanent Residence, 1904-1920

Last permanent residence	Number	Percentage
<b>Cities with a population over 6,000 in 1911</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20.4%</b>
Joliette	13	
Lévis	2	
Lowell	3	
Montréal	8	
Sherbrooke	1	
Thetford Mine	1	
Trois Rivières	3	
<b>Towns with a population over 3,000 in 1911</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10.5%</b>
Berthier	1	
Grand'Mère	2	
Shawinigan (Bay & Falls)	13	
<b>Villages with a population of 3,000 or less</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>68.4%</b>
Abitibi	1	
Acton Jct.	2	
Acton Vale	1	
Berry	1	
Bic	16	
Brampton	1	
Bury	3	
Coal Branch, N.B.	1	
Cochrane, Ont.	1	
Desormeaux (?)	1	
Deseronto, Ont.	2	
Digby, N.S.	1	
Dobie, Ont.	1	
Lac-à-Mathiu (?)	1	
Lacolle	2	
Louiseville	1	
Matane	2	
"Nonsirique" (?)	1	
Notre-Dame-de-Pierreville	2	

(continued)

Table 4.4  
(Continued)

Last permanent residence	Number	Percentage
Pierreville	2	
Portneuf	1	
Ste.-Anne-de-la-Pocatière	1	
St.-Apollinaire	1	
Ste.-Béatrix	8	
St. Clément	3	
St.-Euphémie de Montmagny	1	
St.-Félix	4	
St.-Félix-de-Valois	7	
St.-François	3	
Ste.-Germaine-de-l'Anse-aux-Gascons	1	
St.-Jean-de-Mattha	10	
St.-Johns	1	
St.-Paulin	1	
St.-Prime	1	
St.-Tite	2	
St.-Ubald	4	
St[e].-Élizabeth	1	
St.-Wenceslas	1	
Stanstead	2	
Ste.-Émelie-de-l'Énergie	2	
Tignish	2	
Trois Pistoles	1	
Welland, Ont.	1	
Woodlands	2	
Unidentified	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sources: Compiled by author from the sample of the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* The sample was created by the author and Bruno Ramirez's research group. For the population sizes, see *Recensement du Canada, 1911*; Gouvernement du Québec, *Naissances, mariages et décès pour les années 1899, 1900, 1901 et 1902 répartie par municipalités* (Québec: L'imprimeur de la Très Excellente Majesté le Roi, 1903). See also P.-A. Linteau et al., *L'histoire du Québec contemporain*, tome I, 474-75.

Note: See Note 2 of Table 4.3.

Berthierville, Joliette, Cornwall, St. Raymond, St[e]. Brigide, and Lowell — and then went to Montreal before moving on to Lowell.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the majority of previous Montreal residents among the sampled French Canadians were not born in Montreal but had moved there before migrating south of the border.

As Canada's commercial and industrial metropolis, as early as the last third of the nineteenth century, Montreal had attracted a number of rural French Canadians. In the early twentieth century, a growing number of French Canadians continued to be drawn to that city, some of whom moved on to the United States. An important minority of Lowell's French Canadians had taken the same route, as the following examples illustrate. On 9 September 1916, Irené [sic.] Beauregard (born in Présentation) and Maria (born in St. Paul) both listed Montreal as their last permanent residence in Canada before entering the United States. The couple reported Lewiston, Maine as their destination when they crossed the border. In 1920, they appeared in the census manuscript as residents of Lowell.<sup>31</sup> Available data do not indicate whether the couple moved to Lowell after having been to Lewiston or changed their initial destination and went directly to Lowell instead.

Another example of migrants who moved to Montreal before going to Lowell is twenty-four-year-old Léon Thériault and his fifty-two-year-old mother, Malvina. They left their native village of St[e]. Julie and stayed in Montreal for an unknown length of time before

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<sup>30</sup>The birthplace of one individual (name unknown) is unknown. Rudolph Allard was listed as having been born in Lowell, moved to Canada, and gone back to Lowell. Among the second sample (89 individuals) created from the same source, none listed Montreal as their last permanent residence.

<sup>31</sup>*The Border Entries*, card numbers 402-49-4, 402-49-5; Fourteenth U.S. Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 570, dwelling 38, family number 85.

migrating to Lowell. Léon left for Lowell in August 1912 and Malvina came to join him in July 1919. In 1920, Léon, the household head, and Malvina, his widowed mother, were listed as living in Lowell with Léon's three sisters.<sup>32</sup> The Thériaults also indicated having lived in Lowell for nearly three decades (from 1880 to 1906) prior to their return to the city in the 1910s.

Having moved from the countryside of Quebec, Ontario, or New Brunswick to small cities or indeed to the metropolis, French Canadians like the Beauregards and the Thériaults had already experienced the shift from the rhythms of rural labour to those of the urban workplace. The existence of a significant minority of such immigrants underlines the fallacy of the assumption that French Canadians in the U.S. were exclusively rural farm folk who experienced industrial capitalism for the first time in the factories of New England.

#### *4.3.3. The Diversity in Origins: The Occupational Histories of Lowell Migrants*

Statistics derived from the Immigration Commission's report, *Immigrants in Industries*, further confirm my earlier observations on the background of French-Canadian migrants. Despite the fact that a majority of those who migrated to Lowell were born in rural and agricultural localities, their former occupational experiences were not limited to agriculture. A significant minority had previously worked in the industrial sector, notably the textile industry. This was particularly true for women. *Immigrants in*

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<sup>32</sup>*The Border Entries*, card numbers 409-92-11, 409-94-30; Fourteenth U.S. Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 226, ward 6, dwelling 65, family number 108.

*Industries* contains valuable information on the former occupations of Lowell's French-Canadian textile workers before their migration. According to this report, while over half (56.7 percent) of these Canadian-born male cotton workers had been engaged in farm labour before coming to the United States, a minority (8.6 percent) had worked in textile factories. Among the city's female French-Canadian workers, one half (50.5 percent) had worked on a farm, and a strikingly high proportion (23.1 percent) had worked in textile factories.<sup>33</sup> These data show that for a good proportion of French Canadians, and women in particular, working in Lowell's textile factories was not an entirely new experience. Rather, it meant continuity with their past experiences in Quebec.<sup>34</sup>

It is also important to note that the above figures may have reflected a historical change which was occurring amidst a specific portion of the migrating population.<sup>35</sup> At the turn of the century and in particular, in the early twentieth century, New England textile industries recruited a growing number of women in place of juvenile workers who were increasingly barred from work sites in the wake of a series of anti-child labour laws. It is possible that with

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<sup>33</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 243-44.

<sup>34</sup>The Immigration Commission provided a similar figure for the pre-migration occupational background of French-Canadian women in the New England cotton industry. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry* vol. 10, 363-64. In his study of the French Canadians in Rhode Island, Ramirez has underlined this change in the French-Canadian immigrants' background from an overwhelmingly rural and agricultural one in the 1860s and 1870s to a more industrially related one in the early twentieth century. Based on these findings, he has advanced an insightful hypothesis that the change in the migrants' occupational backgrounds reflected changes occurring to the mechanism that functioned to send specific types of migrants whose skills corresponded with the local labour market's needs. Ramirez, *On the Move*, 133-34.

<sup>35</sup>For a more detailed discussion on the self-selecting mechanism of migrating population, see chapters 3 and 5 of this study.

this new condition in New England's labour market, a female migrant's skill and experience in the industrial sector were becoming a major factor in the family's migration and settlement.<sup>36</sup>

Occupational histories reconstructed from the data linkage of *Border Entries* and census schedules illustrate the work experiences of the sampled French-Canadian migrants of this study. George[s] Chouinard typifies the narrow majority of Lowell's French-Canadian male immigrants who had been engaged in agriculture in Quebec and who took up wage labour after migrating to Lowell. In late October 1909, George, a forty-three-year-old farmer, left Lac-Saint-Jean for Lowell with his wife, Mary, and eight children aged between eight months and twenty years. Mary listed her occupation as housewife. The two oldest children, twenty-year-old Marie and eighteen-year-old Joseph, simply recorded "jobs" as their work. The following year, the family appeared in the census manuscript as residents of Lowell. George was then working as a labourer in a cemetery with his eighteen-year-old son, George Jr. (also listed as a labourer). Three children were working in the city's factories: Twenty-year-old Marie and Joseph, nineteen, were working in the cotton manufacturing industry, while sixteen-year-old Jean laboured in a shoe factory.<sup>37</sup>

Mary Louise Clermont and her sisters, Claudia and Valentine Ducharme, typify a significant number of French-Canadian women whose occupational experience in the textile industry was carried

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<sup>36</sup>See also Bruno Ramirez for the discussion on the New England-wide trend similar to the one which is observed here in Lowell. Ramirez, "A Socioeconomic Profile," 125-42; Ramirez, *On the Move*, 131-36.

<sup>37</sup>*Border Entries*, card number unidentified and Fourteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 860, ward 6, dwelling 90, family number 327.

over from Quebec to Lowell. Twenty-four-year-old Mary Louise worked as a weaver in Quebec before migrating to Lowell in late December 1908. The 1920 census manuscript listed Mary Louise as an inspector in a hosiery factory. This was one of the highest occupational positions that French-Canadian immigrant women could attain in the textile manufacturing industry. Like Mary Louise, the Ducharme sisters were both listed as having worked as factory operatives in Quebec before their journey to Lowell in 1919. The following year, the federal census listed their occupations as follows: Claudia worked in a cotton factory as a relatively well-paid velvet finisher, while Valentine worked as a housemaid for a private family.<sup>38</sup> These examples show the continuing occupational experience of "elite" female textile workers.

There were also cases of women who did not list any occupation in Quebec but became textile workers after they moved to Lowell. Record linkage of the census and the *Border Entries* provides us with examples of ostensibly "new" industrial workers like Annie Brière and Emma Côté. In September 1909, thirty-six-year-old Annie went to Lowell with her thirty-three-year-old labourer husband and three children aged ten, seven, and four. Annie answered "none" as to her occupational experience in Canada. A year later, the 1910 census listed her as working as a weaver in a cotton factory in Lowell.<sup>39</sup> It is rather exceptional that Annie rapidly acquired a weaver's job without any former industrial experience, given that weaving was skilled work which usually required a period of

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<sup>38</sup>*Border Entries*, card numbers 497-147-16, -17 and Fourteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 218, ward 3, dwelling 13, family number 33.

<sup>39</sup>*Border Entries*, card numbers 76-164-25, -27 -27, -30 and Thirteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1910, district 940, ward 2, dwelling 14, family number 33.

training that lasted from a few weeks to six months.<sup>40</sup> Still, it might be possible that Annie learned her skill rapidly during the time between her arrival in Lowell in September and the census enumeration in April of the following year. Alternatively, Annie's apparent quick occupational ascent may have reflected the general tendency among official enumerators to improperly list women's former employment in Quebec. Another, more likely scenario is that this may have been due to Annie's neglecting to report her former job. In either case, it is safe to surmise that Annie had probably had some industrial experience in Quebec before marriage or child-bearing but was not working for wages at the time of her family's migration. When asked at the border about her occupation, Annie answered that she was not working.<sup>41</sup>

A proportion of male immigrants without recorded industrial experience in Quebec also became textile workers in Lowell. Record linkages of nominative data provide us with examples of two men, Léon Thériault and Moïse Beauséjour, who entered Lowell's textile industry at the lowest level of the occupational hierarchy. Twenty-four year old Léon Thériault, who had been a carpenter in Quebec, was working as a helper in the city's cotton manufacturing industry in 1920.<sup>42</sup> Moïse Beauséjour, fifty-two, was retired in Quebec in 1908;

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<sup>40</sup>Narcissa Fantini Hodges, interview with Mary Blewett, in *The Last Generation*, 81-91, especially 82.

<sup>41</sup>I gratefully acknowledge Professor Denyse Baillargeon for suggesting this interpretation of the data.

<sup>42</sup>*Border Entries*, card numbers 499-92-11, 490-94-30 and Fourteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 226, ward 6, dwelling 65, family number 108.



two years later, he was working as a scrubber in a hosiery mill in Lowell.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the majority of Lowell's French Canadians who listed their manual work background, a fraction of French Canadians had worked in the non-manual sector. Irené Beauregard was an example of this minority. Before going to Lowell with his wife in September 1916, Irené had been employed as an office clerk in Quebec. Four years later, the 1920 census listed Irené as a clerk at the American Express company in Lowell.<sup>44</sup>

The above examples illustrate a variety of occupational histories of sampled French-Canadian immigrants. As they moved from Quebec's rural villages to the urban industrial centre of Lowell, most of them also changed from agricultural to industrial workers. A considerable minority, however, had worked in the industrial sector in Quebec before their migration. For this minority, working in Lowell's textile or shoe factories was not an entirely new experience but represented continuity with their past in Quebec.

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<sup>43</sup>*Border Entries*, family number unknown and Thirteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1910, district 861, ward 6, dwelling 9, family number 49.

<sup>44</sup>*Border Entries*, card number unknown and Fourteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 570, ward unknown, dwelling 38, family number 85.

#### *4.3.4. The Dynamics of French-Canadian Mobility: Patterns of Family Migration*

The migration of most French Canadians to Lowell was not an abrupt one-way transplantation of formerly sedentary people. Evidence from my analysis based on three nominative sources reveals diverse patterns of movement and multiple trips between the United States and Canada. It also shows that although these moves largely involved a family unit, French-Canadian families did not always migrate together. Instead, "family migration" frequently involved family separation over various lengths of time ranging from a few weeks to several years. For instance, a father and a son might first move temporarily to a chosen destination, find work, then return to Quebec, and finally lead the rest of the family back to New England. Such practices entailed separate family moves and multiple trips between the two countries. For these migrants, migration was not a single unidirectional move and their destination, in this case, Lowell, was not a unique and ultimate goal. Their moves were frequent, sometimes continuous, but not arbitrary. They searched for a way to better their lot or avoid further decline in their family's well-being.

Three examples taken from Yvonne Lagassé's 1983 interview illustrate various patterns of family migration. In each case, the migration of the entire family followed the departure of some family members, "pioneer migrants," who themselves often followed paths which had been explored by their kin members. These pioneer migrants first looked for jobs for themselves and possibly for work prospects for the rest of the family. Then they had the rest of the family join them in Lowell. Various lengths of time in family separation suggest that migrant families evaluated available resources and different concerns (for instance, financial needs,

maintenance of their family farm, preparation for sale or collateral) and devised ways to best address these considerations.

Yvonne's grandmother had a nephew, Gaspard Beaudry, who had spent time in Fitchburg, moved to Lowell and then returned to Canada "pour s'promener."<sup>45</sup> It was not clear from Yvonne's interview whether Gaspard was still living in Lowell or had left this city to return permanently to Canada when he met Yvonne's grandmother. Gaspard encouraged Yvonne's grandmother to move her family to the city, saying, "Tu t'en iras à Lowell. T'as bien des filles. I [sic] travaillera dans *hosiery*. Y aura des belles *jobs*, d'ouvrage ben propre et puis j' [sic] travaillera toutes."<sup>46</sup> At this point, the family did not leave all together, but Grandfather Loiselle and his eldest son went down to Lowell. Before this trip, Yvonne's grandfather had been to places as far away as British Columbia for two years, but he was not earning enough to support his family. Once in Lowell, however, he and his son found abundant work building the foundations of houses in the *Petit Canada*. Yvonne recalls the great demand for construction work in Lowell at the turn of the century:

Mon grand-père [...] faisait des fondations pour toutes les maisons. Y avait beaucoup des fondations — tout le P'tit Canada, là, qui a été bati. Et i' y avait beaucoup d'ouvrage. J'sais bien, ça prenait beaucoup du temp dans c'temps-là. Y avait pas toutes les machines comme qu'i z'ont aujourd'hui pour faire le mortier. Tout était fait à la main. Puis les fondations étaient faites en pierre. Etaient pas faites en ciment comme aujourd'hui. Fait que ça prenait du temps. Fait que, toujours, i'se [le grand-père Loiselle et son fils] sont trouvés d'ouvrage tous les deux.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Yvonne Lagassé, interview with Brigitte Lane, 22 February 1983, reproduced in Brigitte Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions*, 318.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

After a few weeks, Grandfather Loiséle came back to St.-Jean-de-Matha. Grandfather was determined to move his entire family to Lowell and told Yvonne's grandmother "D'emporter rien que des vêtements de corps."<sup>48</sup> They sold everything, "la maison, le moulin, enfin toute,"<sup>49</sup> and left for Lowell with ten children. Family separation thus lasted only some weeks for Yvonne's maternal family.

Interestingly, in contrast to the Loiséles, for the Lagassés, Yvonne's husband's family, it took a considerably longer time to decide to move the whole family to Lowell. The two sons in the family — Yvonne's husband and his older brother — and a labourer (*un engagé*) worked on the family farm. Yvonne's father-in-law was working for the Boston & Maine Railroad Corporation. He was thus away from home all year long except for two winter months when he took a leave from work and returned to Canada to help his family prepare the hay. Yvonne recounts:

Mon beau-père, i'faisait ben d'l'argent sur les chars. I'passa't l'hiver sur les chars icitte et pis après ça, i' partait et pis i'passait l'hiver au Canada pour aider à faire les foins, enfin toute.... Et puis finalement la vieille, elle s'est tannée de ça ... hein! [...] Y avait un homme engagé, par exemple et pis y' resta't là. Et pis après, ça, y avait les deux garçons. Mon mari puis l'autre, le plus vieux — Clarence son nom. Et i'restaient au Canada. Toute la famille resta't au Canada. Seulement que son mari resta't beaucoup par icitte parce qu'i' faisait beaucoup d'argent sur les chars.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 321

When asked why Yvonne's father-in-law did not work year round on the train, she answered:

C'est lui qui d'manda't une vacance de deux mois par exemple. Des fois rien qu'un mois. Ça dépenda't comment c'est d'l'ouvrage. Mais c'est lui qui d'mandait pour aller aider à faire les foins. Vous savez, quand c'est l'temps des foins au Canada, i'travaillent ben fort. [...] Ben, y avait ben des vaches et i'fallait l'foin pour toute un an. Vous savez, ils ach'taient pas l'foin.<sup>51</sup>

Yvonne's stories of these two sides of her family illustrate different family strategies. While one branch of the family decided to migrate shortly after the first voyage of the "pioneering" members (father and son), the other took years before moving the entire family to Lowell. Still others developed contacts with the New England city for as long as an entire generation before they decided to "settle" in the *Etats*. Roger Brunelle recounts the immigration history of his family as follows:

C'est un passage qui s'est fait comme pour beaucoup d'autres familles entre 1870 et 1920. Pour nous, c'est arrivé — les premiers contacts des Brunelle avec Lowell — au milieu — il y a à peu près un siècle — en 1880. [...] Alors, mon arrière grand-père est resté ici à Lowell depuis 1899 jusqu'à 1906. Et lui il est retourné au Canada ainsi que la plupart de ses filles et deux de ses fils. Mais mon grand-père est resté. Il a épousé ma grand-mère en 1907. Et ils sont restés. En 1908 il a acheté une maison sur la rue Beaver et la famille y habite toujours.<sup>52</sup>

Roger thus situates himself between the third and fourth generations of Lowell residents. Roger continues:

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<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>Roger Brunelle, interview with Brigitte Lane, February 22, 1983, reproduced in Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions*: 325-26.

Je dirais, je suis la quatrième génération, mais "troisième où les gens sont restés d'une façon permanente", de ce côté-ci des montagnes.<sup>53</sup>

If family migration often entailed various lengths of family separation, it also required migrants to travel between Canada and the United States more than once. Evidence derived from *Border Entries* shows that a majority of the sampled French Canadians had been to the United States prior to their recorded voyage to Lowell. Moreover, my findings demonstrate that a majority of those who had been to the United States had previously stayed for a period of time in Lowell, and later returned to that city. This tendency to repeat a migratory route points to an important feature of the French-Canadian migration. Family networks played a central role in linking specific Quebec villages and towns to specific U.S. destinations such as Lowell.<sup>54</sup> About two thirds of the sampled French Canadians (65.8 percent) had previously spent time in the United States (see Table 4.5). Among them an overwhelming proportion (82 percent) had spent time in Lowell. Of those who had not lived in Lowell, a good proportion of them had spent time in neighbouring cities in Massachusetts, in particular, Boston (forty kilometers southwest of Lowell), and other New England cities. Only three individuals had previously resided outside New England. These findings not only illustrate the extent of the geographic mobility of French-Canadian migrants, but also point to a tendency for the migrating population to return to a city or a region where they had once resided, however briefly.

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<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>My findings confirm Bruno Ramirez and Otis' brief discussion on this important function played by migration networks. Ramirez and Otis, "French-Canadian Emigration to the USA in the 1920s," 9-10.

Table 4.5  
 Locations of Previous Sojourn in the United States of Lowell-bound  
 French Canadians Recorded in the *Soundex Index to Canadian  
 Border Entries*

Response to the question: "Had one been to the U.S.A. before?"	Number	Percentage
Yes	100	65.8%
No	52	34.2%
Total	152	100%
Location of previous sojourn in the U.S.A.		
Lowell	82	81.2%
Other than Lowell	12	11.9%
Massachusetts		
Boston	3	
Unspecified	2	
New Hampshire		
Manchester	1	
Nashua	1	
Maine		
Caribou	1	
Conneticut		
Willmantic	1	
New York		
New York City	1	
Washington		
Seattle	1	
Wisconsin	1	
Unidentified	7	6.9%
Total	101	100%

Sources: Compiled by author from the sample of the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* The sample was created by the author and Bruno Ramirez's research group.

Note: The total number and percentage do not add up to 100 because of an individual who had stayed in Boston and Lowell. This person is counted twice.

The following examples further illustrate the variety and frequency of migratory practices of French Canadians who chose to go (back) to Lowell. For a significant proportion of the sampled French Canadians, Lowell was neither the only nor the ultimate destination in the United States. If some migrants left their native village directly for Lowell, others had been to neighbouring localities in Massachusetts or other New England states. Still others went to Lowell and then left again, either to move on to other places in New England or to temporarily return to Canada. After staying elsewhere, a minority went back to Lowell once again. These diverse migratory patterns resulted in multiple entries into the United States before and after the nominal sources used in this study captured their migration to Lowell.

The Chouinards typify the minority of Lowell's French Canadians who had not been to the United States before migrating to that city. On 29 October 1909, forty-eight-year-old George Chouinard and his forty-four-year-old wife, Mary, accompanied by nine children ranging from eight months to twenty years of age, crossed the Canada-U.S. border heading for Lowell. Judging from the family's last permanent residence and the children's birthplaces — five of the eldest children were born in Lac Saint-Jean, one in St. François, and three in unspecified localities — one can speculate that the Chouinards had spent a significant part of their family life in Lac Saint-Jean before migrating to the United States. In 1910, the family appeared in Lowell's census schedules as a family with ten children.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>*Border Entries*, card number unidentified; Thirteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1910, district 860, ward 6, dwelling 90, family number 327.



Unlike the Chouinards, who had not been to the United States prior to their emigration, some family members of migrants, if not migrants themselves, had previously spent time in the United States before their recorded travel. About a month prior to the Chouinards' migration, the *Border Entries* captured the profile of the Brières as they moved to Lowell. Delphis, thirty-three years old, and Annie, thirty-six years old, entered the United States with three children aged ten, seven, and four years. The birthplace of these three children indicates that the Brière family, like the Chouinards, had lived mostly in their native village, St. Tite, before moving to Lowell. Unlike the Chouinards, however, the Brières had resided in Lowell from 1899 to 1905 prior to their 1909 move. The 1910 census lists the Brière family as boarding with a French-Canadian couple in Lowell.<sup>56</sup>

The Clermont family and the Ducharme sisters illustrate the case of French-Canadian migrants who moved several times between their natal village and Lowell. The *Border Entries* recorded that on 21 December 1908, the Clermonts crossed the border as they journeyed to Lowell. The birthplace of their children suggests that the couple, Maxime and Amanda, lived most of their early married life in St-Jean-de-Matha except for four years from late 1899 to 1903 when they lived in Lowell. In 1908 they left their native village once again and moved to the same New England textile city on a permanent basis with their son, Remeus, twenty-one, and three daughters, Priscilla, Mary-Louise, and Annie, twenty-nine, twenty-four, and nineteen years old, respectively. Lowell's 1920 census listed Amanda Clermont, by then widowed, and her three daughters,

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<sup>56</sup>*Border Entries*, card numbers 76-164-25, 76-164-27, 76-164-29, 76-164-30; Thirteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, district 861, ward 6, dwelling 39, family number 203. In the *Border Entries* record, Joseph, the second oldest boy was missing.

Priscilla, Marie-Louise, and Anna [sic.]. Remeus presumably had moved out.<sup>57</sup>

Claudia and Valentine Ducharme travelled back and forth between their Quebec village and Lowell. Born in Mt. Carmel, Quebec, the two sisters lived in this same village except for the eleven years they resided in Lowell (1907 to 1918). In 1919, thirty-two-year-old Claudia and twenty-six-year-old Valentine, both single, crossed the U.S. border heading for Lowell. Judging from several factors — such as the relatively long period they had lived in Lowell (eleven years), the date of their recorded trip back to the United States after their departure from Lowell, and the fact that they declared their trip as "permanent" — one may speculate that the two sisters must have been returning to Lowell after temporarily visiting their family or relatives in Mt. Carmel. In 1920, Claudia and Valentine appeared on the census list in Lowell as boarding with a French-Canadian family.<sup>58</sup>

The above examples — the Brières, the Clermonts, and the Ducharme sisters who travelled back and forth between Quebec and the United States — point to the inadequacy of the once-held stereotype of migration as a one-step transplantation of a previously immobile and isolated population. Going to Lowell was rarely an abrupt or ultimate move for these migrants. Instead, my findings from the record linkage suggest that moving to Lowell was part of a

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<sup>57</sup>Fifty-eight-year-old Maxime was born in St-Jean-de-Matha and his fifty-four-year-old wife, Amanda, was originally from St. Chal[...]. See *Border Entries*, card number 50-92-17, 50-92-20, 50-92-21, 50-92-78; Fourteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 217, dwelling 12, family number 54.

<sup>58</sup>*Border Entries*, card numbers 497-147-16, 497-147-17; Fourteenth Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 218, dwelling 13, family number 33.

Table 4.6  
 Locations of Previous Sojourn in the United States of Lowell-bound  
 French Canadians Recorded in the *Case Histories of the Overseers of  
 the Poor*

Responses to the question: "Had one been to the U.S. before?"		
	Number	Percentage
Yes	84	47.2%
No	94	52.8%
Total	178	100%
Location of previous sojourn in the U.S.A. of those who had been to the U.S.A.		
Lowell	40	31.5%
Elsewhere in Massachusetts	34	26.8%
Elsewhere in New England	38	29.9%
Went back to Canada after staying in the U.S. locations except for Lowell	15	11.8%
Total	*127	*100%

Source: Compiled by author from sample of *Case Histories of the Overseers of the Poor*.

Note\*: The total number and percentage do not add up to 84 and 100, respectively, because of multiple trips recorded by individuals. Each trip was counted and added to the number.

larger migratory process that consisted of a series of movements of variable distance and duration, involved family separation for some period of time, and multiple travels within Quebec and between the two countries. Oral history accounts have further indicated that these features of migration had one common purpose, the family's well-being. The latter meant above all the economic survival of the family, but this factor was not the sole determinant of the decision to migrate. Probably an equally important consideration for these families on the move was when, how, and where to bring their families together.<sup>58-a</sup>

Findings from the *Case Histories* also indicate the diverse movements of Lowell-bound French Canadians before their arrival in this city. As many as half (47.2 per cent) of the sampled population taken from the *Case Histories* had previously been to the United States (see Table 4.6). Among those who had spent time in the U.S.A., a little less than half (46.5 percent) had resided in Lowell.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58-a</sup> For a discussion on the importance of family in migration within Quebec, see Gérard Bouchard, "Family Structure and Geographic Mobility at Laterrière, 1851-1935," *Journal of Family History* 2, no. 4 (December 1977): 350-369.

<sup>59</sup>It should be noted that these percentages derived from the *Case Histories* are smaller than the ones recorded by the *Border Entries*. Differences in figures taken from the *Case Histories* and the *Border Entries* may have to do with the representativity of the sampled population. By its nature, the *Case History* files contain information pertaining to the city's most destitute population who were dependent on charitable organizations. It is likely that these individuals had fewer opportunities to temporarily test the waters in New England cities than immigrants who could afford several train tickets between Quebec villages and U.S. destinations, and this may have had some effect in lowering the percentage of those who had spent time in the United States. Another hypothesis, not necessarily in conflict with the first one, is the following. The destitute population on the *Case Histories* may have had more difficulty making long-distance movements from Quebec to New England. On the other hand, the same people may have felt a greater need to move more frequently from one locality to another in New England in search of jobs than their counterparts who found stable jobs in an industrial city. This practice of moving within the New England region may have had some impact on raising the

The residential histories of two French Canadians, Jan-Anna Bédard and Edward Gaudette, further illustrate how migrations consisted of a number of frequent moves. Neither of them chose Lowell as their only and ultimate destination. They had been to neighbouring cities in New England before going to Lowell. Canadian-born Jan-Anna travelled to Fall River, Rhode Island, when she was "very young." She lived in Fall River for sixteen years where she married a French-Canadian man named Charles Bédard and bore their first daughter. Jan-Anna and Charles then moved to Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and lived there for five years. In June 1893, the couple, now with four children, left Woonsocket and moved to Lowell. After a short time, they returned to Canada. In 1900 they went back to Lowell again.<sup>60</sup>

Another example is Canadian-born Edward Gaudette, who moved to Lowell in 1890 and stayed there for a few months. On 21 April 1890, at the age of twenty-five, Edward married a Lowell-born French Canadian, Lena Patenaude. Edward and Lena then moved to Haverhill, Massachusetts. After two years, the couple moved to Nashua, New Hampshire, with their first daughter. In 1902 the family, with two additional children, moved back to Lowell and in the following year had their fourth child.<sup>60-a</sup>

The above two cases delineate the extremely high mobility of some French-Canadian migrants in the early twentieth century. These examples do not reveal the reasons behind such frequent

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proportion of those who had been in a number of New England localities other than Lowell and, conversely, lowering the proportion of those who had only resided in Lowell. Tested with a larger sample, these hypotheses will shed more light on the migratory process of French Canadians.

<sup>60</sup>*Case History*, file number 6921.

<sup>60-a</sup> *Case History*, file number 7309.

moves. One could speculate — but only speculate — that migrants' high mobility was a response to a combination of factors, such as economic vicissitudes in Quebec and New England, as well as personal ties with family and fellow villagers living in neighbouring locations, which prompted migrants to move from one place to another.<sup>61</sup> If local labour market conditions had a generalized impact on the vectors of migration, personal and kin networks acted to channel migrants to specific destinations.

#### 4.3.5. *The Extent of the Migratory Networks*

By the early twentieth century, it was clear that French-Canadian migrants to New England had ended their earlier dependence on the organized efforts of recruiting agents sent by American textile companies, although railway ticket agents and some French-Canadian Catholic priests settled in New England continued to encourage their migration. Information on New England destinations increasingly circulated through personal networks formed by neighbours, friends, and relatives, who had already lived and worked in New England manufacturing centres.<sup>62</sup> Although

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<sup>61</sup>Recent studies point out that within the reservoir of potential migrants, actual departures were often determined by personal circumstances such as unsuccessful courtships, unacceptable pregnancies, death or remarriage in the family, and avoidance of compulsory military service. See Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Julianna Puskás, *From Hungary to the United States, 1880-1914*, translated by Maria Bales (Budapest: Akademia Kiado, 1982).

<sup>62</sup>Immigrants' letters are also an important source for revealing the extent of informal networks of family and friends. If some immigrants refused to admit their difficulties in a place of migration, others boasted of their earnings in U.S. dollars. On their visit or return home, some dressed up to the point of ridiculousness. A priest described the migrants coming home as follow:

documenting these migratory networks over time is an exceedingly difficult task, the *Border Entries* again help us to provide some insights on this issue.

For the period under study, data derived from *the Border Entries* highlight the centrality of family and friends in knitting the informal web of information and support. The data on contact persons whom migrants intended to meet upon their arrival in Lowell are particularly important in revealing the role played by family and kinship in forming this informal network. Evidence from my sample points to the indispensable presence of a contact person for Lowell-bound French-Canadian migrants. Nearly all the identified contact persons (99.2 percent) were family or kin; contact persons falling outside this category accounted only for a small minority (see Table 4.7). This means that an overwhelming majority of sampled French-Canadian immigrants who moved to Lowell during the first two decades of the twentieth century did so not as isolated individuals, but as members of family or kin groups. Among members of extended families, cousins made up the largest proportion of contact persons (17 percent), followed by brothers and sisters, uncles, and brothers-in-law.

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"Il [le migrant] a jeté bien loin de lui le solide vêtement d'étoffe du pays que sa bonne mère lui avait fait au départ. Les quelques piastres qu'il a gagnées, il les a sur lui sous le forme de pantalon et de paletot de drap qui le rendent tout simplement ridicule. Une chaîne d'or faux sur la veste, le chapeau sur le *cran* de la tête, il se donne des airs d'indépendance qui font l'ébahissement de ses compagnons d'enfance. Regardez-le, le dimanche, à la porte de l'église, il est le coq du village. Les garçons et les filles n'ont pas assez d'yeux pour l'admirer. Ils ne rêvent qu'à l'imiter, à partir pour les Etats."

Father Henri-Raymond Casgrain, "Lettres américaines," *L'opinion publique*, (Montréal, 30 mars 1882), quoted in Yves Roby, *Les Franco-Américains de la Nouvelle-Angleterre: 1776-1930* (Sillery, Quebec: Éditions du Septentrion, 1990), 50-51.

Table 4.7  
 Relation of Contact Persons to Lowell-bound  
 French Canadians

	Number	Percentage
<b>Immediate family</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>53.7</b>
Husband	4	3.3
Wife	6	4.9
Son	11	8.9
Daughter	0	0
Father	13	10.6
Mother	2	1.6
Brother	16	13.0
Sister	14	11.4
<b>Extended family</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>45.5</b>
Father-in-law	2	1.6
Mother-in-law	0	0
Brother-in-law	9	7.3
Sister-in-law	1	0.8
Son- or daughter-in-law	0	0
Grandfather	8	6.5
Grandmother	0	0
Uncle	10	8.1
Aunt	3	2.4
Cousin	21	17.1
Niece	0	0
Nephew	2	1.6
<b>Institution</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Convent	1	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Compiled by author from the sample of the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* The sample was created by the author and Bruno Ramirez's research group.



The following two examples illustrate the presence of a contact person for migrating French Canadians. In December 1908, Maxime and Amanda Clermont left for Lowell with four children aged between nineteen and twenty-nine years. The Clermont family listed Amanda's brother, Narcisse Clermont, living at 9 Pawtucket Street, Lowell, as the person they were to meet upon arrival in the city.<sup>63</sup> Four months after the Clermonts' migration, the Frenette family also crossed the border to the south. The migrating unit consisted of Napoleon, his wife, Emma, and four children aged twenty, seventeen, eleven, and six years old. The Frenettes listed as their contact person their daughter, Bernadette, living at 65 Pole Street, Lowell.<sup>63-a</sup>

The indispensable presence of a contact person at a migrant's destination confirms a key characteristic of French-Canadian migration in the early twentieth century. It was a movement built primarily on family and kinship networks — what Ramirez and Otis have termed an informal sponsored migration.<sup>64</sup> These networks undoubtedly became the principal factor in directing the population movement to specific locales. It can be argued from my findings that by the early twentieth century, the presence of a contact person had the effect, for a great majority of Lowell's French-Canadian migrants, of reducing the relative importance of formal recruiting agents, who had assumed a crucial role in directing the migratory flow.<sup>65</sup> Prospective migrants gained precise information on the job

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<sup>63</sup>*Border Entries*, card numbers 50-92-17, 5-92-20, 50-92-21. 50-92-78, and 50-92-?.

<sup>63-a</sup> *Border Entries*, card numbers 63-115-9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

<sup>64</sup>Ramirez and Otis, "French-Canadian Emigration to the USA in the 1920," 10-11.

<sup>65</sup>This interpretation is largely influenced by Bodnar's thesis that the role of middlemen or labour agents in leading a large flow of migration to particular industries or cities was increasingly undermined as the migrants

market, housing conditions, and everyday life at a particular destination through migrants' letters and visits home. As the potential migrants' knowledge on the destination grew, they probably became less dependent on formal recruiting agents.

It is also important to note that the contact person was rarely a member of the migrant's nuclear family. This is probably because migrating units were largely composed of immediate family members. Consequently, contact persons tended to be outside the migrant's nuclear household. At the same time, in the case of a separate family move where the rest of the family moved to join the "pioneer migrants," these latter individuals were likely to assume the role of contact persons. The relatively high percentage of sons and fathers among contact persons may have resulted from the fact that these pioneer migrants were likely to be male members of the family. Although an extremely low rate of husbands among contact persons from my data does not directly corroborate this hypothesis, an examination of the migrating unit helps us to clarify this point.

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received a steady stream of information from friends and relatives on labour market conditions and wages in their destination. John Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 58-60, 68.

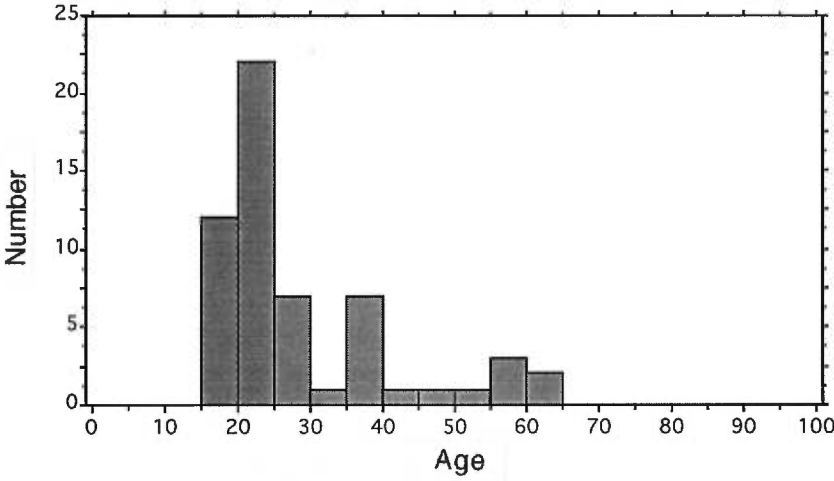
#### 4.3.6. *Patterns of Migration: Moving Alone or Accompanied?*

Evidence from the *Border Entries* demonstrates that during the period from 1900 to 1920, about one third of the sampled migrants (38 percent) travelled alone while the majority (62 percent) was accompanied by one or more persons.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, most cases listed in the *Border Entries* do not record the relation of the accompanying traveller(s) to the recorded individual. Nevertheless, an analysis of the age, marital status, and family name of accompanying persons suggests that a typical migrating unit consisted of adults above working age with or without children under working age. All those travelling alone were over fifteen years of age — the legal working age — and an overwhelming majority (71.9 percent) were young migrants between sixteen and twenty-eight years old (see Figure 4.1). When two migrants crossed the border together, they were also likely to be of legal working age although occasionally the young or the elderly voyaged with a companion (see Figure 4.2). When the migrant group grew to three or more, it was likely to include children under sixteen, or adults above working age (see Figure 4.3). Given that the persons listed as accompanying a migrant invariably bore the same family names as the latter, it is reasonable to surmise that groups of two tended to be composed of spouses or siblings, whereas groups of three or more included the children of one or more of the adult migrants.

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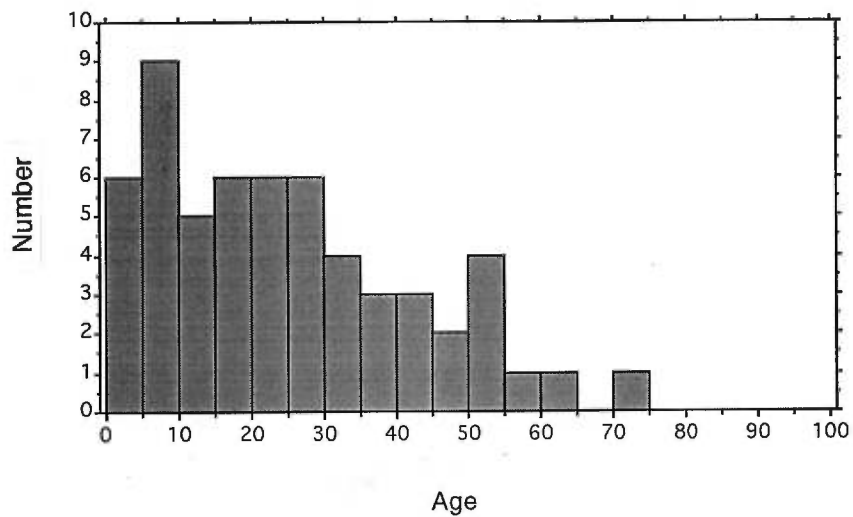
<sup>66</sup>These figures conform with the general pattern of French-Canadian migration to the nation-wide U.S.A. for the period of 1909-18: single travellers accounting for a minority (41.9 percent) as against a majority of accompanied migrants (58 percent). As the century proceeded, however, the proportion of individual migration versus accompanied migration reversed. By 1929 individual migration had become the predominant pattern. In the period between the wars (1924-1929), over two thirds travelled alone whereas less than one third of the migrants travelled in company. Ramirez and Otis, "French-Canadian Emigration to the USA in the 1920," 8.

Figure 4.1  
Distribution of French Canadians Travelling Alone to Lowell,  
1904-1920



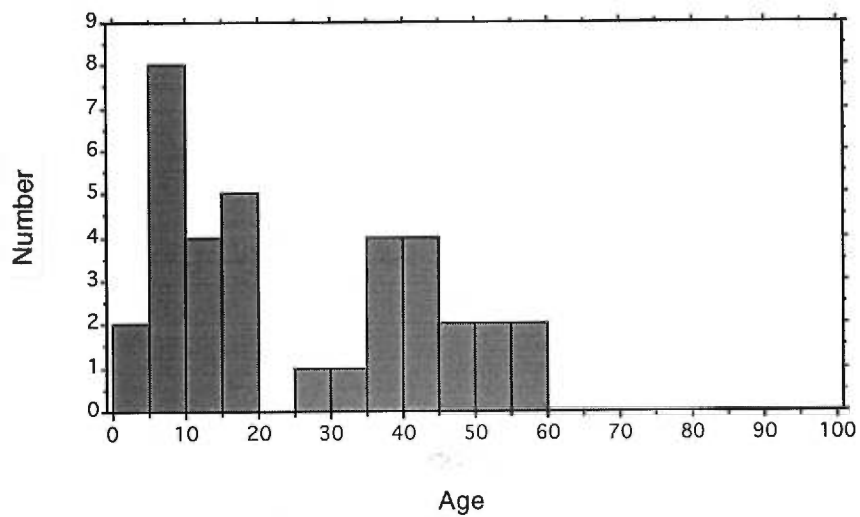
Source: Compiled by author from the sample of the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* The sample was created by the author and Bruno Ramirez's research group.

Figure 4.2  
Distribution of French-Canadian Travellers to Lowell Accompanied  
by One Person



Source: Compiled by author from the sample of the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* The sample was created by the author and Bruno Ramirez's research group.

Figure 4.3  
Distribution of French-Canadian Travellers to Lowell Accompanied  
by Two or More Persons



Source: Compiled by author from the sample of the *Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries to the U.S.A.* The sample was created by the author and Bruno Ramirez's research group.

The following examples from *Border Entries* illustrate the cases of migrants travelling accompanied. Two young couples, Aimé and Désiré Aubert, and Eugène and Mary Auprey, typify the substantial proportion of French Canadians who migrated without a child. In early January 1916, Aimé Aubert, a twenty-one-year-old cook, and Désiré, an eighteen-year-old steward, left their native village of Lévis, Québec. In late August 1920, another young couple, Eugene Aupry, a twenty-year-old shoemaker, and twenty-one-year-old Mary, a domestic, both born in Scotsville, Quebec, left Bury, Quebec, their last permanent place of residence, for Lowell. Louis-Oscar and his wife, Marie-Blanche Aubut illustrate another group of French Canadians, those who migrated to Lowell with their children. Louis-Oscar and Marie-Blanche crossed the border heading for Lowell in early March 1917. Louis-Oscar was a forty-two-year-old blacksmith, and Marie-Blanche, age unknown, did not list any occupation. The couple was travelling with fourteen children ranging from three to nineteen years of age.<sup>67</sup> None of the children listed their work experience in Quebec.

Diversity in migrating units does not challenge the centrality of the family in French-Canadian migration. Rather, it can be argued that such variety indicates the elasticity of familial and kinship organization on the part of French Canadians so that they could maximize the possibility of successful migration. Labour market conditions in the migrants' point of destination changed and so did the qualities, such as age, skill, and gender, required of workers. Through their webs of information, migrants acquired

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<sup>67</sup>The data do not indicate the relationships of these fourteen accompanying migrants to Louis-Oscar and Marie-Blanche. However, judging from their name, age, and residential history, the author has estimated that they were children of the couple.

detailed knowledge of such changes in demand and reconciled them with their household needs.

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Evidence presented in the above pages contests the classical assimilation model of immigration, which Frank Thistlethwaite criticized for its "American-centred" perspective of the migratory process. My findings show that French-Canadian migration to Lowell was largely directed by migrants' personal ties with previous migrants, who were, in most cases, family and kin members. Although a majority of the sampled (first-generation) French Canadians in Lowell were born in rural villages of Quebec, their backgrounds were neither exclusively rural nor agricultural. Some had spent time in commercial/industrial centres in the province. Others had resided in textile centres in New England or in other U.S. locations and moved several times between Quebec and the United States. Their frequent movements were largely embedded in the webs linking family members over geographically and politically separate entities.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has shed light on the complex and diverse process of migration undertaken by French Canadians in early twentieth-century Lowell and the centrality of family and kin networks in this process. Knowing exactly where to go and what to expect, French-Canadian migrants were far from being simply transient victims of economic vicissitudes or overpopulation. Rather, the movements of individuals and families, even when spread over a



generation or more, should be interpreted as collective strategies designed to realize, as Rudolph Vecoli has expressed, the "optimum good"<sup>68</sup> for their family and kin group.

The findings presented in this chapter of the timing of departure, residential histories, occupational experiences, contact persons, and companions of migrants have shown that the decision to migrate was not made in desperation or in the delirium of "American fever." Instead, this decision was largely based on well-informed, pondered judgements. The propensity among some of Lowell's French Canadians to move several times in their lifetime does not necessarily contradict an earlier finding that revealed the limited transiency of a large proportion of French-Canadian cotton workers in New England.<sup>69</sup> Rather, it can be argued that these different patterns of geographic mobility show different aspects of the same phenomenon. The cross-border migration was only one, though probably the most important, result of French Canadians' growing capacity to move to locales which stood out as being the most advantageous on their "cognitive map."<sup>70</sup> In order to optimize the well-being of their families, the transition from the "old" to the "new" country could largely be made without trauma. As Dirk

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<sup>68</sup>Vecoli, *A Century of European Migrations*, ed. Vecoli and Sinke, introduction, especially 10-11.

<sup>69</sup>Ramirez, "A Socioeconomic Profile": 125-42.

<sup>70</sup>Bruno Ramirez has indicated that towards the end of the nineteenth century, French-Canadian immigrants chose their destination less arbitrarily. Their decisions increasingly became the result of informed and calculated judgements based on the precise knowledge on socioeconomic conditions of the local labour market. Ramirez, "Migration and Regional Labour Markets," in *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850-1930*, ed. Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey, Society of Welsh Labour History and Canadian Committee on Labour History, (Llafur/CCLH, Wales, 1989), 119-33, especially 123. See also Jean Lamarre, "La migration des Canadiens français vers le Michigan," 90.

Hoerder has observed, it was less a movement into an unknown land of foreign culture than a voyage from a village (or a region) to a specific job and into a specific community.<sup>71</sup> And these geographically separate locations and labour markets were nevertheless interconnected by the family networks of the migrants.

The following two chapters, one focusing on men and the other on women, look closely at the ways in which the members of French-Canadian immigrant families cooperated, negotiated, and at times conflicted with each other in order to realize the "optimum good."

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<sup>71</sup>Dirk Hoerder, "Migrant Workers in the Atlantic Economies," 90-91.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FRENCH-CANADIAN MEN AND THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

#### INTRODUCTION

Between the 1870s and the 1920s, French-Canadian male immigrants experienced considerable changes in their occupational status. The intensification of the labour process; efforts made by labour reformers, legislators, and labour unions to curb child labour; the arrival of "new immigrants" *en masse*, who filled the positions just below those of French Canadians; and the temporary economic boom of World War I characterized the new reality of Lowell's local labour market. As Lowell's demographic, economic, and sociocultural conditions were radically transformed, these men found themselves engaged in better-paid and more regular jobs in the city's ethnically and occupationally segmented labour force. Because the occupational position of French-Canadian men improved at the turn of the century, their households came to rely less on the wage-earning capacity of their children. The general improvement in the earning power of French-Canadian men notwithstanding, their occupational positions remained largely confined to the lower economic echelons. Moreover, their earnings

were clearly below the level required to support a family. When they were injured, ill, or simply laid off, there was little, if any, compensation from the companies and no public social security upon which they and their families could rely.

The limited upward mobility of French-Canadian men in early twentieth-century Lowell confirms a thesis which views migrant (and other) workers as playing within the constraining "walls" posed by political, economic, and sociocultural factors.<sup>1</sup> This notion contests the classical view of migrants as victims of structural forces and instead views the migrants' marked presence in a particular segment of the labour market as a result of their adaptive strategies. The ethnically segmented labour market was sustained from without and from within. For instance, in order to secure much needed labour, Lowell's textile industry relied upon French-Canadian workers' networks of family and ethnic ties while immigrants obtained their jobs through similar connections. In this process, migrants perpetuated a function of the segmented labour market while deliberately using it as a means of strategic autonomy. More importantly, this was not a static process. Changes that occurred in the occupational positions of French-Canadian male workers — such as their renewed presence in the textile labour force and the growing variety of jobs they held in the city's larger labour market — suggest that migrants adjusted their strategies to meet the new reality of Lowell's local labour market.

This chapter examines the impact of Lowell's rapidly changing labour market on the lives of French-Canadian men and their families in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup>For the concept of "playing within the constraint," see for instance, Ewa Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration," in *Immigration Reconsidered*, ed. Yans-McLaughlin, 187-238, especially 196-212.

Comparisons between French Canadians and four other immigrant/ethnic groups — Americans (U.S.-born of U.S. parents), Irish (the predominant immigrant group from 1850s to 1870s), Portuguese and Greeks (the most recent arrivals of the early twentieth century) — reveal some demographic characteristics of Lowell's French-Canadian population in the period under study. The occupational experiences of its male workers in the city's labour market as a whole are also examined. Finally, budgets extracted from French-Canadian working families demonstrate the difficulties experienced by these families in trying to make ends meet.

#### 5.1. LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION AND THE NOTION OF "PLAYING WITHIN STRUCTURES"

A shift away from individuals and toward structuralist emphasis has characterized the analysis of the socioeconomic status of the immigrants and their descendants in the United States. The "mobility studies" of the early 1970s, which tended to neglect various structural factors, were succeeded by studies that documented how different economic and political determinants, in addition to migrants' family and community resources, affected the dynamics of their occupational experiences, household strategies, and schooling patterns.<sup>2</sup> Incorporating the concepts of dual economies and segmented labour markets developed by political economists since the 1970s,<sup>3</sup> recent historical works revealed the marked presence of

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<sup>2</sup>Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, especially, introduction; Bodnar, Roger, and Weber, *Lives of Their Own*; Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Joel Perlmann, "Beyond New York: The Occupations of Russian Jewish immigrants in Providence, Rhode Island, and in Other Small Jewish Communities, 1900-15," *American Jewish History* 72 (1983): 369-94.

<sup>3</sup>Both terms refer to a mechanism which favours the separation of workers into distinct labour markets based on gender, skill, and ethnic origin.

immigrant workers of different origins in specific industrial sectors of American urban centres. This segmentation process was largely attributed to the considerable variations in local employment opportunities prevalent in different cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, Worcester, and Fall River. These studies further pointed out two typical conditions for labour market segmentation: instability in employment and the presence of lower occupational circuits that consisted of a large pool of unstructured, low-paying, and menial jobs. These conditions assured what Ewa Morawska has termed an ethnically split "secondary internal labour market," in which new immigrants were effectively excluded from participating in the more stable and better paid job tracks reserved for American-born and West European workers.

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These labour markets are usually divided into primary and secondary sectors. According to this classification, the primary labour market in the present-day United States corresponds to employment in public and other large-scale institutions and industries (such as coal, metals, oil, chemicals), which are characterized by stability of employment and by union regulations. The secondary sector refers to small-scale, competitive branches of the economy, such as light industry, retailing, and services. The latter category is characterized by fluctuations in production, lack of union protection, and rapid labour turnover. Historical studies reveal, however, that these distinctions are too static and simplistic. Ewa Morawska, for instance, has pointed out that the major industries that employed immigrants in the early twentieth century — such as some areas of coal and steel, both classified today as belonging to the primary sector — possessed the features typical of secondary employment as described by the dual-labour market theory. The production volume shifted frequently, the annual turnover rates were high, part of the workforce remained non-unionized, and they relied heavily on low-skill labour. Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration," 198-200. Among early works by the political economists on the dual-labour-market theory, see for instance, Peter Doeringer and Michael Piore, *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1971); Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Richard Edwards et al., *Labor Market Segmentation* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1975); Bennett Harrison and A. Sum, "The Theory of 'Dual' or Segmented Labor Markets," *Journal of Economic Issues* 13 (1979): 687-707; Saskia Sassen, "Immigrant and Minority Workers in the Organization of the Labor Process," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1980): 1-34.

These historical studies have revealed a striking similarity between the conditions for the segmented labour market that functioned in the early twentieth century and the conditions which have been attributed as the cause of labour market division by sociological and economic studies on present-day immigration.<sup>4</sup> By introducing the labour market segmentation theory into its analysis, much of the early literature on contemporary immigration tended to assume that immigrant workers were passively pushed into the secondary labour market or ethnic enclaves because they had to cope with mechanisms of discrimination and exclusion. Consequently, this perspective has reinforced the "immigrant-as-victim" paradigm and thus largely neglected the degree of autonomy which some immigrants were capable of exercising.

In contrast, more recent studies have emphasized the need to incorporate a consideration of migrants' autonomy into the analysis.<sup>5</sup> In order to find a job quickly or even before arriving at

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<sup>4</sup>A large amount of works on the status attainment and social mobility of immigrants and their descendants has been produced in the field of sociology. These studies mostly deal with the present-day American economy and current labour migrations. Ewa Morawska critically points out that in the sociological literature the segmentation of labour markets has commonly been referred to as a phenomenon characteristic of the advanced capitalism of the post-World War II era. As historical studies have revealed, however, a similar phenomenon already existed in the early twentieth century. For a review of these sociological studies and discussion, see Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration," particularly 198-200.

<sup>5</sup>See, for instance, Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*; Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, *Lives of Their Own*; Morawska, *For Bread With Butter*; Ramirez, *On the Move*; Hoerder, "International Labor Markets and Community Building by Migrant Workers in the Atlantic Economies," in *A Century of European Migrations*, ed. Vecoli and Sinke, 78-107; Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*; David Gordon et al., *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Stanford Jacobi, "The Development of Internal Markets in American Manufacturing" in Osterman ed., *Internal Labor Markets*, 23-69; and Bernard Elbaum, "The Making and Shaping of Job and Pay Structures in the Iron and Steel Industry," *ibid.*, 71-109.

their destination, immigrant workers often mobilized their ethnic and family resources. For instance, Italian and Polish men who entered the unskilled labour market of American factories, coal mines, and construction sites at the turn of the century, Jewish women who laboured in the garment industry, and French-Canadian women who worked in the textile industry or in domestic services as cooks and maids, found their jobs through ethnic and family connections. At the same time, American industries, in order to secure their labour force, relied upon these ethnic networks for hiring new workers. The presence of the segmented labour market was thus sustained from both sides. Accordingly, ethnically segmented labour markets should be interpreted as a product both of discriminatory practices on the part of the immigrants' host society and of adaptive strategies devised by immigrant workers.

Some scholars have carried the notion of strategic autonomy even further with an alternative idea, "playing within the structures." Finding the structural emphasis too deterministic, proponents of this idea focus on the adaptability of the immigrant group in their cultural life and social organization. The proclivity of immigrant groups to become concentrated in specific economic niches is thus interpreted as a result of the immigrants' efforts to cope "with structural limitations by maneuvering within them."<sup>6</sup> By seeking "structural solutions," immigrants made the best of their resourcefulness and resilience when they were confronted with structural barriers.

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<sup>6</sup>Yans-McLaughlin, *Immigration Reconsidered*, 13.



My analysis of French-Canadian men takes note of these two interpretations — the dual nature of the segmented labour market and the notion of "playing within the structure." The findings presented in the following sections confirm the continued presence of this segmented labour market in early twentieth century Lowell. These dynamics were impelled by the hiring policies of management and trade unions, and reinforced by the migratory practices of the city's French Canadians. This mechanism was not a static one. French-Canadian men exhibited upward mobility in their occupations and the range of jobs available to them also widened during the first two decades of the twentieth century. These changes point to a process in which French Canadian men sought to carve out a better lot for their families from what was available within the limits posed by structural factors. This is what Morawska has described as immigrants playing within the constraining "walls" but not entirely overcoming them.<sup>7</sup>

## 5.2. A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF FRENCH CANADIANS IN LOWELL

This section examines the age distribution of French Canadians (both those born in Canada and the United States) in Lowell, that of the migrating population (those born in Canada), the household configuration of French Canadians in the city, and the age distribution of the working population.<sup>7-a</sup> Comparisons with other immigrant/ethnic groups shed additional light on various

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<sup>7</sup>Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration," 212.

<sup>7-a</sup> Throughout this section, the sample of the French-Canadian population under study includes French Canadians born in Canada as well as in the United States. However, the analysis of the migrating population naturally includes only French Canadians born in Canada.

characteristics of the French-Canadian population. For the years 1910 to 1920, the samples — representing five percent of Lowell's households and comprising respectively 5,123 and 5,780 individuals — were compiled randomly from federal census manuscripts. French Canadians accounted for 1,102 individuals in the 1910 sample, and 1,115 in 1920.

As described in the previous chapter, changing labour market conditions in the New England textile industry had profound impact on the French-Canadian migratory flow into the region. By the early twentieth century, the number of French-Canadian immigrants to New England decreased significantly and the migratory population changed considerably. French-Canadian families with large numbers of children, who had once provided the ideal labour force for the textile industry in Lowell, were no longer best suited for meeting the new demands of the local labour market. Aware of this new reality, prospective French-Canadian migrants adjusted their plans even before their departure to the United States. Those already established in the city also accommodated themselves by changing the patterns of their labour market participation. The analysis of age distribution and household composition of French Canadians in Lowell confirms these adaptations. By 1910, this group's population was increasingly composed of long-time residents, and the proportion of children fifteen years or younger decreased substantially both among the migrating population and the working population. In 1920, this trend continued.

An analysis of the age distribution of French Canadians points to the stabilization of an earlier trend: a progressive decline in the proportion of children. The age distribution of Lowell's French-Canadian immigrants, both first generation (Canadian-born) and second generation (U.S.-born), increasingly approached that of the Irish and American populations (See Table 5.1). The number of

Table 5.1  
 Age Distribution by Ethnic Group in Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

Age group	French Canadian	Irish	American	Portuguese	Greek
<b>1910</b>					
14 or under	33.8	22.6	26.0	43.6	6.6
15 to 24	20.8	18.0	19.4	25.5	41.2
25 to 34	16.2	17.3	16.6	16.0	29.7
35 to 44	13.0	18.0	11.8	12.8	10.4
45 or over	16.2	23.9	26.3	2.1	9.3
Total (N)	100.0 (1,102)	100.0 (1,501)	100.0 (918)	100.0 (94)	100.0 (182)
<b>1920</b>					
14 or under	32.4	14.2	36.0	40.9	33.9
15 to 24	18.8	16.6	15.1	18.2	18.3
25 to 34	15.7	17.0	13.3	16.4	20.5
35 to 44	13.1	18.5	10.6	17.6	16.5
45 or over	21.7	33.7	25.0	6.9	10.9
Total (N)	100.0 (1,152)	100.0 (1,468)	100.0 (1,201)	100.0 (159)	100.0 (322)

Source: Compiled by author from the Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Notes: 1. Ethnic group is determined by the place of birth of individuals and their parents.  
 2. Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

French Canadians who were under fifteen years of age remained at about the same level during the decade, accounting for about one third of the city's total French-Canadian population. This proportion was higher than that of the Irish population, and closer to that of the Americans. By contrast, the proportion of Greek immigrants in this age group increased significantly between 1910 and 1920, while the proportion of juvenile Portuguese immigrants remained extremely high throughout. During the same period, people in the most active age groups, those between fifteen and forty-five years of age, made up approximately half of the total French-Canadian population.

A notable change occurred in the population group aged forty-five years and over. Their proportion among French Canadians increased from 16.2 percent to 21.7 percent over the decade. Among the Irish in the same age group the change was also significant (increasing from 23.9 to 33.7 percent) while that of the Americans remained at about the same level (decreasing from 26.3 to 25.0 percent). By contrast, for the Portuguese and Greek populations, the proportion was far lower and remained low (increasing from 2.1 to 6.9 percent, and from 9.3 to 10.9 percent, respectively).

Table 5.2, which excludes those born in the United States (second generation), gives us a clearer picture of the age distribution of the French Canadians who migrated to the U.S.A. In 1910, the majority of the migrating population (59.3 percent of the men and 63.2 percent of the women) belonged to the most active age group, between fifteen and forty-five years of age. Over a quarter of the migrating French-Canadian population, both male and female, was composed of those aged forty-five years old and over. By contrast, the proportion of Irish immigrants in the same age bracket (forty-five and over) was far higher (41.5 percent in 1910), whereas it was significantly lower for the two recent immigrant groups (3.0

Table 5.2  
 Age Distribution of French-Canadian Immigrant  
 Population by Gender, Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

Age group		
1910	Men	Women
14 or under	13.3	9.8
15 to 24	20.0	20.3
25 to 34	20.0	22.9
35 to 44	19.3	20.0
45 or over	27.4	27.0
Total (N)	100.0 (285)	100.0 (315)
1920		
14 or under	5.3	3.9
15 to 24	9.6	7.4
25 to 34	15.3	17.9
35 to 44	22.0	25.8
45 or over	47.8	45.0
Total (N)	100.0 (209)	100.0 (228)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth  
 U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may  
 not equal one hundred.

percent of the Portuguese and 10.3 percent of the Greeks). The proportion of children fifteen years old or under, who prior to this time had been the largest group among the French-Canadian immigrant population, declined substantially from the turn of the century onward. In 1910, approximately one out of eight males and one out of ten females were fifteen years old or less. Among the more recent arrivals, this proportion varied significantly. More than 20 percent of Portuguese immigrants were children under fifteen years old while less than 5 percent of Greek immigrants belonged to this age group. (See Table 5.3.)

By 1920, the typical French-Canadian immigrant was much older than his/her counterpart of the late nineteenth century. The proportion of those aged fourteen or under declined further, now representing less than 5 percent of the immigrant population (5.3 percent of men and 3.9 percent of women) and, conversely, the proportion of those aged forty-five or over rose considerably. It is likely that these two phenomena are related, because people over forty-five are less likely to have children under fifteen years old. Among the Irish, the proportion of those fourteen or under remained extremely low (less than one percent, both in 1910 and 1920), among the Greeks it increased substantially (4.6 percent in 1910 and 13.8 percent in 1920), while among the Portuguese it was far higher, though in decline (22.4 percent and 7.2 percent, respectively). Among the French Canadians, slightly less than half of the immigrant population was composed of those who were forty-five years old and over, which signals an important change in the pattern of French-Canadian immigration to Lowell during the early twentieth century.

Table 5.3  
 Age Distribution of Immigrant Population by Ethnic Group in Lowell,  
 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

Age group	French Canadian	Irish	Portuguese	Greek
<b>1910</b>				
14 or under	11.5	0.7	22.4	4.6
15 to 24	20.2	8.6	34.3	43.1
25 to 34	21.5	20.2	22.4	31.0
35 to 44	23.0	28.8	17.9	10.9
45 or over	27.2	41.5	3.0	10.3
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>100.0 (600)</b>	<b>100.0 (441)</b>	<b>100.0 (67)</b>	<b>100.0 (174)</b>
<b>1920</b>				
14 or under	4.6	0.5	7.2	13.8
15 to 24	8.5	2.9	24.4	21.3
25 to 34	16.7	15.0	29.4	26.6
35 to 44	24.0	23.3	23.5	28.7
45 or over	46.2	58.3	15.4	11.7
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>100.0 (437)</b>	<b>100.0 (441)</b>	<b>100.0 (221)</b>	<b>100.0 (94)</b>

Source: Compiled by author from the Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Notes: 1. Ethnic group is determined by the place of birth of individuals and their parents.  
 2. Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

It is possible that the variations in the age distribution among these immigrant populations relate to differences in the epoch of migration — earlier arrivals as opposed to later ones; or to the various patterns of migration — migrations that involved families as opposed to those that involved individuals alone. There may also have been differences among the four immigrant groups with regard to the intended duration of their stay. Time must also have played an important role in balancing the population pyramid for both the Irish and the French Canadians. However, other factors — especially, the self-selection of the immigrant population in terms of age, gender, and household status<sup>8</sup>— seem to have played an even more significant role in changing the demographic characteristics of the immigrants studied here. Unfortunately, there is insufficient empirical evidence to determine which factor was more influential. Nevertheless, variations in the age distribution among and within groups of immigrants point to the existence of a mechanism for selecting the most appropriate population for migration. The dynamics of this process reflect the migrants' careful evaluation of changing labour market conditions at home and in the country of destination, and consequent adjustment of their strategies.

The composition of households among French-Canadian and other immigrant/ethnic groups shows a predominance of family units over single-person households. Moreover, to an overwhelming degree these were nuclear families composed of a male head and his wife, with or without children. In 1910, sons and daughters accounted for about half of the sampled French Canadians. About forty percent of the American, Irish, and Portuguese population consisted of sons and daughters (see Table 5.4). By contrast, children

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<sup>8</sup>With regard to changes occurring in the demographic profiles of migrating populations, Bruno Ramirez has developed an interesting idea of selective mechanisms. Ramirez, *On the Move*, 125, 128-137.



Table 5.4  
 Relationship of Immigrants to Household Head, Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

	French Canadian	Irish	American	Portuguese	Greek
<b>1910</b>					
Head	19.1	23.2	23.4	11.7	16.5
Wife	14.5	15.7	13.9	9.6	6.0
Daughter	25.8	20.5	20.2	18.1	6.0
Son	26.4	18.7	20.4	19.1	7.7
Other family member	5.9	9.0	9.9	6.4	11.0
Lodger	5.4	9.0	8.2	35.1	52.7
Servant	0.7	1.7	-	-	-
Unidentified	2.2	2.3	4.0	-	-
Total (N)	100.0 (1,102)	100.0 (1,501)	100.0 (918)	100.0 (94)	100.0 (182)
<b>1920</b>					
Head	19.9	25.1	20.1	17.6	21.4
Wife	15.5	16.8	12.4	17.0	13.4
Daughter	26.3	18.5	25.2	30.8	18.9
Son	25.7	17.6	22.9	25.2	22.0
Other family member	6.7	8.3	10	2.6	7.8
Lodger	5.5	8.4	8.2	6.3	15.2
Servant	0	0.7	0.2	-	-
Unidentified	0.3	3.5	0.7	0.6	1.2
Total (N)	100.0 (1,155)	100.0 (1,468)	100.0 (1,201)	100.0 (159)	100.0 (322)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Notes: 1. Ethnic group is determined by the place of birth of individuals and their parents.  
 2. Because numbers are rounded, the total in percentage may not equal one hundred.

represented only slightly more than ten percent of the Greek population. French-Canadian households occasionally expanded to include other individuals related to the household head, such as brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, parents, parents-in-law, cousins, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren. Still, the presence of coresidential extended family members was lower among French Canadians than among the three other groups studied here. Also, a small proportion of French Canadians, Irish, and Americans (5.4 percent, 8.2 percent and 9.0 percent, respectively) were boarders and lodgers, although the Portuguese and the Greeks contributed a much higher percentage (35.1 percent and 52.7 percent, respectively).

A decade later, the household configuration of French Canadians had not changed significantly. Sons and daughters continued to make up a little over half of the total population, the proportion of extended family members rose slightly, and the proportion of boarders remained low. Similarly, American and Irish households hardly changed, in marked contrast to considerable changes in the two more recent immigrant groups over the decade. Among the Portuguese and the Greeks, the proportion of wives and children increased while the proportion of boarders fell significantly.

For each of the above immigrant groups, the epoch in which the peak migration occurred also seemed influential in determining, first, the differences in the evolution of the household configurations and, second, the criteria employed by potential migrant populations in selecting who would migrate. For instance, by 1910, the earlier migrant groups — the Irish and French Canadians — had, to a significant degree, become a "settled" population in Lowell, showing household patterns that resembled those of the American population; over the following decade their

configuration changed only slightly. On the other hand, for the more recent arrivals — the Greeks and the Portuguese — the decade between 1910 and 1920 was a period when their demographic profiles evolved most notably, from a distribution composed overwhelmingly of new arrivals to a distribution made up more and more of individuals who had already stayed a long time.

The age configuration of the active work force among French Canadians also sheds light on crucial aspects of the relationship between family migration patterns and industrial labour markets (see Table 5.5). Between 1910 and 1920, the proportion of men aged forty-five years old and over, and that of women between twenty-five and thirty-four years old, increased substantially. Clearly, French-Canadian households were no longer highly dependent on the wages earned by their children in their early teens. By 1910, an extremely small proportion (3.0 percent) of French-Canadian children aged fourteen and under was employed. Ten years later, after the boom years of World War I, the figure decreased further (1.8 percent). Again, these figures confirm a decline in the employment of children. This constituted a major shift in the characteristics of Lowell's French-Canadian immigrant families, whose household economy had once relied heavily on the work of children.

The above pages show an aging of Lowell's French Canadians in general, and of the immigrant and working population in particular, in the early twentieth century. By 1910 the demographic profile of Lowell's French-Canadian population had come to resemble that of the local settled population, in that the proportion of children fifteen years old and under was decreasing both among the migrating and working populations. In 1920, this trend continued without significant change. It can be suggested from these findings that Lowell's radically changing market conditions

Table 5.5  
 Age Distribution of French-Canadian Working Population  
 by Gender, Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

Age group	Men	Women
<b>1910</b>		
14 or under	1.8	1.6
15 to 24	29.0	49.7
25 to 34	24.3	18.0
35 to 44	20.4	18.5
45 or over	24.6	12.2
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(330)	(189)
<b>1920</b>		
14 or under	0.6	2.5
15 to 24	26.1	41.8
25 to 34	23.1	26.9
35 to 44	18.2	13.4
45 or over	31.9	15.4
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(328)	(201)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

had an immediate impact on the way in which French-Canadian families who were already living in the city compensated for the reduced opportunities of children to contribute to the household income. More importantly, these findings indicate that Lowell's socioeconomic transformation also affected the French-Canadian migratory flow and, thus, the migrants' adaptation to this new reality even before their departure. Clearly, such "adaptation" on the part of prospective immigrants reflected a margin of autonomy that these immigrants exercised within the imposed limitations arising from the structural and conjunctural conditions. Immigrants carefully evaluated the changing market conditions at home and at their destination and accordingly modified their initial projects or devised new strategies, endeavouring to make the best use of their familial and community resources.

### 5.3 THE OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE OF FRENCH-CANADIAN MEN

If Lowell's radically changing market conditions had an immediate impact on the migratory flow of French Canadians, it also affected the household organization of French-Canadian families already living in the city. Children's contribution to their family's income clearly shrank. The key element in the new labour market conditions was the improved occupational status of French-Canadian male workers.

As Lowell's economic activities diversified, so did the jobs held by French-Canadian male workers. Whereas in an earlier period, a great number of French-Canadian male workers were employed as day labourers, by the early twentieth century, many French-Canadian workers had found better paid or more stable jobs in the city. The influx of southern and eastern Europeans, coupled with the effects of the World War I boom, helped to modify the bottom-of-the-

ladder positions of French-Canadian men. Still, French-Canadian men were restricted to the manual work sector, and the city's occupational hierarchy endured. In comparison to the late nineteenth-century cohorts, a growing proportion of French-Canadian men found employment in semi-skilled and skilled trades while the proportion of day labourers decreased considerably. Only a limited number of French-Canadian men held white collar jobs. The predominantly working-class profile of French-Canadian men notwithstanding, there was also a small nuclei of independent business owners and professionals. The presence of this ethnic "middle-class" points to the development of a mature and diverse community. Finally, a close analysis of the textile workers, the largest proportion of French-Canadian male workers in the city, confirms the improved occupational status observed among French-Canadian men in general. It also suggests that the appeal of the textile industry, hitherto on the decline among the American-born, was temporarily revived. These new tendencies may be explained by the structural changes this industry underwent and the life cycle stages of French-Canadian workers.

### *5.3.1. The Classification of Work*

Gérard Bouchard and his research group, the IREP (Institut interuniversitaire de recherches sur les populations), have developed a scale for classifying different occupations present in the Saguenay region of Quebec from 1842 to 1971.<sup>9</sup> First, occupations are divided into two major categories — manual labour and non-manual labour. These categories are then grouped into nine sub-

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<sup>9</sup>Gérard Bouchard, *Tous les métiers du monde: le traitement des données professionnelles en histoire sociale* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1996), especially 67, 68, "Annex."

categories based on the technical difficulty and the level of responsibility that each job involves. The sub-categories include: (a) semi-and unskilled manual workers, (b) skilled manual workers, (c) craftsmen, (d) farmers, (e) semi- and unskilled white-collar workers, (f) administrators and skilled white-collar workers, (g) those who work in the liberal professions, (h) industrialists and small shopkeepers, and (i) undetermined.

The logic of above classification notwithstanding, David Montgomery alerts us to the arbitrariness of terms such as "skilled" and "unskilled" and to the judgement and experience required by many types of operative work, despite its repetitive nature. The case of an experienced power-loom weaver, Cora Pellerin, an immigrant daughter of French-Canadian immigrants to Manchester, New Hampshire, illustrates how work, classified as "semi-skilled," nevertheless required comprehensive knowledge of power-loom functions, and swift judgement so as to respond promptly to any kind of unforeseen abnormality. Cora once said about her work as a power-loom weaver: "You have to have it in you to be a good weaver. You either fit in or you don't." Cora's interview further reveals how her work would proceed. It consisted primarily of watching for breaks in the yarn that would spoil the machine's output. However, when the loom would get out of order, a bobbin would drop and sprout a whole new warp. The warp would have to be cut out and the weaver would have to start the entire process all over again. In order to manage such a situation quickly, the weaver had to learn the patterns with five or six colours "not just in your hands," but "in your head too."<sup>10</sup> The terms "skilled" and "unskilled" constituted

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<sup>10</sup>Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, 79-82. See also David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: the Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 116.

only one way of classifying the levels of knowledge, judgement, and supervision required for various kinds of work.

While the boundaries between skills often shifted, in response to cultural changes or workplace struggles, the nature of work and the attendant skills were constantly changing.<sup>11</sup> The machinist in the pre-Civil War period was, for instance, described by pioneer trade unionist Jonathan Fincher as "a cross between a millwright and a whitesmith, a fitter, finisher, locksmith, etc." Within half a century, "machinists" saw their job description evolve from builders of machinery to those who cut and shaped metal parts on machine tools.<sup>12</sup>

In an effort to take into account some of the ambiguities inherent in terms such as "skilled," "semi-skilled," and "unskilled," I have modified Gérard Bouchard's scale by grouping into one category all operatives such as weavers, spinners, and carders, and craft workers such as machinists, mechanics, and engineers. Under that one category, however, I have also created sub-categories which will enable us to distinguish trades according to the degree of difficulty of the work they require. These sub-categories include operatives and semi-skilled workers, machinists, carpenters, and other craft workers. Other less qualified workers, such as bobbin boys, sweepers, and labourers are treated as unskilled workers.

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<sup>11</sup>Christina Burr highlights the gender dimension of the skills. Bearing little relationship to the level of training or ability required to perform them, "skill" classifications define men's work as skilled and women's work as unskilled or semi-skilled. Christina Burr, "Defending 'the Art Preservative': Class and Gender Relations in the Printing Trades Unions, 1850-1914," *Labour/Le Travail* 31 (Spring 1993): 47-73. I thank Professor Denyse Baillargeon for bringing this article to my attention .

<sup>12</sup>Jonathan C. Fincher, "Early History of Our Organization," *Machinists and Blacksmiths International Journal* (February 1872): 520, quoted in Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 181-82.



### 5.3.2. *Labourers and Other Unskilled Workers*

As the range of occupations diversified, the occupational status of French-Canadian male workers generally improved. One of the clearest signs of this development was the decrease in the number of French-Canadian males working as day labourers in New England cities.<sup>13</sup> In 1910, according to my census data, only 13.9 percent of French-Canadian male workers in Lowell were listed as labourers. A decade later, the percentage of labourers had declined again, to 8.2 percent. Also, the absolute number of labourers in my sample declined from 46 to 27, a drop of almost 40 percent. This is a significant change from 1870 when two thirds of adult French-Canadian males in the city were unskilled workers, and labourers constituted the largest category, accounting for nearly 60 percent of the unskilled work force.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, close observation of the labourer population reveals that as long-time French-Canadian residents (mostly, Canadian-born individuals) in this city — and elsewhere in New England — abandoned this occupation, the new generation of labourers did not enter the occupation in sufficient

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<sup>13</sup>During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, French-Canadian males worked in a dozen New England textile communities and were concentrated overwhelmingly in unskilled occupations. In Fall River, for example, the 1869 city directory shows that about half of the French-Canadian heads of family were working as labourers, whereas no more than one out of four was employed in textile manufacturing. At about the same time, in Holyoke, more than one quarter of French-Canadian adult males worked as labourers, forming the largest occupational group. Textile mill employment made up the second largest occupational group after that of labourers, with 18 percent of the working population in the cotton textile industry and four percent in the woollen textile industry. Following closely in third place were construction and building-related workers. In Lewiston, Maine, as many as 41 percent of French-Canadian family heads were listed as day labourers. See Philip T. Silva, Jr., "The Spindle City," 345-46; Peter Haebler, "Habitants in Holyoke," 66-68; Yves Frenette, "La genèse d'une communauté canadienne-française," 223.

<sup>14</sup>Frances Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 106.

numbers to compensate for the loss. While the decrease was particularly evident among first-generation workers, whose number dropped by nearly half, the number of second generation labourers slightly increased (see Table 5.6). The Lowell data also indicates that the proportion of household heads among French-Canadian male labourers decreased from 65.2 percent to 55.6 percent, while that of their sons remained at about the same level, approximately 30 percent. Clearly, by the early twentieth century it was less likely that the principal male wage-earner of a French-Canadian family worked as an unskilled labourer. A growing proportion of them earned wages in better-paid, and possibly stabler, occupations.

### *5.3.3. Industrial Workers*

According to my data, the range of occupations listed for French Canadians rose from 107 in 1910 to 127 in 1920, an increase of 19 percent. The variety of occupations was still smaller than that of the Irish (182 occupations in 1910 and 172 in 1920). Nonetheless, within the city's economic structure, a growing number of French Canadians found higher-level jobs which offered them greater security.

Over the decade, the proportion of manual workers among French Canadians remained close to 80 percent, higher than that of males in both the Irish and American groups (see Tables 5.7 and 5.8). About 70 percent of Irish males and slightly more than half of American males were listed as manual workers. As for Greek and Portuguese males, the vast majority (about 90 percent) were manual workers. Over the ten-year period, while the percentage of Greek males who were manual workers fell considerably, that of Portuguese males remained over 90 percent.

Table 5.6  
 Number of Sampled French-Canadian Men Working as  
 Labourers in Lowell, 1910 and 1920

Birthplace	1910	1920
Canada (French) (% of labourers among Canadian-born workers)	38 (16.2%)	18 (10.0%)
U.S.A. (% of labourers among U.S.-born workers)	8 (8.7%)	9 (6.1%)
Total (% of total number of French-Canadian labourers)	46 (13.9%)	27 (8.2%)
Number of French-Canadian Male Workers	330	328

Source: Compiled by author from the Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal  
 Census Schedules.

Table 5.7  
Occupational Distribution of Male Workers in Five Ethnic Groups, Lowell, 1910  
(Number of Individuals per 100)

	French Canadian	Irish	American	Portuguese	Greek
Manual Workers					
Unskilled	77.2	71.9	54.7	92.6	88.3
Semi- and skilled	23.9	18.3	9.1	22.2	28.9
White Collar	53.3	53.6	45.6	70.4	59.4
Lower white collar (clerical etc.)	10.0	18.3	28.5	-	-
Upper white collar	6.1	11.3	19.0	-	-
Professional	3.9	7.0	9.5	-	-
Independent	2.4	1.3	3.3	-	-
Other	4.8	5.0	8.0	7.4	5.5
	5.5	3.7	5.1	-	5.5
Total (N)	100.0 (330)	100.0 (459)	100.0 (274)	100.0 (27)	100.0 (128)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

- Notes: 1. Ethnic group is determined by the place of birth of individuals and their parents.  
2. Because numbers are rounded, the total in percentage may not equal one hundred.  
3. Other occupations include farming and unspecified.

Table 5.8  
Occupational Distribution of Male Workers in Five Ethnic Groups, Lowell, 1920  
(Number of Individuals per 100)

	French Canadian	Irish	American	Portuguese	Greek
Manual workers					
Unskilled	79.7	71.6	58.4	91.3	78.7
Semi- and skilled	16.5	22.2	11.9	39.6	24.4
White collar	63.4	49.4	46.5	52.1	54.3
Lower white collar (clerical etc.)	12.5	20.8	25.7	6.3	6.3
Upper white collar	5.8	13.2	11.9	4.2	5.5
Professional	6.7	7.6	13.8	2.1	0.8
Independent	0.9	0.4	4.5	-	1.6
Other (Number)	3.4	4.7	9.0	2.1	11.8
	3.4	2.5	2.6	-	0.8
Total (N)	100.0 (328)	100.0 (486)	100.0 (312)	100.0 (48)	100.0 (127)

Source: Compiled by author from Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

- Notes: 1. Ethnic group is determined by the place of birth of individuals and their parents.  
2. Because numbers are rounded, the total in percentage may not equal one hundred.  
3. Other occupations include farming and unspecified.

Within the manual work sector the largest proportion of French-Canadian male workers were industrial operatives (semi-skilled) and skilled workers whose tasks required a relatively high level of judgement and experience (see Table 5.9). This category (skilled and semi-skilled) included various textile manufacturing workers such as carders, weavers, spinners, slashers, knitters, loom-fixers, and operatives, as well as workers in other types of manufacturing: shoe cutters, stitchers, and bobbin makers. The proportion of semi-skilled workers among the French-Canadian male manual workers did not change significantly over the decade, accounting for a little over one third of the total French-Canadian male manual labour force. Michel De[s]marais, forty-year-old weaver in a cotton factory, was one of these French-Canadian operatives. The 1920 census listed Michel as having migrated to the United States in 1885; his wife Angeline, thirty-three, worked as a looper at a hosiery factory.<sup>15</sup>

The proportion of occupations for which less expertise was required — back boys, bobbin boys, yarn boys, sweepers, and various kinds of helpers — also changed little over the decade, remaining below 10 percent. Pierre Lalonde was fifty years old when he was listed as working as a labourer in 1920 census. It is difficult to imagine how Pierre could have supported his family of eight — thirty-eight-year-old wife, Amanda, and seven children aged from four to fourteen — with his meager wage. By then, however, French-Canadian household heads who were listed as unskilled workers had become a small minority.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 576, ward 10, dwelling 28, family number 65.

<sup>16</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 185, ward 2, dwelling 41, family number 86.

Table 5.9  
 Leading Occupations of French-Canadian and Irish Men in the Manual Labour  
 Sector, Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

		1910	1920
<hr/>			
French-Canadian Male Workers			
<hr/>			
Unskilled		23.9	16.5
	Labourers	14.2	8.3
	Others	9.7	8.2
Skilled and semi-skilled		53.3	63.4
	Operatives and other semi-skilled	34.8	36.8
	Machinists	6.8	12.6
	Carpenters and other craft workers	7.1	12.2
		<hr/>	
	Total	100.0	100.0
	(Number of male workers in the above jobs)	(225)	(250)
	Percentage of the above workers in the total number of French-Canadian male workers	69.2	76.7
<hr/>			
Irish Male Workers			
<hr/>			
Unskilled		17.6	22.2
	Labourers	10.4	15.3
	Others	7.2	6.9
Skilled and semi-skilled		47.3	49.4
	Operatives and other semi-skilled	32.9	25.7
	Machinists	9.6	5.0
	Carpenters and other craft workers	4.8	11.2
		<hr/>	
	Total	100.0	100.0
	(Number of male workers in the above jobs)	(268)	(300)
	Percentage of the above workers in the total number of Irish male workers	58.4	62.1
<hr/>			

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Census Schedules.

In contrast to the unskilled workers, there were important changes among certain groups of craft workers. In particular, the percentage of those listed as mechanics, machinists, and engineers almost doubled over the decade. By 1920, these mechanic-related occupations constituted the second largest group among working French-Canadian males, replacing that of labourer which had been the second largest occupational group a decade earlier. Three sons of the Lambert family worked as machinists. A widowed son, Arthur, thirty-five, worked in a garage while two single sons, Adélar, twenty-four, and Victor, twenty, both worked in machine shops. Their wages were supplemented by the earnings brought home by their seventy-one-year-old father who worked as a driver and a thirty-one year old sister who worked as bookkeeper in an office. The mother, sixty-two, and an older single sister, thirty-two, both stayed home.<sup>17</sup> The proportion of craft workers, including carpenters, plumbers, tinsmiths, blacksmiths, and tanners, also rose significantly. Alfred Parent, forty-seven years old in 1920, was typical of these craft workers. Alfred worked as a carpenter at home.<sup>18</sup> His eighteen year old son, Raymond, was a engineer assistant at a textile school. Two other sons, one fifteen years old and another of unknown age, were not working.

In 1920, French-Canadian male workers were clustered in certain groups of manual labour jobs to a greater degree than their

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<sup>17</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 195, ward 2, dwelling 28, family number 34.

<sup>18</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 179, ward 3, dwelling 55, family number 52. Given Alfred Parent's indication of workplace (house) and occupation (carpenter), he might well be classified as a self-employed or small entrepreneur. Yet the census schedule also reported that Alfred was an employee and not an independent business owner (or someone working on his own account). Accordingly, I have classified Alfred in the category of skilled workers and not among the small business owners.



Irish counterparts. In particular, French Canadians were concentrated in the following skilled and semi-skilled positions: operative work (36.8 percent of French-Canadian males as compared to 25.7 percent of their Irish counterparts), machinists (12.6 percent as compared to 5.0 percent), and other craftsmen such as carpenters, blacksmiths, plumbers, tinsmiths, painters, and tanners (12.2 percent as compared to 11.2 percent). Curiously, among the Irish the proportion of labourers increased over the 1910-1920 period from 10.4 percent to 15.3 percent. This was in sharp contrast to the notable decrease in the proportion of French-Canadian labourers during the same period. In all categories of unskilled jobs except that of labourer, there were no significant differences between French-Canadian and Irish male workers. These figures seem to suggest that over the decade, and as far as manual labour is concerned, the occupational profile of French Canadians in Lowell increasingly included industrial operatives and skilled workers, especially engineers, machinists, and mechanics, as well as craft workers such as carpenters, masons, plumbers, and tinsmiths. While the relative composition of Irish workers in the labour force did not change substantially over the decade, French-Canadians worked more and more often as skilled and semi-skilled workers and craftsmen, quickly catching up to their Irish counterparts in occupational status (see Table 5.9).

As the overall job status of French-Canadian males improved, they also gained some ground within the cotton textile industry. In its 1908-1909 study, the Immigration Commission reported that, on average, Lowell's French-Canadian cotton factory workers eighteen years of age or over, earned slightly more than Irish males. The average weekly wage of a French-Canadian male was \$9.77, compared to \$9.70 earned by his Irish counterpart.<sup>19</sup> This finding

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<sup>19</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 253.

was significant because it marked the first time since settling in this city in the 1860s that French-Canadian male workers had surpassed their Irish counterparts in average weekly earnings in the cotton mills, even though it was only by a few cents. This was another clear sign which indicated the occupational advancement of French-Canadian male workers in Lowell.

Despite the above findings, however, changes in the profile of French-Canadian male workers were restricted to the manual work sector: as far as white-collar jobs were concerned, the small proportion of French Canadians in this sector contrasts sharply with the number of their Irish and American counterparts. While in 1910, ten percent of French-Canadian male workers in Lowell had white-collar jobs (at either the clerical level or higher), there was a far higher proportion of Irish (18.3 percent) and American (28.5 percent) male workers in the same category (see Tables 5.7 and 5.8). Although by 1920 the proportion of French-Canadian males in this occupational category had increased to 12.5 percent, the proportion of their Irish counterparts increased to 20.8 percent while that of the Americans decreased to 25.7 percent. Moreover, by 1910 a large proportion of the French-Canadian male white-collar workers occupied lower-level, semi-skilled positions, such as salesmen, clerks, watchmen, and police officers<sup>20</sup>; they were not found in the white-collar upper echelon, which comprised foremen, "second hands,"<sup>21</sup> inspectors, managers, and teachers — all of which

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<sup>20</sup>The classification of police officers here may raise some eyebrows. This categorization adheres to criteria developed by Gérard Bouchard, including the nature of effort (manual or non-manual), level of responsibility, and level of technical difficulty. For further discussion on this point, see Gérard Bouchard, *Tous les métiers du monde*, chap. 4, especially 89.

<sup>21</sup>This was a term used in documents of the period. "Second hand" designated a foreman or second person in charge of an operating room in a textile factory. Note the manuscript census also listed "third hands" in the

required a high degree of responsibility. A decade later, however, the ratio was reversed and more French Canadians could be found in upper levels than in lower ones. As for the "new immigrants," only a small fraction were admitted into the realm of white-collar work. In 1910, none of the Portuguese or Greek males were listed in this category, although a decade later, the proportion in both groups had increased to 6.3 percent. These figures point clearly to the predominance of American and, to a lesser degree, Irish, workers in clerical and supervisory ranks.

The above findings confirm the thesis of "playing within" by which immigrant workers actively coped within the "walls" of the segmented labour market but were unable to overcome them. French-Canadian male workers in Lowell made continuous occupational progress over the period 1910 to 1920, but this progress was limited to the blue-collar positions. Despite the increased proportion of skilled workers, the occupational status of French-Canadian males improved only in blue-collar jobs. The upward mobility of French-Canadian males within the manual labour sector was partly promoted by the arrival of a large number of newcomers on the local labour market.<sup>22</sup> These new arrivals included — as

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textile factories. See also Blewett, *The Last Generation*, Glossary, 321.

<sup>22</sup>As has been shown in chap. 3, the number of "new immigrants" increased considerably at the turn of century. A large proportion of them became manual workers. During the decade from 1910 and 1920, for instance, the proportion of unskilled workers among Portuguese male workers almost doubled, and the proportion for their Greek counterparts changed relatively little, whereas the proportion of French-Canadian unskilled workers decreased considerably (see Tables 5.7 and 5.8).

In his discussion on the labour market segmentation, Dirk Hoerder classifies cases of "split labour markets" — where two or more groups of immigrant workers competed with each other — into two patterns. According to Hoerder, in fast-growing economies, "senior" migrant workers and the U.S.-born generations either found equal-paying positions elsewhere or moved up into better jobs. In other cases, new low-paying jobs became available, and in a

already mentioned — Greek and Portuguese workers as well as other newcomers to the city, such as Poles, Turks, Syrians, and Armenians. In the structured hierarchy of the city's labour market, these new groups entered at the occupational levels just below those of French Canadians. It should be noted that the war temporarily interrupted the entrance of the "new immigrants." This had significant impact on the dynamics of the local labour market, and subsequently, also transformed the occupational positions of French-Canadian men. Unfortunately, my data, derived from the decennial census schedules, do not allow me to examine closely what happened during the war years (1916-1918). Still, my sample points to the relative advancement of French-Canadian male workers, which is most evident by the decrease of French-Canadian males working as day labourers. This relative upward mobility notwithstanding, French-Canadian men were mainly confined to the manual labour sector.

#### 5.3.4. *Independent Business Owners*

Alongside the working-class majority, there was also a small nucleus of independent shopkeepers and professionals who made up the middle-class elite of the French-Canadian community in Lowell.<sup>23</sup> This ethnic *petite bourgeoisie* was mostly composed of

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process of substratification new groups filled the bottom level of the local labour market. The case of Lowell's French Canadians in the early twentieth century confirms the first pattern although the better paying jobs they found were largely limited to the blue-collar sector. Dirk Hoerder, "International Labor Markets and Community Building by Migrant Workers in the Atlantic Economies," in *A Century of European Migrations*, ed. Vecoli and Sinke, 78-106, especially 93.

<sup>23</sup>In 1910, sixteen French-Canadian males of my sample were listed in this category, as either employer or self-employed: proprietors of a wood yard (2), candy store owner, boardinghouse owner, caretaker (1 each); variety store dealer and wood dealer (1 each); barbers (3); contractors in a butcher shop and in an unspecified sector (1 each); grocer and storekeeper (1 each); clothier and

owners of small businesses (such as fruit and vegetable stores, candy stores, butcher shops, bakeries, barbers, clothiers, and jewellers), but also building contractors (including wood yard owners and carpenters), boardinghouse and restaurant owners, and a very small number of professionals (such as physicians and pharmacists). Although few in number, the range of services they offered placed these small businesses at the core of everyday life for the French-Canadian (and other) immigrants in the city. Yvonne Lagassé's oral history vividly depicts a variety of independent small stores in Little Canada.

Les magasins, y en avait beaucoup! On n'avait pas besoin d'aller en ville pour avoir besoin de quelque chose. Premièrement, je va's commencer par la rue Cheever. [...] Y avait Mademoiselle Coutu qui avait un salon de beauté; après y avait Monsieur Racette qui avait un magasin, qui a tenu un magasin d'bonbons. Après est venu un magasin de viandes. Après est devenu un Monsieur Parent qui a acheté ça. Après ça encore un autre Racette qui avait un magasin d'viandes. Après est venu un magasin de viandes. Après est devenu un Monsieur Parent qui a acheté ça. Après ça encore un autre Racette qui avait un magasin d'viandes. Après ça est venu Monsieur Mayotte qui avait une bakery qui faisait le pain et, le samedi soir, cuisait les binnes. Puis ça a été Mademoiselle Dubois, Mademoiselle Rita Dubois qui est aujourd'hui Madame Brunelle. Et après, Monsieur Albert Sawyer. [...] Après ça, d'l'aut'bord d'la rue, y avait une Madame Laurent qui a tenu un magasin. Avant elle, c'était Monsieur Millette [...] (on l'appelait "P'tit Coeur Millette") qui appartient un autre p'tit magasin d'bonbons. Après ça, on avait un cordonnier, un Monsieur Ouellette. Après ça, la pharmacie Toupin qui f'sait l'coin d'la rue Aiken et d'la rue Cheever.<sup>24</sup>

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fruit peddler (1 each). In 1920, there were eleven people of my sample in this category: proprietors of a wood yard (2), restaurant owner, meat market owner (1 each); contractors (2), roofer and carpenter (1 each); barber; baker; jeweller (1 each).

<sup>24</sup>Yvonne Lagassé, interview with Brigitte Lane, reproduced in Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions*, Appendix J, I. Les rues et les magasins: 514-25, especially 515-16.

Yvonne's interview reveals a sense of the community bonds that these small businesses — largely French-Canadian, but including others such as Jewish stores and a Chinese laundry — nurtured with their clientele. Yvonne warmly remembers some of the store owners such as Madame Coutu who sold hats made to order ("Elle était magnifique!") and Monsieur Landry, the owner of a candy store, who walked with a cane because he was paralyzed in both of his legs. His daughter worked with him in this shop. They occasionally made "crebags" by putting some extra change in the bottom of candy bags.<sup>25</sup>

Businesses offered French-Canadian immigrants a far more attractive option than blue-collar work. Shop owners escaped the pressures of industrial work in the textile factories and enjoyed a sense of autonomy. Therefore, a move from labourer or textile worker to small business owner represented an important step for immigrants.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, maintaining a store or restaurant was demanding work. For instance, bakeries in Little Canada, which sold cooked beans as well as bread, began preparations at four o'clock in the morning.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the long hours of exhausting work, store owners constantly faced the risk of financial ruin by extending credit to hard-pressed clients. Yvonne recalls a bakery on

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<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 518-19.

<sup>26</sup>Franca Iacovetta discusses the significance of becoming a shopowner in the case of Italian immigrants in post-World War II Toronto. Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 64.

<sup>27</sup>Lagassé, interview with Lane, reproduced in Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions*, 514-25.

Ward Street:

D'l'aut'bord d'la rue, à la gauche, était le bon Monsieur — là, vena't Monsieur Langlois! Il était charitable, à la force du mot! Vous savez qu'autrefois, les gens c'était payé le samedi midi — à midi, midi moins dix, midi moins l'quart. Le monde dans les magasins de grocery avait pas l'argent au pouce comme aujourd'hui. L'achetaient à crédit, y avait un livre. A mesure qu'on l'achetait, on l'achetait. I' nous marquaient ça dans notre livre. A la fin d'la semaine, le monde allait payer. Y a bien des gens des fois qui travaillaient pas. I'donnaient deux, trois piasses sur leur bill. Monsieur Langlois jam[a]lis qu'i'disait un mot. Sa femme des fois, elle aimait pas ça. I'disa't: "Oh, i'vont nous payer!" Je vous dis que ce Monsieur Langlois là, oh, il était charitable!<sup>28</sup>

Langlois' charity may well have remained within the bounds of financial prudence. Still, Langlois, like many other small business owners, had to live with the threat of failure.

Business failures may not be the only reason for explaining the decrease in the number of independent shopkeepers and professionals between 1910 and 1920. Over the period under study, the proportion of independent shopkeepers and professionals fell both among French-Canadian and Irish males (see Tables 5.6 and 5.7). The proportion among their American counterparts remained more or less steady, twice as high as that of French-Canadian men. In 1910, 7.2 percent of French Canadian male workers in Lowell could be found in this category, compared to 6.3 percent and 10.3 percent, respectively, for their Irish and Americans counterparts. By 1920, the proportion of French Canadians in this category declined to 4.3 percent, that of the Irish to 5.1 percent, while the proportion of Americans increased to 13.5 percent.

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 520-21.

According to my census data, while there were no Greeks or Portuguese listed as professionals, the proportion of these groups listed as independent shopkeepers was close to or larger than that recorded for the French-Canadian and Irish groups. In 1920 especially, the large proportion (11.8 percent) of Greek independent shopkeepers and businessmen stands in sharp contrast to the proportion noted a decade earlier, as well as to the percentages recorded for other ethnic groups (Tables 5.6 and 5.7). A large part of this group was made up of males listed as running a "coffeehouse," an important meeting place for Greek men in the city. In the words of a Greek immigrant to the city, for them a coffeehouse was "a very inexpensive club house."<sup>29</sup> They would frequent such establishments to play cards, discuss Greek politics, and exchange news from home as well as information about jobs in the city and elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the rapid rise of Greek independent shopkeepers points to the vivacity of the coffeehouse culture for the Greek men of Lowell.

There is insufficient evidence to determine the reasons for the slight decline in the proportion of independent shopkeepers among French-Canadian and Irish men. Two hypotheses may be advanced. For one, the effect of World War I drew a greater number of workers to the manufacturing sector in order to meet the enormous demands for cloth and artillery. In the early twentieth century, the textile industry had undoubtedly found a large portion of its labour force among the inexhaustible and cheap labour power

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<sup>29</sup>Nicholas Georgoulis, interview with Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 255-63, especially 260.

<sup>30</sup>A photograph of Greek men sitting around a table in one of the coffeehouses appears in *Fixed in Time: Photographs of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1860-1940* (Lowell: Lowell Historical Society, 1983), ed. Lewis Karabatsos and Robert McLeod Jr., photograph number 76.



that had flooded into the northern industrial centres of the United States from southern and eastern Europe. But with the wartime interruption of immigration from these regions, the textile industry was obliged to rely on contingents drawn from "old immigrant" groups, and may have attracted a certain number of French Canadians and Irish men who had been working in non-industrial sectors or running small businesses.

Another hypothesis I propose here, closely connected to the one above, is that a small proportion of those who were independent businessmen and shopkeepers were not representative of the "middle-class" in the contemporary sense, but were people who might easily make the transition between these independent occupations and industrial or white-collar jobs, doing so in either direction. Undoubtedly, one moved from business ownership to textile work more unwillingly than one did in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, structural factors — such as the war-time boom — may have made such changes less overwhelming. For example, at times these people might run bakeries and grocery stores, while at other times, when the wartime economy temporarily boosted the wages of workers, a significant number of them would go into the factories. When the factories began to downsize or close down their operations, some would probably return to their small businesses. This sort of "interchangeability" of workers cannot be confirmed by my Lowell sample data since they do not allow us to follow the occupational itineraries of workers between the censuses of 1910 and 1920.<sup>31</sup> Still, Yvonne's oral history account shows that small

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<sup>31</sup>Referring to the Jewish garment industry in New York city in the early twentieth century, Virginia Yans-McLaughlin observes that in most of the small workshops, which required little capital investment, artisan bosses worked besides their workers; often "the boss himself had just climbed out of the ranks of wage labor and could easily slide back to his former status." Although one cannot compare these Jewish-owned sweat shops to Lowell's large-scale textile factories, McLaughlin's comment is indicative of yet another

businesses frequently changed hands. This point remains to be further explored in the future.<sup>32</sup>

### 5.3.5. Textile Workers

The textile industry was Lowell's largest labour market and the most important employer of French Canadians, who toiled therein as manual workers, with few exceptions. The proportion of these workers engaged in the city's cotton, woollen, hosiery, and carpet factories fell from 37.1 percent in 1910 to 32.0 percent in 1920 (see Table 5.10). In 1910, among French-Canadian male textile workers, over 90 percent of the first-generation (Canadian-born) workers and more than 95 percent of the second-generation (U.S.-born) workers were listed as manual workers, while a small minority (6.3 percent of the first-generation; none for the second-generation) were listed as non-manual workers (see Table 5.11).<sup>33</sup> In 1920, the

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case of "interchangeability" of that time between employers and employees. See Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, "Metaphors of Self in History: Subjectivity, Oral Narrative, and Immigration Studies," in *Immigration Reconsidered*, ed. Yans-McLaughlin, 254-290, especially, 267.

<sup>32</sup>See the forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation by Brigitte Violette on the French-Canadian middle class in Fall River, Massachusetts. "Régénération des élites au sein d'une communauté Franco-Américaine: le cas de Fall River, Massachusetts, 1870-1930," Département d'histoire, Université de Montréal.

<sup>33</sup>See Laurence Gross for a reproduction of part of a letter from Boott's agent E. W. Thomas to Frederick A. Flather, dated 16 May 1912. See also Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 141-44. Thomas' letter includes valuable information with regard to the employees listed by occupation in various departments. Gross, however, alerts us that Thomas' figures were not always reliable. For instance, (operation) rooms of employment indicated in the letter may be misleading as to the kinds of jobs each worker held. For example, although the letter indicates that the Portuguese were concentrated in the mule-spinning room, they were more likely to be in the low-paying jobs of back boy rather than working as the better-paid and more prestigious mule-spinner. Nevertheless, the figures are one of the most precious accounts of employees' records at the time. It is, therefore, useful to look at them here. According to

Table 5.10  
 Sampled French-Canadian Men in Lowell's Labour Force, 1910 and 1920

	1910	1920
City's total male work force in the sample (Number)	100% (1,635)	100% (1,800)
Total French-Canadian men in the sample (Number)	20.1% (330)	18.2% (328)
French-Canadian male textile workers (Number)	37.1% (122)	32.0% (105)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Table 5.11  
Occupational Distribution of French-Canadian Male Textile Workers by Birth Place,  
Lowell, 1910 and 1920 (Number per 100)

	1910		1920	
	Percentage	(N)	Percentage	(N)
<b>Canadian-born</b>				
Manual	90.5	(86)	86.2	(50)
Unskilled	30.5	(29)	5.2	(3)
Skilled and semi-skilled	60	(57)	81	(47)
White collar	6.3	(6)	12.1	(7)
Clerical	2.1	(2)	1.7	(1)
Upper white collar	4.2	(4)	10.3	(6)
Unspecified	3.2	(3)	1.7	(1)
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>(95)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>(58)</b>
<b>U.S.-born</b>				
Manual	96.2	(26)	89.4	(42)
Unskilled	18.5	(5)	29.8	(14)
Skilled and semi-skilled	77.8	(21)	59.6	(28)
White collar	-	-	4.3	(2)
Clerical	-	-	-	-
Upper white collar	-	-	4.3	(2)
Unspecified	3.7	(1)	6.4	(3)
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>(27)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>(47)</b>

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

proportion of French-Canadian male manual workers declined slightly (86.2 percent of first-generation workers; 89.4 percent of second-generation workers) whereas the proportion of non-manual textile workers increased (over 12 percent of first-generation workers; 4.3 percent of second-generation workers). These changes again indicate an upward mobility of French-Canadian male workers.

An examination of French-Canadian male textile workers in terms of age, generation, and household status points to a change in the relationship of French Canadian men to this industry. At the turn of the century, as a result of the structural transformations in textile manufacturing, the degree of attraction this industry held for French Canadians had decreased significantly.<sup>34</sup> By 1920, however, the situation seems to have changed once again. The French-Canadian labour force renewed its interest in working for the textile industry, but the appeal was specific to older people and the same degree of appeal did not extend to the youth. In general, the French-Canadian male labour force in the cotton industry was now older, and increasingly composed of second generation workers, while a growing proportion of the first generation workers were household heads aged forty-five years and over.

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Thomas' letter, the office workers in 1917-18, including both men and women, all had British or Irish surnames. Although French Canadians, like the Americans, English, and Irish, appeared in all departments, the predominance of French Canadians was notable in certain rooms such as weaving, ring-spinning, and spooling. As for the new immigrants, Thomas' chart shows an even higher predominance in certain areas. The Portuguese, for instance, were working in only seven departments and, in particular, were clustered in the carding and weaving rooms.

<sup>34</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*, chap. 5, especially 134-36.

The composition of French Canadians in the city's textile industry changed considerably. Our census data reveal that, by the early twentieth century, the French-Canadian male work force in the textile industry was composed increasingly of older individuals (see Table 5.12). In 1910, a little less than a quarter of these male workers were aged forty-five years or older, while a decade later this proportion increased to almost one third. Conversely, during the same period the proportion of those between fifteen and twenty-four years of age fell from 33.6 percent to 28.6 percent. Children fifteen years of age or younger were no longer present, at least on the census list.<sup>35</sup> Phillip Cinqmars, a French-Canadian second hand in his late forties at the time of the 1920 census, was typical of this older workforce. Having migrated to the United States in 1881, Phillip was among the substantial number of French-Canadian men working in textile factories in Lowell. His oldest son, Robert, twenty-four, was also working in a cotton factory as a weaver. Neither his wife, Gertrude, forty-three, nor his three other sons aged between five and eleven, listed any occupation. Phillip's father-in-law, a seventy-four year old widower working as a machinist, probably contributed additional earnings to the household.<sup>36</sup>

Similar changes are also apparent when one looks at the occupational categories of first- and second-generation French-Canadian male cotton textile workers. According to a study done by

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<sup>35</sup>Findings from another New England state indicate a sharp decline in the percentage of working children in the late nineteenth century. In Rhode Island, for instance, from 1880 to 1900, the proportion of working French-Canadian children aged ten to fourteen had more than halved, going from two thirds to 30 percent, while that of children attending school had more than doubled, going from 30 percent to 70 percent. A significant proportion of these wage-contributing children were working in textile factories. See Ramirez, *On the Move*, 131.

<sup>36</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Population Census Schedules, 1920, district 177, ward 1, dwelling 10, family number 10.

Table 5.12  
 Age Distribution of French-Canadian Male Workers in the  
 Textile Industry, Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Workers per 100)

Age	1910	1920
14 or under	0	1.0
15 to 24	33.6	28.6
25 to 34	23.0	24.8
35 to 44	19.7	14.3
45 or over	23.0	31.4
Total (Number)	100.0 (122)	100.0 (105)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

the Immigration Commission using data from the 1900 census, the proportion of second-generation French Canadians in the New England cotton industry had by this time substantially declined.

Whereas 14.1 percent of the entire French-Canadian-born (first generation) population of male workers were in the cotton industry, of the American-born (second-generation) French-Canadian workers, less than half of that number, 6.7 percent, were employed in the same industry.<sup>37</sup>

In early twentieth-century Lowell, labour participation rates for the first and second generations indicate an important change in the composition of the French-Canadian work force in the cotton industry. While the proportion of French Canadians (of both sexes) employed in the industry rose, the extent of this increase differed considerably between the generations. Over the decade with which my study is concerned, the proportion of cotton workers among first generation French-Canadian men increased relatively little in comparison to the significant growth in the proportion of second-generation men (see Table 5.13). As for women, the difference between the first and second generations was less remarkable and both showed an increase markedly higher than that of the men.

The household status of French-Canadian male workers in the cotton industry also underwent transformation. While the total number of first-generation employees in the cotton industry fell, those who remained in the industry were increasingly heads of households rather than sons or other family members. In 1910, over half (55.9 percent) of first-generation male cotton workers were listed as heads of households, while by 1920, their proportion rose to

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<sup>37</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry* vol. 10, 9, 72. See also Ramirez, *On the Move*, 135.



Table 5.13  
 Labour Participation Rates of French-Canadian Workers in the Cotton Industry by  
 Birthplace, Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

Birthplace	Men		Women	
	1910	1920	1910	1920
French Canada	28.2	30.2	37.9	48.2
U.S.A.	17.4	27.1	24.2	30.8
All the French-Canadian Workers	25.2	28.8	32.8	38.0

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

80 percent (see Table 5.14). Conversely, the proportion of those first generation workers listed as sons fell from 29 percent in 1910 to 10.9 percent in 1920. In contrast, among the second generation, who almost doubled in number over the decade, the proportion of both those listed as heads of households and sons showed little change.

These new developments partly reflect different stages in the life cycle of the two generations. Although there was no official retirement age for textile workers, by 1920 many first generation workers had to leave their work as they grew older, often because of injury or health problems related to their hazardous and physically demanding jobs. A significant number of second-generation French Canadians, who were "spared textile labour" at an early age, now entered it for the first time.<sup>38</sup> Changes in the average age of French-Canadian male workers seem to further confirm this hypothesis. The census data indicate that during the decade with which my study is concerned, the average age of the first generation workers rose from thirty-five to forty-three years of age, while that of the second generation rose only slightly, increasing from twenty-six to twenty-seven years of age.

The demographic profile of the male French-Canadian labour force in the textile industry was also affected by a temporary expansion in the industry's production. The boom years in war-related industries such as textiles and cartridges may have had the effect of bringing in new workers drawn largely from the second generation, while retaining first-generation employees. As my findings above have shown, the French-Canadian workers' renewed interest in textile manufacturing was not a universal phenomenon, but depended rather on the age, generation, length of residence, and

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<sup>38</sup>Ramirez, "A Socioeconomic Profile," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 11 (spring 1983): 135.

Table 5.14  
 Household Relations of French-Canadian Men Employed in the Textile  
 Industry by Birth Place, Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Workers per 100)

	Canadian-born	U.S.-born
<b>1910</b>		
Household heads	55.9	34.6
Sons and sons-in-law	29.0	51.4
Other family members	4.3	3.7
Lodgers	10.8	7.4
Total (N)	100.0 (93)	100.0 (26)
<b>1920</b>		
Household heads	80.0	29.3
Sons and sons-in-law	10.9	51.2
Other family members	3.6	10.6
Lodgers	5.5	4.9
Total (N)	100.0 (55)	100.0 (41)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

- Notes: 1. Other family members include brothers, uncles, nephews, cousins, fathers, and fathers-in-law.  
 2. Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

household status of each worker.

The proportion of French-Canadian adult males in the textile industry fluctuated according to changes in local labour market conditions. Their participation in the leading industry of the city shrank or expanded as these men carved out as much as possible from what was available in the city's labour market. The structural and conjunctural factors which shaped migrants' occupational choice included their life cycle, the campaigns of Progressive reformers — to reduce the hours of work, to introduce factory inspection regulations, and to cast child labour in a negative light — the massive arrival of "new immigrants," the interruption of these arrivals during WWI, technological advancements, cost-efficient policies set out by the textile management, in addition to the effects of a "war boom." All these factors contributed to mould the socioeconomic conditions of the local labour market and the demographic characteristics of its labour force.

#### 5.4. ECONOMIC ROLES AND MALE PRESTIGE

Although labour and feminist historians generally agree that men and women experience class in specific ways, few scholars have examined the relations between male workers and families. Some of the few exceptions in recent historical and sociological studies suggest that family relations did not automatically alter when changes occurred in the wage-earning capacity of the household.<sup>39</sup> While the census data analyzed in this section cannot be used to substantiate claims about the relationship between men's earning-power and their status or prestige within the family, oral history accounts suggest that the two variables did not move in lockstep.

In the 1880s, at the peak of the population influx from Quebec to New England, French-Canadian male heads had greater difficulty finding stable work, and often ended up unemployed or working

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<sup>39</sup>This does not mean, however, that relationships of authority were fixed and predetermined. Recent studies in American women's history have shown that they were modified over time through conflict and negotiation. Among these studies, see for instance, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class Oppression," in *Hidden Aspect of Women's Work*, ed. Christine Bose, Roselyn Feldberg, and Natalie Sokoloff (New York: Praeger, 1987): 47-73; Dolores E. Janiewski, *Sisterhood Denied: Race, Gender, and Class in a New South Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Carole Turbin, *Working Women of Collar City: Gender, Class, and Community in Troy, New York, 1864-86* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 216. See also Mark Rosenfield, "'It Was a Hard Life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950," *Historical Papers/Communication historiques*, 1988 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, n. d.), 237-79; Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*; Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployment of Man and His Family* (New York: Arno Press, 1973). For work in immigration history on the relations between men and the family economy, see Lillian Petroff, "Sojourner and Settler: The Macedonian Presence in the City, 1903-1940," in *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*, ed. Harney, 177-203; Camela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicizing Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 69, nt. 39.

irregularly as day labourers. However, their wives and children were more likely to find work in the expanding textile sector. Under these circumstances, French-Canadian fathers and husbands were often obliged to play a complementary — if not subordinate — economic role compared to that of their wives and children who became the family members most likely to be engaged in paid work outside the home.<sup>40</sup>

My Lowell findings suggest that by the early twentieth century, in comparison to their counterparts in the late nineteenth century, French-Canadian male household heads experienced a marked increase in their economic significance, both in terms of the value of their take-home earnings and in the skills required and the responsibilities given to them in their work. As a greater proportion of men obtained more stable and higher ranking positions, the earlier role reversal in the household economies seemed to have been reversed — at least momentarily.

These changes in the economic role of male family heads may have had some influence in modifying the authority, power, and prestige that they held over other family members. Ramirez argues, for instance, that in the late nineteenth century, the destabilizing of the traditional economic hierarchy characterizing family life in rural Quebec had created, to some extent, a "marginalization" of the French-Canadian male family head. Yet it would be erroneous to assume that these changes automatically unsettled the customary hierarchy in family relations. Family relations seem to have remained more constant than did the changes in wage-earning power. Likewise, in the early twentieth century, as these men assumed greater economic significance than their fathers and

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<sup>40</sup>Ramirez, *On the Move*: 118-19; Frenette, "La genèse d'une communauté," 223; Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 106, 186.

grandfathers, they did not necessarily experience an increase in their share of control or authority over other family members.

Historians and sociologists have advanced interesting arguments with regard to the impact of changes in the economic contribution of family members on family relations. For instance, according to Joy Parr's work of early twentieth-century Paris, Ontario, and Mirra Komarovsky's study on the impact of male unemployment on American families, changes in the husband's economic role did not always bring immediate changes to his position of authority within the family.<sup>41</sup> He might maintain his nominal position as the head of the family at least temporarily, often throughout an extended period, and this bore little relation to his

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<sup>41</sup>Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 81, 299; Komarovsky, *The Unemployment of Man*, 24, 43-47, 76-82. Although Komarovsky's focus is not on immigrant families *per se*, her observation on the impact of the Depression on family relations is important in revealing the asymmetric balance in which men and women lived during unstable economic conditions. Komarovsky has explained that the male family head's loss of employment had a threefold significance: loss of his role as provider, diminished prestige, and change in daily routine. Because the loss of economic security weighed more heavily upon men than women, most men undoubtedly had a difficult time adjusting, and stubbornly resisted any change in their roles and family patterns. In the early stage of the family's adjustment — what Wight Bakke calls "unstable equilibrium" — when the woman attempted gainful employment, the division of labour in respect to domestic work tended to remain the same in that the wife was still responsible for the household. Even during the stage of "disorganization," when the wife took over the responsibility for financial managing and planning, the customary division of domestic chores was often maintained. More importantly, the husband might keep his "nominal position" as head of the household which other family members and he recognized only in title. As a result, no one in the family had a clear-cut customary status. According to Bakke, if this stage of the disorganization continued for any length of time, "the family could be destroyed as a unit." See also Robert Cooley Angell, *The Family Encounters the Depression* (New York: Scriber's Sons, 1936), 84, 17; Wight E. Bakke, *Citizens Without Work: A Study of the Effects of Unemployment upon the Workers' Social Relations and Practices* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 135-40, 182-84; Winifred D. Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values: 1920-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 111-13.

social and occupational status outside the family. Being aware of the necessity for keeping the family unit from falling apart, family members probably acted in a way so as to avoid radical modifications to the position of authority and prestige of the head of the household as well as to the pattern of daily work routines. In a similar way, one may speculate that during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the changes in family relationships to which Lowell's French-Canadian families were exposed were relatively minor when compared to the notable improvement that has been observed above in occupational status experienced by male heads. In other words, higher salaries earned by male heads of the family might not spontaneously translate into the reinforcement of their authority.

Measuring the "authority" of the male household head is a difficult task, as there is no readily available means of assessment. Moreover, circumstances varied from one family to another, which makes it difficult to advance valid generalizations. Del Chouinard of Lowell recalled in an interview the religious and strict father he knew as a child in the 1930s, and articulated the ideology of parental authority that he himself internalized:

Whether my father was right or wrong, he was still my father therefore he was always right. In turn, I've brought up my three daughters the same way. I am the head man; I am the man of the house. Whether I am right or wrong, I am still the father and the man of the house. I reserve the right to be right, although I am wrong.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Del Chouinard, interview with Mary Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 264-75, especially 266. Other family interviews also reveal the presence of a strong paternal authority within the family. See also Raymond Dubois (fictitious name), interview with Hareven and Langenbach, reproduced in Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 152-66, especially 163. Raymond Dubois, a French-Canadian son of American-born parents in Manchester, New Hampshire, remembers that his father was always respected as "the person



Even so, Del also revealed that his rebellious brother would occasionally stand up to their father. Clearly, within a given family, a particular constellation of personalities and dispositions could either reinforce or dilute the "norm" of paternal rule.

By the early twentieth century, men were undeniably the primary breadwinners in most French-Canadian households in Lowell. This was an important change from the situation three decades earlier when women and children easily found wage work in textile factories while husbands and fathers were often unemployed or worked irregularly. Despite the considerable changes that French-Canadian men underwent in their capacity as the family's breadwinners, their authority over their family members seemed to have changed relatively little.

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bringing home the bacon." Raymond recalls: "He was served first — at least in my family and the families of my friends. If I ate at their homes, their father was always served first. Respect. Today he's lucky if he can grab the pot, but in those days you'd get your fingers chopped off if you reached first."

Some of the oral history accounts from Hareven's research in Manchester bring to light revealing instances where the traditional allocation of domestic roles were redefined or modified. These cases indicate that as late as the 1930s, some French-Canadian husbands, driven by necessity or pragmatism, were willing to help their wage-earning wives by taking part in housekeeping work such as washing floors. See Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, 204-05. It should be pointed out, however, that the change in these cases is not the direct result of an increase or decrease in men's earning capacity *per se*. Rather, the central question emerging from these examples is married women's participation in paid work and its impact on the domestic division of labour. Clearly, this question, closely related to the larger one on the relation between women's sense of autonomy, their wage work, and the earning power of male household heads, constitutes a separate issue which needs a thorough examination. See also Heidi I. Hartmann, "The Family as the Locus of Gender, Class, and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 3: 366-94. See also chap. 6 of this study.

## 5.5. WAGES AND THE COST OF LIVING: THE CASE OF FRENCH-CANADIAN FAMILIES OF TEXTILE WORKERS

Despite the general occupational improvement that French-Canadian immigrant men made in the early 1900s, many of them still did not earn enough to support an entire family. In 1911, for example, the average annual income of French-Canadian male textile worker fell far short of the minimum cost of living.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, with chronic unemployment and underemployment, and dangerous working conditions, French-Canadian families constantly faced the threat of suddenly losing their men's wages. Examination of weekly wages, annual income, cost of living, and frequent lay-offs reveal the hard reality of wage-earning families in Lowell in the early twentieth century.

### *5.5.1. Weekly Wages and Annual Incomes, and the Cost of Living*

On a yearly basis, cotton textile workers brought home considerably less than other industrial workers. Cotton workers were among the lowest paid workers despite their long hours of work. According to Shirley Zebroski, in 1900, textile operatives earned on average ten cents an hour while other manufacturing workers earned twenty-one cents an hour. In 1903, the average work week in all manufacturing industries<sup>44</sup> was fifty-seven hours,

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<sup>43</sup>Scott Nearing, *Financing a Wage Earner's Family: A Survey of the Fact Bearing on Income and Expenditures in the Families of American Wage Earners* (New York: Huebsch, 1913), chaps. 3 and 4, especially 116-18. See also, Gross, *Industrial Decline*: 149.

<sup>44</sup>Zebroski does not clearly define the geographic extent of "all manufacturing industries," but the context of her writing suggests this refers to the manufacturing in New England. See Shirley Zebroski, "The 1903 Strike in the Lowell Cotton Mills," in *Surviving Hard Times*, ed. Blewett, 44-62.

compared to an average of sixty-two hours in the cotton factories. Moreover, a cotton manufacturing operative could expect to work only nine months a year, perhaps a few weeks more if he or she was lucky.<sup>45</sup> This was because of the irregularity of employment offered by the textile factories. The Immigration Commission report shows by gender and birthplace, the months that individuals sixteen years of age and over worked in the Lowell cotton factories during the year prior to the inquiry. Nearly two thirds (64.5%) of French-Canadian male workers found employment for twelve months of the year. This exceeded the corresponding level of year-round employment achieved by American (i.e., born in the United States of American-born fathers) male workers (51.6 percent), the Irish (45.3 percent), the Portuguese (32.6 percent), and the Greek (31.7 percent).<sup>46</sup>

There were enormous variations in workers' wages depending on their occupation, skill level, gender, age, and ethnic origin. By 1909, for instance, according to the data provided by the Immigration Commission, an English-born male worker in Lowell earned the highest weekly wages on average, \$11.44, while a French-Canadian male worker earned \$9.77, which was, however, slightly higher than the average for an Irish worker.<sup>47</sup> Despite these differences, what was common to all these wage-earners was that their earnings — at

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<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>The figures for female workers were even lower. The French Canadians were more regularly employed than any other group, 57.1 percent having worked twelve months. The U.S.-born female workers of American-born fathers ranked the second (51.6 percent), closely followed by the Irish (53.8 percent), and Greek (40.0 percent). Only one percent of the Portuguese-born women reported as having worked twelve months. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 274.

<sup>47</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 251.

the mercy of economic vicissitudes and managerial decisions — fluctuated constantly.<sup>48</sup>

A comparison of annual income and cost of living in this period reveals the difficulties working families had in remaining

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<sup>48</sup>In the absence of separate data for men and women, one cannot observe here fluctuations in weekly wages for male textile workers. Nevertheless, the following evidence from the Boott Cotton Mill, one of the oldest textile corporations in Lowell, illustrates the rise and fall of workers' earnings over a period of less than two decades in the early twentieth century. In June 1907, for example, wages in carding rose from \$11.25 to \$11.80 per week for the one fixer, from \$10.50 to \$11 each for the two grinders, while most of the other eighteen carding workers earned between \$5.35 and \$6.75 after raises of about 25 cents each. Less than a year later, in March 1908, wages fell to levels even lower than before the 1907 increase, and remained low until as late as 1910. Gross, *Industrial Decline*, 144-149. In neighbouring textile cities, such as Lawrence and Fall River, the average weekly wages of operatives were kept no higher in 1911 than they had been in 1893, despite the increase in both productivity and the cost of living during the intervening years. See Silvia, "Spindle City," 696-705; Jean-Claude Simon, "Textile Workers, Trade Unions, and Politics: comparative Case Studies, France and the United States, 1885-1914" (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 1980), 306-8. See also Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 169-70.

A series of wage increases began in 1912, and accelerated during the following years. By 1916, war-time orders had led to increased production and a scarcity of workers, and wages rose twice in the Boott factories: first by ten percent and then by eight percent. In 1917, the wage increase reached its highest level following two additional ten-percent raises. Owing to the intense competition for labour, steady inflation and a flow of government contracts, this upward spiral in earnings was sustained until early 1920. Later that year, however, as the national economy was strained once again, a 22.5 percent pay reduction was imposed across the board, and was accompanied by a 25 percent cut in output. The wage cuts continued into the 1920s, with a 20 percent cut being implemented in many Massachusetts factories. By the end of 1924, weekly rates were estimated at \$21.63 for spinners, \$25.42 for doffers, \$22.42-\$25.20 for weavers, and \$32.81 for loom-fixers. See Gross, *Course of Industrial Decline*, 144-49.

For the period from 1900 to 1915, the average weekly salaries paid in the textile factories in Quebec and Massachusetts fluctuated in a similar manner. It should be noted, however, that textile workers in Massachusetts constantly earned higher average wages than their Québec counterparts. See Jacques Rouillard, *Les travailleurs du coton au Québec 1900-1915* (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1974), 71-72.

above the poverty line. It is important to note that for most workers these weekly wages were simply an estimate based on average piece-rate earnings, a standard that for a long time regulated nearly all measurable jobs in the Lowell textile factories.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the weekly wages and annual incomes calculated here do not take into account any of the following: fines for imperfect products, which were subtracted from the weekly earnings of the workers; uncompensated sick leave; or the high rates of temporary or seasonal unemployment regularly endured by textile workers.

In 1913, the average annual income of cotton mill workers in Lowell was estimated at \$454. In comparison to other Massachusetts cities, this was a fair amount, although well below the average of \$625 for boot and shoe workers, or the \$692 for machine shop workers.<sup>50</sup> At about the same time, the Immigration Commission reported an annual average of \$498 for a French-Canadian married man working in the textile industry in Lowell. Again, this average was slightly higher than that of his Irish counterpart, estimated at \$479 a year.<sup>51</sup>

Robert Layer's study on the annual earnings of cotton manufacturing operatives in northern New England provides a similar estimate. According to his study, during the period prior to World War I the annual earnings of mill workers reached their highest level (\$397.47 in 1907), before falling into a lengthy period of decrease that lasted until early 1912. Then, later in the same year, earnings took an upward turn, and in 1913, just before the war

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<sup>49</sup>Gross, *Industrial Decline*, 144-149.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigration in Industry*, vol. 10, 261.

broke out, they reached their highest level, \$409.26. As for the real annual earnings index, as estimated by Robert Layers, the ratio between average annual earnings and cost of living did not recover the level reached in 1907 (179.2) and a worker's real wages remained below that figure throughout the years just prior to World War I.<sup>52</sup>

### 5.5.2. *The Cost of Living*

The average annual earnings of the mill workers, as discussed above, were far below the estimated minimum cost of living required to sustain a family. In 1911, for instance, Scott Nearing's *Financing a Wage Earner's Family* estimated that for a couple with three children, an income of between \$750 and \$1,000 was needed to make a decent living.<sup>53</sup> In the same year, the U.S. government assessed the minimum cost of living to be between \$691 and \$732, "depending on the *nationality* of the families."<sup>54</sup> During the war years, the cost of living increased even further. Evidently, the average income of a household head employed as a textile worker was not sufficient to provide for the worker's family. The difference between the minimum cost of living and the average wage had therefore to be made up by work performed by other members of his family, or, at times, by the male head of household taking a second or even third job. When the shortfall could not be closed, families had to live on

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<sup>52</sup>Robert George Layer, *Earnings of Cotton Mill Operatives, 1825-1914*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 48. Layer's real annual earnings index represents the rate of relative annual earnings per full-time worker divided by cost of living index estimated by Hansen. Layer calculated the relative annual earnings per worker based on the relative increase in annual earnings in relation to the 1844-46 level taken as 100.

<sup>53</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 149.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

the verge of poverty.

With the depression of wages, workers and their families found it difficult to meet the ever-increasing cost of consumer goods. After 1910, and continuing a trend that had been building since the late nineteenth century, cycles of inflation sharply swelled the prices of commodities and forced working families to stretch their already tight budgets even further. Their grievances gave rise to special legislation introduced by the State of Massachusetts which also created a commission on the cost of living. The results of the commission's inquiries only confirmed statistically what immigrant families already knew: the harsh realities of working-class life. Of all consumer products, the price of food had risen the fastest. By 1908, the average price of food exceeded the 1880-99 level by twenty percent. Prices of staples such as eggs, bread, and milk increased from twenty-five, to as much as forty-five, percent during the decade, while meat prices increased more than ninety percent.<sup>55</sup>

George Kennigott's *The Record of A City* (1911) provides some examples of family budgets based on a sample of 287 working-class families and offers further insight into the mounting economic difficulties that faced both immigrant and American working-class families in Lowell. The families studied by Kennigott represented a variety of ethnic origins (French-Canadian, Irish, Greek, Austrian-

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<sup>55</sup>Massachusetts, Commission on the cost of Living. *Report on the Cost of Living* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing, 1910), 21. See also Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), chap. 3, especially 98. For comparison with other cities, see also Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 121; Margaret Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (1910; reprint, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), chap. 10 and especially 152 and 154; Donald Cole, *Immigrant City: Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1845-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 118.

Polish, as well as American), and present a picture of "the respectable, sober, industrious, and thrifty wage-earners of Lowell, who constituted nearly a fourth of the population."<sup>56</sup> A summary of the budgets for three French-Canadian households follows.

First, let us look at the family of a French-Canadian box maker. Being the only wage-earner in the family, he supported his wife and two small children (five months and two years of age, respectively) with his weekly wage of \$7.25. They lived in a large tenement house occupied by families of different immigrant groups. Their weekly expenses were:

Food —	\$3.34
Fuel and light —	\$0.61
<u>Rent —</u>	<u>\$2.00</u>
Total —	\$5.95

The expenditures for provisions, rent, light and heat amounted to \$6.00 a week, leaving only \$1.25 for clothing, medical expenses, or to provide for sudden and frequent lay-offs. Clearly, this family lived on the verge of destitution.<sup>57</sup>

When a family had one or more children over fourteen years old earning wages and contributing to the household, the family was, in general, much better off. This was not the case of a family headed by an unskilled worker. Kennigott records one French-Canadian labourer's family that had a total of eleven people living at home. The husband earned seven dollars a week and his wife stayed home. Of nine children, ranging in age from one-and-a-half to

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<sup>56</sup>George F. Kennigott, *The Record of a City*, chap. 5, especially 110.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid*, 121. Budget number 55.



twenty years old, two worked, earning a total of seven dollars. This family lived in an apartment with five rooms including a kitchen. Their expenses in one week in November were as follows:

Food — \$9.73  
 Fuel and light — \$1.24  
Rent — \$2.75  
 Total — \$13.72

The family had as little as thirty cents to spend on other expenses.<sup>58</sup>

In another French-Canadian family, the husband was working as a blacksmith's helper, bringing home a weekly wage of eight dollars. The wife stayed at home, while of the eleven children aged two to eighteen years old, four earned wages totalling \$29. This family of thirteen, living in a four-room apartment (including the kitchen) spent:

Food — \$11.44  
 Fuel and light — \$1.16  
Rent — \$1.25  
 Total — \$13.85

With twenty-two dollars and fifteen cents remaining at the end of the week, this family must have enjoyed comforts that other families could not afford.<sup>59</sup> The family had over fifteen dollars to spend on other expenses such as clothing, furniture, and miscellaneous. Clearly, the most vulnerable were families with small children who relied on only one major source of income, while a household with a

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<sup>58</sup>*Ibid*, 114-115. Budget number 86.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid*, 115-117. Budget number 117.

larger number of workers, be they offspring (many of whom were adult children living with their parents) or spouses, was more secure.<sup>60</sup>

World War I ushered in a period of great prosperity in the United States. With the increased demand for skilled and unskilled workers, unemployment plummeted and wages increased in all industries. In cotton manufacturing, the average hourly wage rose from 15.3 cents in 1914 to 15.8 cents in 1916, and by the beginning of 1918 had jumped to 26.7 cents. These apparently impressive wage hikes, however, were in most cases offset by an even higher rise in the cost of living. As Edward Scollan notes, "the stable output of civilian goods with the increase in purchasing power produced a marked inflationary spiral, and real wages just barely kept pace with the cost of living."<sup>61</sup> The economic situation of Lowell in 1918 undoubtedly reflected this general trend in the United States.

In addition to the differences caused by the insufficient income provided by a sole wage-earner, the lives of working families were further encumbered by other factors, such as the lack of job security and the occupational hazards the work entailed. Textile cities were notorious for their high unemployment rates, even in good years, and for "the most severe unemployment problems in depressions."<sup>62</sup> In the period from 1900 to 1920, about 20 percent of the work force was laid off each year.<sup>63</sup> For example, in

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<sup>60</sup>See also Hareven for a similar observation. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, 207-08.

<sup>61</sup>Edward Scollan, "World War I and the 1918 Cotton Textile Strike," in *Surviving Hard Times*, ed. Blewett, 105-14.

<sup>62</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 148

<sup>63</sup>Alexander Keyssar, *Out to Work: the First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 58, 118.

1908 the Lowell factories reduced their production by 20 percent for two months. This cutback led to a reduction in employment on a similar scale. In 1920, the Boott manufacturing factories ran on a three-day weekly schedule, closed for an extended period the following year, and in the spring of 1924, "when the business was dull," only operated one or two days a week. During this period, other factories generally operated at about one half to three quarters of their total capacity.<sup>64</sup> Throughout this period, when business fluctuations made it more economical to reduce or suspend operations, workers were simply laid off without any provision for unemployment compensation.

The report of the Immigration Commission also testified to the difficulty of keeping regular employment in the cotton industry. In 1908, less than two thirds of the residents of Lowell who had been born in French Canada worked continuously for twelve months. Compared to French Canadians, Greek-born workers had more difficulty keeping their job year round, with less than one third employed for the entire twelve months.<sup>65</sup>

Even without imposed lay-offs, a large number of workers left their work. As Laurence Gross states, with few other means of expressing discontent, "quitting became a statement" against oppressive working conditions in many factories. The Boott factories consistently lost disgruntled workers at a rate exceeding that of other textile factories. An average of 63 percent of workers left the job in 1913-14, despite the recession, and 123 percent<sup>66</sup> walked out

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<sup>64</sup>Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 148-49.

<sup>65</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 274.

<sup>66</sup>Figure taken from Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 151. According to the explanation given by Gross, if a factory had to replace workers

the following year when a large labour shortage made other employment alternatives available. Some workers left one cotton factory for another which offered higher wages in a different city. Others found new jobs at the U.S. Cartridge Company, which offered wages that were higher than those of any cotton manufacturer. Still others moved out of the city in order to look for work in a neighbouring city. Turnover rates were particularly high among skilled workers, who were in a better position to confront exploitation. In 1916, three quarters of the weavers in the Boott Mill left in six months, and 250 out of approximately 350 spinners and spoolers were listed as "fleeing" instead of quitting. Moreover, one third to one half of the office workers, and 41 men of the Boott factories at the level of second hand or above, quit from 1914 to 1916.<sup>67</sup>

The turnover rate reflected the dissatisfaction of workers whose organizational power remained quite weak. As elsewhere, unorganized workers had little bargaining power with which to confront management. In the cotton factories, unions existed only among certain skilled workers, such as mule spinners, slashers, weavers, loom-fixers, and firemen. Even with such craft unions, Lowell lagged far behind other neighbouring textile centres such as Fall River and New Bedford in its degree of union organization.<sup>68</sup> As

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in a given position more than once for a period of time, then the rate could exceed one hundred percent. E-mail communication with Gross, 17 April 1998.

<sup>67</sup>Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 7; James H. Green, *World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (1980; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 109; Caroline Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture: A Study in Industrial Beginnings* (1931; reprint, New York: Johnson, 1966), 224 and n. See also Gross, *Industrial Decline*, 151-52.

<sup>68</sup>Gross, *Industrial Decline*, 151-52. Compare Lowell to Lawrence, Massachusetts: though only twelve kilometres away and equally dominated by the textile industry, labour strikes were far more common in Lawrence. Gross

a consequence, strikes were, by far, less frequent and less successful in Lowell than in other textile cities in the region, and thus, for a long time, quitting was one of the few means available by which a worker could protest poor working conditions.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the improvement in the occupational profiles of French-Canadian men, they and their families were confronted with daily hardships arising from the compounded effects of the rise and

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explains the reasons for this difference: in Lawrence, divided ownership of several major textile corporations made it easier for workers to form a united front against the management. Also, the greater number of highly skilled jobs in woollens and worsted mills in Lawrence attracted experienced immigrant workers. Many of these skilled workers brought with them experience with labour organization, and, in particular, the Franco-Belgians and Italians came with highly developed, politically radical belief-systems as well. In Lowell, meanwhile, production of coarse cottons was encouraged, which required hiring of mostly unskilled and/or uneducated workers. This, coupled with the overwhelming presence of newer immigrant workers and their diverse languages, reduced the workers' prospects for organization. These factors enabled the manufacturing owners to maintain Lowell's longstanding managerial system, composed of joint ownership and joint action, and their strong anti-craft union attitudes. See also David J. Goldberg, *A Tale of Three Cities: Labor, Organization and Protest in Paterson, Passaic, and Lawrence, 1916-1921* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989); and Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>69</sup>Lawrence Gross has counted thirty-two strikes of all sizes in various Lowell cotton factories in 1910-14. Only one in 1912 was successful in attaining a wage increase. This strike took place as an aftermath to one in Lawrence, led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In March 1912, after the Lowell strike's successful conclusion, the city's textile corporations announced a wage hike in order to "equalize Lowell and Lawrence standards." Yet in practice, they offered a significantly smaller raise than the ten-percent increase won in Lawrence and elsewhere in New England. Lawrence Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline*, 151-155. See also Shirley Zebroski, "The 1903 Strike in the Lowell Cotton Mills," in *Surviving Hard Times*, ed. Blewett, 44-62; Mary T. Mulligan, "Epilogue to Lawrence: The 1912 Strike in Lowell, Massachusetts," in *Surviving Hard Times*, ed. Blewett, 82-83; Edward J. Scollan, "World War I and the 1918 Cotton Textile Strike," in *Surviving Hard Times*, ed. Blewett, 105-114. For interview accounts of textile strikes in Lowell, see Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 100; Rouillard, *Ah! Les Etats*, 91.

fall of wages, inflationary rates in the cost of living, frequent layoffs and injuries, and obstacles to means of protest against corporate management.

## CONCLUSION

My analysis of the occupational profile of French-Canadian men in early twentieth-century Lowell enables us to capture a historical process which was as much a result of the hierarchical structure of the city's labour market as it was a reflection of these men's strategic autonomy. Their marked presence in working-class jobs illustrates both continuity and change in the process by which the city's ethnically segmented labour force was reproduced. The dynamics of the upward, yet limited, occupational mobility of these men, as well as the growing variety of their work experiences, can be interpreted as part of a dynamic whereby French-Canadian workers, increasingly of the second generation, were reshaping the work experiences of their fathers. In so doing, this new generation was gradually adjusting its economic strategies to the structural transformations taking place in the city's labour market. By exhibiting a greater degree of occupational mobility and occupying a growing variety of jobs, French-Canadian men actively devised a way of adjusting to these changing conditions.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FRENCH-CANADIAN WOMEN: THE HOUSEHOLD AND BEYOND

#### INTRODUCTION

Women played a crucial role in French-Canadian families by fulfilling their responsibilities as workers, wives, mothers, and daughters. The report of the Immigration Commission showed that in 1909, a French-Canadian household in Lowell had an average income of \$800, an amount 1.6 times greater than the average annual wage of a single male worker.<sup>1</sup> Which other members of the family then contributed to the household economy? Whenever possible, wives and children in many French-Canadian families brought home additional wages that without a doubt eased the family's precarious financial situation. As the proportion of family income provided by children declined, women's contributions became increasingly important. The work provided by women extended beyond supplementing the family budget and performing household tasks — it was indispensable to the family's daily survival.

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<sup>1</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 264.

Evidence presented in this chapter shows that while most French-Canadian women were almost entirely responsible for the domestic tasks regardless of their working status outside the home, they differed in the ways in which they assumed their financial responsibilities towards the household. The structure of families and household organizations of French-Canadian women in Lowell varied considerably and their economic role within the household was not only that of temporary contributors: some were providers, others were self-supporting, and still others were interdependent. A proportion of them worked temporarily, others permanently, and still others intermittently throughout their lives.

The supplementary role of women's paid work in the household should not obscure the unequal nature of the division of labour. Regardless of their participation in the labour market, women cooked, washed, cleaned, mended, managed the household budget, and took care of children. Unlike waged work, women's responsibilities in these unpaid household tasks were not likely to be shared to the same extent by their spouses.

This chapter begins its analysis where that of Thomas Dublin ends in *Transforming Women's Work*. He argues that female wage workers of different ethnic origins in different historical periods did not invariably enjoy the same amount of independence or autonomy from their family. According to Dublin, as shifts in ethnicity, residence patterns, and family status occurred among immigrant female millworkers at the turn of the century, they experienced a marked decline in their economic and social independence from the family in comparison to their "Yankee" counterparts in the antebellum period.<sup>2</sup> My analysis shows that the

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Dublin, *Transforming*, 232.



meaning of paid work was different not only for the women of different ethnic groups, but also for those within the same group. For instance, the economic contribution of a single French-Canadian female worker who was a primary wage-earner of a family headed by her widowed mother had far greater significance to her household than her fellow worker of the same age group who was supplementing the wages of her father. Hence, earning wages had different meanings for different female workers.

This chapter first examines the occupational situation of French-Canadian women in relation to other immigrants in Lowell. It then analyses the diversity of these women's responsibilities in contributing to the budget of their families. Finally, it reveals a less studied area: the role of immigrant women in purchasing, preparing and providing what was necessary to the survival of the family. My analysis suggests that marital status is only one indicator of the importance of women's contribution to their families' livelihood. More importantly, other factors, such as living arrangements, household members' labour force participation, and above all, availability of family members to take care of young children, defined women's financial roles. My analysis relies largely on the samples derived from two sets of the U.S. federal census (1910 and 1920). Also examined are the data taken from the report of the Immigration Commission and a collection of oral history accounts conducted by Mary Blewett with textile workers and their children living in Lowell in the early twentieth century.

### 6.1. THE IDEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY WAGE AND DUALISTIC CATEGORIES: DEPENDENT/INDEPENDENT AND TEMPORARY/PERMANENT

Since the 1970s, women's work and family life have constituted important foci for scholarly evaluations of the social impact of the industrial revolution. Until recently, this assessment tended to characterize a woman's relationship to the family in terms of readily definable and oppositional categories that failed to capture the diversity of the roles that women played. Women were viewed as either dependent or independent with regard to their families, as either living with the family or "adrift," as self-supporting or supporting others, and working either temporarily or permanently. These oppositional categories were largely derived from the ideology of the family wage — a set of beliefs holding special importance in nineteenth-century social life and remaining influential until the early twentieth century. This ideology claimed that the male head of the household should be the primary "breadwinner" and that his earnings should be sufficient to support his unwaged wife and children.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, given the fact that the wages of male workers were often insufficient, this model was more of an ideal than a reality for a large proportion of working-class families. Still, it became the ideological norm for the majority of urban households, both American and immigrant.

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<sup>3</sup>Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: a History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Leslie Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Lynn Y. Weiner, *From Working Girl to Working Mother: the Female Labor Force in the United States, 1820-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 5-7. See also Carole Turbin, *Working Women of Collar City*, 8-13; 72-76.

Based on these oppositional categories, a large segment of the academic debate revolved around the significance of individual wages, a form of wage that rewarded the labour of an individual, as opposed to that of a family. Edward Shorter set off the debate by arguing that individual wages provided women with a new economic independence and encouraged a new individualism. Joan Scott and Louise Tilly have taken strong exception to this view.<sup>4</sup> In examining the role of women in the family economy, Scott and Tilly argue that women's increased participation in paid employment represented a variant of a traditional family strategy, one aimed primarily at serving purposes related to the family as a collectivity. Scott and Tilly acknowledge that young women working outside the home and earning individual wages during the period of French and British industrialization may have gained some influence over the allocation of family resources.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, these two historians argue that rather than giving them greater economic independence from the family, as was previously assumed, the increased participation of women in paid employment did not displace them from their role of serving the family. Tilly and Scott thus posit that with regard to women's paid work, continuities outweighed discontinuities in the shift from a family economy in the pre-industrial period to a family wage economy in the early industrial period.<sup>6</sup>

The hypothesis advanced by Tilly and Scott has greatly influenced subsequent interpretations of women's wage labour in

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<sup>4</sup>In particular, they have strongly criticized Edward Shorter's essay, "Female Emancipation, Birth Control, and Fertility in European History," *American Historical Review* 78 (1973), 605-40.

<sup>5</sup>Scott and Tilly, *Women, Work, and Family*, 116.

<sup>6</sup>Scott and Tilly, *Women, Work, and Family*, 104, 134-36. See also Thomas Dublin, *Transforming*, 10-12.

the United States.<sup>7</sup> Informed by their model, but also incorporating issues of gender relations into his analytical framework, both in the family and in the society at large, Thomas Dublin has explored the experiences of women in the industrializing cities of New England. He notes a series of changes in the last four decades of the nineteenth century: a substantial decline in the proportion of female mill hands who were boarders, and the relative increase in the proportion of working wives, household heads, and other relatives. In so doing, Dublin has revealed new shifts in terms of ethnicity, residence patterns, and family status in the female labour force of the textile industry. By 1900, in his view, these transformations had led to a marked decline in the economic and social independence that "mill girls" had previously enjoyed in the ante-bellum decades. As a result, in comparison to an earlier generation of female factory workers, most of whom were young American women recruited from the rural communities surrounding the textile cities in the first half of the nineteenth century, French-Canadian and Greek factory operatives in 1900 were significantly more involved in contributing to their families' economic well-being.<sup>8</sup>

Together with studies that elaborate on Tilly and Scott's hypothesis, Dublin's work clearly makes an important contribution to research on women's wage-work. While he is concerned with various implications of female workers in textile factories at

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<sup>7</sup>Carole Groneman, "'She Works as a Child; She Pays as a Man': Women Workers in a Mid-Nineteenth Century New York City Community," in *Class, Sex, and the Women Workers*, ed. Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), 90; Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community*, 170, 187, 200-202; Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, especially 75. See also, Thomas Dublin, *Transforming*, 8-14.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Dublin, *Transforming*, 232-33.

different historical times and among different ethnic groups, Dublin's analysis leaves a number of questions unanswered in regard to the variations in household economic contribution among women of the same marital status and ethnicity but who resided in different household structures and living arrangements.

Feminist historians have begun to examine closely the variations in the economic role of women in different types of families and households. In her study of Troy, New York, Carole Turbin has criticized the assumption of previous studies which tended to categorize women mainly in terms of marital status and to presume that single daughters who lived at home were temporary contributors to family income.<sup>9</sup> This approach, argues Turbin, ignores important variations in the contributions of women to their families' livelihood. In closely examining variations in the economic roles of working daughters, wives, and widows in Troy, Turbin reveals that marital status was only one indicator of the importance of women's contribution to the livelihood of their families. She has shown that the structure of families and households largely defined women's financial responsibilities.<sup>10</sup>

The following section heeds Turbin's call for rethinking the conventional analytic framework and applies her perspective to Lowell's French-Canadian women, a substantial proportion of whom

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<sup>9</sup>For discussion of the problems related to working-women's household economic contribution, see Diane Gittens, "Inside and Outside Marriage," *Feminist Review* 14 (1983): 20-23, Martha May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage: The Ford Motor Company and the Five Dollar Day," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1981): 400-08; Mary Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*. See also Turbin, *Working Women*, 75, 103.

<sup>10</sup>Turbin, *Working Women*, chap. 3; Marilyn Cohen, "Survival Strategies in Female Headed Households: Linen Workers in Tullylish, County Down, 1901," *Journal of Family History* 17, no. 3 (1992): 303-18.

worked in the city's textile industry. However, as far as French Canadians are concerned, conclusions derived from my analysis do not support Turbin's hypothesis which stresses that financial interdependence among family members led to a lesser degree of dependence of women on the male members of the family and conversely, a lessening of men's authority.<sup>11</sup> The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that complementary and indispensable roles played by women did not challenge the unequal nature of the roles of men, women, and children within French-Canadian families in early twentieth-century Lowell. Family relations remained relatively stable.

## 6.2. WOMEN'S PAID WORK IN LOWELL

In Lowell, about two fifths of women worked for wages. Comparisons of the wage labour participation rates of women from five immigrant/ethnic groups in Lowell indicate that the more recent the group's arrival in the city, the greater the pressure for its women to enter the labour market. In comparison to American women, French-Canadian women had a considerably higher rate of paid labour participation; the rate of employment for Greek women was even higher. Analysis of working French-Canadian women in Lowell in 1910 and 1920 shows, first, their constant participation in manual labour, particularly in the textile industry; second, a small but increasing number employed in the expanding white-collar sector; and, third, a marked decline in the number of self-employed women.

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<sup>11</sup>In her study of Montreal's working families in the late nineteenth century, Bradbury also makes this point. Bradbury, *Working Families*, 16, nt. 20.

The rate of employment for women born in French Canada was particularly high. In 1909, the Immigration Commission reported that 42 percent of Lowell women born in French Canada and aged sixteen or over were working for wages, while the figure was only 31 percent for American-born women with American-born fathers, and only 20 percent for Irish-born women. Conversely, an overwhelming majority of Irish-born and American women (80 percent and 69 percent, respectively) were listed as staying home, in contrast to only 57 percent for their French-Canadian counterparts.<sup>12</sup>

While among the three immigrant/ethnic groups of long-time residence in New England, (i.e., the French Canadians, the Irish, and the Americans) French-Canadian women had the highest rate of wage labour participation, they ranked behind other groups of immigrants who had arrived in the city more recently. Again, according to the Immigration Commission data, over 60 percent of Portuguese women and close to 80 percent of Greek women aged sixteen or over were listed as working outside the home. These figures reveal that as far as the rate of wage labour participation of migrating populations is concerned, French-Canadian women were situated between long-time residents and recent arrivals.

The differences in the rate of wage labour participation for women belonging to different groups may be explained by differences in the stage of immigration for each group. In comparison to immigrants who had already settled in the city over previous decades, women who had just immigrated to Lowell were likely to be those who could readily enter the labour market — that is, young and without children. In the light of child labour legislation,

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<sup>12</sup>My own calculation, based on the data provided by Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 246.

which was strictly enforced in New England states at the turn of the century, the presence of an adult female who could work for wages was one of the most crucial factors in the survival of immigrants and their families. The pressure to earn wages must have been felt even more urgently by recent arrivals to the city, since wages might pay for the cost of migration itself.<sup>13</sup> One may further speculate that the imperative for newly arrived immigrant women to enter the labour market reflected the manner in which the migrating population had been selected in their society of origin prior to their departure: It was important to be young — though over the legal working age and also physically strong enough to endure the intensification of working conditions — and without children.

The figures derived from the 1910 and 1920 census for "new immigrants" seem to support the above hypothesis — the more recent the arrival, the greater the pressure to enter the labour market (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2). Unlike the Immigration Commission data that limited its observation to foreign-born individuals, my Lowell data include both women born abroad as well as those born in the United States of foreign-born parents. In 1910, more than five out of ten Greek women of age sixteen or over in Lowell participated in wage labour, representing the highest rate of female workers among the five immigrant/ethnic groups studied here. By 1920, the proportion rose to a little over one of six. During the same period the labour market participation rate of Greek women of all ages declined noticeably. This decline may be explained by the fact that by this time, the proportion of children born in the United States within the Greek population increased, and subsequently lowered the proportion of women subject to pressures for immediate participation in the labour market. As for the Portuguese, also recent

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<sup>13</sup>This point has been brought to my attention by Professor Deirdre Meintel.



Table 6.1  
Occupational Distribution of Female Workers in Five Ethnic Groups, Lowell, 1910  
(Number of Individuals per 100)

	French Canadian	Irish	American	Portuguese	Greek
Manual workers	84.2	72.8	49.3	93.4	92.3
Unskilled	10.1	14.9	9.7	6.7	15.4
Semi- and skilled	74.1	57.9	39.6	86.7	76.9
White collar	6.9	17.1	38.8	-	-
Lower white collar (clerical etc.)	3.7	7.0	17.2	-	-
Upper white collar	3.2	10.1	21.6	-	-
Professional	2.7	-	0.7	-	-
Independent	8.0	5.5	8.2	6.7	-
Unidentified	2.6	1.5	2.2	-	15.4
Total (N)	100.0 (189)	100.0 (328)	100.0 (134)	100.0 (15)	100.0 (13)
Labour market participation rate	33.5	38.0	27.1	34.9	43.3
Labour market participation rate of women of age 16 or over	48.6	47.6	36.6	40.0	52.1

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

- Notes: 1. Ethnic group is determined by the place of birth of individuals and their parents.  
2. Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.  
3. Other occupations include farming and unspecified.  
4. The category of independent includes autonomous dressmakers.  
5. French Canadians recorded in the category of professional were nuns.

Table 6.2  
Occupational Distribution of Female Workers in Five Ethnic Groups, Lowell, 1920  
(Number of Individuals per 100)

	French Canadian	Irish	American	Portuguese	Greek
Manual workers	84.0	71.3	45.2	95.0	97.9
Unskilled	10.4	11.8	10.8	20.0	23.4
Semi- and Skilled	73.6	59.5	34.4	75.0	74.5
White Collar	15.0	25.3	43.3	-	-
Lower white collar (clerical etc.)	6.0	13.8	22.3	-	-
Upper white collar	9.0	11.5	21.0	-	2.1
Professional	-	0.3	0.6	-	-
Independent	1.0	2.9	5.1	-	-
Others (Number)	-	-	4.5	5	-
Total (N)	100.0 (201)	100.0 (348)	100.0 (157)	100.0 (20)	100.0 (47)
Labour market participation rate	33.9	42.2	25.3	24.4	35.6
Labour market participation rate of women of age 16 or over	48.0	48.9	38.3	44.2	60.2

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

- Notes: 1. Ethnic group is determined by the place of birth of individuals and their parents.  
2. Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.  
3. Other occupations include farming and unspecified.  
4. The category of Independent includes autonomous dressmakers.

arrivals, the rate of women's paid labour participation likewise declined, but less radically. Over the decade, the proportion of female Portuguese workers dropped from one-third to a quarter.

The Lowell sample, derived from manuscript censuses, shows that between 1910 and 1920 period, the wage labour participation rate of French-Canadian women aged sixteen or over was consistent. In 1910 about half of these French-Canadian women worked for wages (see Table 6.1). About the same proportion of Irish women (47.6 percent) was listed as working for wages, whereas for American women the proportion (36.6 percent) was much smaller. A decade later, the proportion of gainfully employed French-Canadian women aged sixteen or over remained at the 1910 level, as did that of their Irish and American counterparts (see Table 6.2). These findings indicate that, as far as French-Canadian women are concerned, their rate of labour market participation did not significantly change despite major social changes — notably, war-time demand and intensified competition from Southern industry.

When examined more closely, the figures derived from the manuscript census throw light on a series of subtle changes experienced by Lowell's female workforce during the first two decades of the twentieth century. One notes that compared to the variety of job categories listed for men, female workers of all ethnic backgrounds were frequently concentrated in a narrower range of occupations. As shown by the Lowell data, over the decade from 1910 to 1920, while the number of types of jobs increased from 47 to 70 for French-Canadian female workers, and from 80 to 105 for Irish female workers, the number represented less than 60 percent of the variety recorded for their male counterparts.<sup>14</sup> A large proportion of the

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<sup>14</sup>According to my Lowell data, during the same period the number of job titles of French-Canadian male workers increased from 107 to 127; that of Irish males declined from 185 to 172.

city's working women was in the manual sector, in particular, the textile industry.

An examination of occupational experience reveals other signs of stabilization, as well as some changes. In the early twentieth century, while a majority of French-Canadian women worked as manual labourers, a growing minority was engaged in white collar occupations and the proportion of independent workers declined greatly. The majority of working women were in manual labour, particularly in the cotton industry. According to the Immigration Commission data for 1909, over 70 percent of the Greek women aged sixteen years or over worked in the cotton factories, whereas the figure for the Portuguese was 58 percent. For both French Canadians and Americans the proportion was 28 percent, while for the Irish it was 16 percent. There is no certain explanation for the significantly lower proportion of Irish-born women in the cotton industry. Compared to the other ethnic groups studied, a larger proportion of French-Canadian women worked in the manual sector outside the cotton industry (13 percent, as opposed to 6 percent of the Greeks, 4 percent of the Irish, 0.8 percent of the Portuguese, and none of the Americans).<sup>15</sup>

The 1910 and 1920 Lowell censuses also confirm the concentration of women workers in manual labour, especially in mostly unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the manufacturing of textiles, boots, shoes, and garments (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2). Moreover, the proportion of females from each immigrant/ethnic group in the manual labour force did not change significantly over the decade. Both in 1910 and 1920, over 80 percent of French-Canadian working women, more than 70 percent of Irish, and over 90 percent of Greek

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<sup>15</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 246.

and Portuguese female workers earned wages as manual workers. The largest proportion of these workers was employed in the city's cotton industry. In 1910, among French-Canadian women, about one third (32 percent) were working in the cotton factories; by 1920, the proportion increased to a little over one third (37 percent, not shown in the tables). Together with workers in the hosiery, corduroy, and woollen factories, nearly all French-Canadian women in the manual industrial sector were employed in the textile industry. Factory work constituted the major source of employment of other immigrant women as well. The only exception to this trend was the situation of American women. Less than half of them participated in the manual labour force, and over the decade this proportion declined. In 1910, although close to half of them were working in the manual sector, a little less than four out of ten had white-collar jobs. A decade later, the proportion in the manual sector decreased slightly while white-collar jobs rose to about the same level as that for manual workers.

As for French-Canadian women, the proportion who worked in the white collar sector was small but grew significantly. In 1910, it was very small (3.7 percent among the lower and 3.2 percent among the upper categories); a decade later, this proportion nearly doubled in the lower (clerical) and tripled in the upper (supervisory) categories. By 1920, a minority of French-Canadian women (both Canadian-born and U.S.-born) worked as salespersons and bookkeepers, while in the textile factories, a few others achieved the level of inspector or, less frequently, that of forewoman (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2).

In Lowell, the increased participation in white-collar jobs was by no means limited to French-Canadian women. The number of Irish and American women working in the city's white-collar sector also increased at an even faster rate (rising from 17.1 percent to 25.3 percent for the Irish and from 38.8 percent to 43.3 percent for the

Americans). By contrast, among "new immigrant" women, the proportion of white-collar workers remained extremely low. These findings reveal that the "women's sector" in Lowell expanded unevenly among female workers of different ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the presence of an occupational hierarchy (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2). As observed in the previous chapter, the city's male workers were also subject to this hierarchy.

The increased participation in white-collar jobs among long-time residents of Lowell, in particular among American women, was not an isolated phenomenon, but was part of a broader structural change that had begun earlier in larger northern cities. In Boston, for instance, the "women's sector" had significantly expanded during the last three decades of the nineteenth century: the proportion of women working in clerical or sales jobs rose from 2.5 percent in 1860 to 6.9 percent in 1880; and by 1900 it reached a little less than 20 percent.<sup>16</sup>

Women listed as self-employed experienced another notable change. Within the decade from 1910 to 1920, the proportion of independent businesswomen fell significantly. The greatest drop was among French Canadians, falling from 8 to 1 percent, closely followed by the Irish, among whom it dropped from 5.5 to 2.9 percent, and finally by the Americans, from 8.2 percent to 5.1 percent (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2). This decline was due largely to the diminishing number of women working as self-employed dressmakers. Although we do not know what these women did after leaving their dressmaking occupation, we may speculate that they were most likely integrated into the industrial labour market. With the increased pressure on factories to meet war-time quotas and a

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<sup>16</sup>Dublin, *Transforming*, 237, table 7.3.

possibility of earning higher wages, many of these women, who previously worked on their own, may have entered factory work, while a small proportion possibly became saleswomen or office clerks.

As the above findings have illustrated, the occupational distribution of Lowell's French-Canadian women who had gainful employment in the early twentieth century points to their steady rate of participation in the manual labour sector, particularly in the city's textile factories. At the same time, a growing proportion of French-Canadian women in Lowell participated, as did women of other cultural backgrounds, in the expansion of the white-collar sector. Finally, by 1920, the number of French-Canadian women listed as self-employed had decreased to a very low level (one percent).

### 6.3. THE ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF FRENCH-CANADIAN FEMALE WAGE WORKERS: MARITAL STATUS, AGE DISTRIBUTION, AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

An examination of French-Canadian female workers must consider the implications of their living arrangements for their participation in the labour market. To what extent did French-Canadian working-class families assume that women should contribute to the household economy? To what degree did marital status and age determine the financial responsibilities and employment patterns of these women? How did the variety of living arrangements influence the organization of paid and unpaid work? Under what circumstances did a woman's allegiance to her family promote or discourage her participation in wage earning? What other circumstances affected her economic role? These questions are formulated to recognize the previously underexamined variety of experiences among French-Canadian working women.

From the following analysis we can observe fine distinctions in the economic responsibilities assumed by the French-Canadian female workers. Such differences were not simply determined by age or marital status, but were also largely defined by the conditions of the household (notably, availability of male wage-earners within the household and living arrangements).

The distribution patterns of female workers according to marital status were similar for all ethnic groups except the Portuguese. The proportion of married Portuguese women in the labour market was markedly higher than that of married women belonging to other ethnic groups (see Table 6.3). The data derived from the manuscript census schedules of 1910 and 1920 indicate that in the French-Canadian female labour force, two thirds were single women, about a quarter were married women, and less than 10 percent were widowed or divorced. Subtle differences existed among ethnic groups. The proportion of single women among Lowell's French-Canadian workers was noticeably lower than that for Irish and Americans. Conversely, the proportion of French-Canadian women workers who were married was a little higher than the other two groups. Over the decade, the respective proportion of single, married, and widowed or divorced French-Canadian women in the labour force did not change significantly, while that of Americans and Greeks fluctuated considerably.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>It is interesting to note that at a slightly later period, the proportion of married women working in a Quebec cotton factory was significantly lower than in Lowell. The low proportion of married women generally in the Valleyfield mill prior to World War II was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews by Gail Cuthbert Brandt. The proportion of married women in the female work-force in the Quebec cotton industry remained small (10 percent in 1941, 17 percent in 1951). See Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "'Weaving It Together': Life Cycle and the Industrial Experience of Female Cotton Workers in Quebec, 1910-1950," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 7 (Spring 1981): 113-25; Sylvie Beaudreau and Yves Frenette, "Les stratégies familiales des francophones de la Nouvelle-Angleterre. PERSpective diachronique," *Sociologie et société* 26, no. 1 (printemps 1994): 164-178, especially 171-73; Marie Lavigne, *Les femmes*



Table 6.3  
 Marital Status of French-Canadian Female Workers in Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

	French Canadian	Irish	American	Portuguese	Greek
<b>1910</b>					
Single	66.7	76.2	78.4	13.3	69.2
Widowed and Divorced	6.9	8.5	6.0	13.3	0
Married	25.4	12.5	14.9	66.7	23.1
Unknown	1.1	2.7	0.7	6.7	7.7
Total (N)	100.0 (189)	100.0 (328)	100.0 (134)	100.0 (15)	100.0 (13)
<b>1920</b>					
Single	66.2	75.6	68.2	40.0	51.1
Widowed and Divorced	9.5	10.1	6.4	0	2.1
Married	23.4	13.5	25.5	60.0	46.8
Unknown	1.0	1.0	0	0	0
Total (N)	100.0 (201)	100.0 (348)	100.0 (157)	100.0 (20)	100.0 (47)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

The age distribution of working women for the different ethnic groups in Lowell shows that over the decade under study, the average age of French-Canadian workers was on the rise (see Table 6.4). Our findings reveal that in 1910 the largest proportion (about half) of Lowell's French-Canadian female workers consisted of young women fifteen to twenty-four years of age. At the same time, the percentage of women thirty-five years or over exceeded 30 percent. By 1920, the proportion of those between fifteen and twenty-four years old declined (to just above 40 percent) while the percentage of older workers between twenty-five and thirty-four years old increased from 18 percent to slightly over 25 percent. As for those in the thirty-five or over age bracket, their proportion remained at about the same level over the decade. These figures suggest that in the course of the second decade of the twentieth century, the average age of Lowell's French-Canadian female workers was gradually rising.

### *6.3.1. Single French-Canadian Women*

My analysis of French-Canadian working women begins by focusing on single women. These workers are important for this study in part because they made up the largest component of French-Canadian working women in Lowell. More importantly, generalizations that concern the female labour force as a whole have been largely based on these single women. The image of the wage-earning women was often one of young single daughters

Table 6.4  
 Age Distribution of Female Workers in Five Ethnic Groups, Lowell, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

Age group	French Canadian	Irish	American	Portuguese	Greek
<b>1910</b>					
14 or under	1.6	2.5	0	0	7.7
15 to 24	49.7	32.8	39.6	60	61.5
25 to 34	18.0	24.5	28.4	20	15.4
35 to 44	18.5	24.5	15.7	20	0
45 or over	12.2	15.6	16.4	0	15.4
Total (N)	100.0 (189)	100.0 (326)	100.0 (134)	100.0 (15)	100.0 (113)
<b>1920</b>					
14 or under	0.2	0	1.3	0	5.0
15 to 24	41.8	22.6	34.4	40.0	48.9
25 to 34	26.9	25.8	21.7	20.0	31.9
35 to 44	13.4	24.1	17.8	30.0	14.9
45 or over	15.4	27.5	24.8	5.0	4.3
Total (N)	100.0 (201)	100.0 (349)	100.0 (158)	100.0 (20)	100.0 (47)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

living with their parents,<sup>18</sup> working only temporarily before marriage. The data on French-Canadian working women in Lowell challenges the above image. Moreover, the financial contribution of working women to their households depended largely upon their household conditions and living arrangements.

Single French-Canadian female workers in Lowell did not constitute a homogeneous group, but were distributed over the range of age brackets (see Table 6.5). In 1910, although the majority (68.3 percent) of these women were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, an important minority (13.3 percent) were aged forty-five or over. By 1920, the proportion of young workers between fifteen and twenty-four years of age fell to sixty percent, while the ratio of those forty-five or over remained at about the same level (12.8 percent). The percentage of those in the twenty-five to thirty-four year old age group increased significantly, going from 15.9 percent in 1910 to 24.8 percent in 1920. These figures for single workers confirm the gradual aging of the French-Canadian female work force as a whole.

Although a majority of single women workers were daughters who lived in households headed by their fathers, this was not the case for all (see Table 6.6). Both in 1910 and 1920, the largest proportion of single women (over 70 percent) were daughters who

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*dans la société québécoise: aspects historiques* (Montreal: Boréal express, 1977).

<sup>18</sup>For instance, in her study on the working immigrant women in Central Falls, Rhode Island, Louise Lamphere dedicates her first three chapters to an analysis of the wage-earning daughters in the early twentieth century. Lamphere explains that her decision to do so does not ignore the presence of employed wives, mothers, or widows, but reflects the fact that an overwhelming proportion of the female workers in the textile mill at that time were young, single women. See Lamphere, *From Working Daughters to Working Mothers*, 31, 34.

Table 6.5  
 Age Distribution of French-Canadian Female Workers in  
 Lowell by Marital Status, 1910 and 1920  
 (Number of Individuals per 100)

Age group	Single	Married	Widowed
<b>1910</b>			
14 or under	2.3	0	0
15 to 24	68.3	13.2	0
25 to 34	15.9	32.1	16.7
35 to 44	11.1	26.4	25.0
45 or over	13.3	22.6	58.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(126)	(53)	(12)
<b>1920</b>			
14 or under	2.3	0	0
15 to 24	60.2	16.0	0
25 to 34	24.8	30.0	26.3
35 to 44	8.3	28.0	26.3
45 or over	12.8	24.0	47.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(133)	(50)	(19)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

Table 6.6  
 Distribution of Household Relationships of French-Canadian Wage-Earning Women  
 by Marital Status, Lowell, 1910 and 1920

	Single		Married		Widowed and Divorced	
	Percent	(N)	Percent	(N)	Percent	(N)
<b>1910</b>						
Household Head	2.6	(3)	10.4	(5)	53.8	(7)
Wife	-	-	58.3	(28)	-	-
Daughter	73.0	(92)	16.7	(8)	7.7	(1)
Other Family Member	9.5	(12)	10.4	(5)	23.1	(3)
Lodger	10.3	(13)	2.1	(1)	7.7	(1)
Servant	4.8	(6)	2.1	(1)	7.7	(1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>(116)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>(48)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>(13)</b>
<b>1920</b>						
Household Head	2.3	(3)	4.3	(2)	57.9	(11)
Wife	-	-	66	(31)	-	-
Daughter	71.4	(95)	10.6	(5)	10.5	(2)
Other Family Member	12.8	(17)	17	(8)	10.5	(2)
Lodger	13.5	(18)	2.1	(1)	18.8	(3)
Servant	-	-	-	-	5.3	(1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(133)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(47)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(19)</b>

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

lived with their parent(s). However, in 1910 a substantial minority (10.3 percent) were boarders and lodgers. As well, 10 percent were related in other ways to the household head (i.e., sisters, nieces, and grand-daughters). A decade later, living arrangements for single French-Canadian female workers had further diversified. This was reflected in the growing proportion of single women living in a household headed by someone other than their parent(s). The proportion of women who were boarders and lodgers then rose to over 13 percent, while the ratio of non-nuclear family members also increased close to 13 percent. In both 1910 and 1920, there was also a very small proportion (2.6 percent in 1910 and 2.3 percent in 1920) of single female workers listed as single female household heads.<sup>19</sup>

The economic contribution of single women of the same age bracket and living in similar households varied considerably. The census manuscripts offer some examples, such as the case of two twenty-four-year-old women (daughters of household heads), Henrietta Desjardins and Bertha L[a]urier.<sup>20</sup> Henrietta, a stitcher at a shoe factory, and Bertha, a winder<sup>21</sup> at a cotton factory, were among a substantial group of single working women of their age group who lived with their parent(s). Although they shared similar living arrangements, their economic contribution differed significantly.

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<sup>19</sup>Calculated by the author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Census Schedules.

<sup>20</sup>Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1910, district 839, ward 2, dwelling 1, family number 1; and district 861, ward 6, dwelling 81, family number 255.

<sup>21</sup>A winder attends to the mechanical transfer of yarn from one size or form of package to another, such as front bobbins to cones or tubes. Mary Blewett, *The Last Generations*, 323

Henrietta lived with her father, a stone mason; her mother, who stayed at home; and two younger sisters, Rose, a stitcher who was twenty years of age; and fifteen-year-old Josephine, who was listed as not working outside the home. The Desjardins family lodged a shoe cutter, John Desjardins. Although the census schedule lists John as a lodger, one may speculate from his family name that he was a close relative to Henrietta's family. In that case, John quite possibly paid the family a smaller amount for his bed and board than non-family lodgers would normally have done.<sup>22</sup> In any case, with the additional income provided by the lodger and the steady work of her father and her younger sister, Henrietta's earnings were not the family's primary source of income.

The case of Bertha L[a]urier was quite different. Bertha, and her sister, who worked as a stitcher, were the principal providers for the family. The two sisters supported their widowed father and a younger sister, neither of whom was gainfully employed. Bertha's economic contribution thus had far greater significance to her household than did Henrietta's.

The case of an older single woman named Angelina Larogne again demonstrates how the situation of the family largely defined the level of a woman's economic responsibility towards her household. Angelina was a thirty-nine-year-old weaver at a cotton factory. The oldest of six daughters, she lived with her widowed

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<sup>22</sup>Denyse Baillargeon illustrates cases of young married couples living with their in-laws in the Depression-era Montreal. These couples could choose from a wide range of arrangements to pay for their bed and board. Most frequently, young couples, the least wealthy ones, simply paid an amount for their bed and board; others took charge of the cost of rent, electricity, and heating, while the parents paid only for their food. Still others, instead of paying for the bed and board, made non-monetary exchanges of services; for example, one young wife worked for the boardinghouse run by her mother-in-law. Baillargeon, *Ménagères au temps de la crise*, 94-97.



father, who worked as a teamster. Three of her five sisters worked at a cotton factory — nineteen-year-old Louisanna as stitcher, eighteen-year-old Rose and fifteen-year-old Liliane as winders. The second oldest, thirty-one-year-old Georgina, was listed as not working. Georgina probably took the role of her deceased mother, keeping house and caring for her ten-year-old sister.<sup>23</sup>

An important minority of unmarried women workers belonged to households which were headed by a widowed mother. Their proportion decreased from 25 percent in 1910 to 19 percent in 1920, but there is no certain explanation for this. One can speculate that in the absence of wages from a father or male sibling, the financial responsibility of these single female workers was far more important than the one assumed by unmarried women who lived with their parents. A twenty-one-year-old sewer, Blanche [Laronoiw?],<sup>24</sup> for example, lived with her widowed mother and an eleven-year-old brother, neither of whom worked outside the home. Blanche was therefore the only family provider.

As the census data suggest, it was common for widows not to be employed if their older children earned wages. This meant that when a working daughter was not the only breadwinner of the household, her economic responsibility was more likely to be shared by her siblings than by her widowed mother. Twenty-six-year-old Eugénie Vigneault lived with her widowed mother and supported the household with the help of her twenty-nine-year-old brother Alphie. Eugénie worked as an operative at a hosiery factory and

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<sup>23</sup>Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1910, district 861, ward 6, dwelling 102, family number 355.

<sup>24</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 180, ward 6, dwelling 25, family number 148. The family name was difficult to read from the microfilmed copy.

Alphie as a box-maker. In the Vaillancourt family, three daughters of nineteen, seventeen, and thirteen years old worked for wages, as stitcher, winder, and doffer, respectively, while the forty-two-year-old widowed mother stayed home. Their earnings supported the family, which included five other siblings who ranged in age from four to fourteen, none of whom worked.<sup>25</sup>

The household arrangements we have observed above demonstrate the varying importance of these single women to their households, in their role as wage earners and/or domestic caretakers. In Angelina's household, for example, her widowed father needed someone to take charge of domestic tasks, while other members had to earn wages in order to supplement the income that their father earned as a teamster. As this case illustrates, in families headed by a widowed male, the primary problem was to find someone, usually an older daughter, to replace the deceased wife and perform household work. In households headed by a widowed mother, such as in the case of Eugénie, the problem was of a different nature, since mothers usually took charge of domestic duties. Given the low wages of female workers, widows' households were usually in more dire financial strains than those of their male counterparts.

In the household of a lone parent (either male or female), two imperatives — securing a minimum household income and having someone take care of domestic tasks — likely determined a daughter's marriage prospects. In these households, it was common to find one or two unmarried daughters (and to a lesser extent, sons) either working for wages or taking charge of domestic work. Whether they accepted it willingly or not, these older single daughters, often in

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<sup>25</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 557, ward 16, dwelling 79, family number 257; and district 570, ward 4, dwelling 221, family number 84.

their thirties or older, obviously had greater responsibilities than their younger co-workers who lived in a two-parent household.

The economic contribution made by unmarried women who lived with others than their parents also varied considerably. The situation of female family members who were not daughters — namely, sisters, granddaughters, nieces, etc. — significantly differed from lodgers and boarders. For example, two sisters, Valentine and Clodia Ducharme, who were lodgers, were probably more independent economically than those who lived with their own immediate families, such as Hermina and Adeline Martin, two sisters who lived with their uncle, Napoleon Fisette, and his family. Hermina worked as a looper and Adeline a stitcher at a hosiery.

Valentine, a twenty-six-year-old housemaid, and Clodia, a thirty-two-year-old velvet finisher, boarded with a French-Canadian immigrant family, the Desmarais.<sup>26</sup> Clodia may have worked at the same cotton factory as her landlord couple, as they were listed as machinist and cutter. The census data, however, do not tell us the exact nature of the relationship that Valentine and Clodia had with the Desmarais. Whether it remained an acquaintanceship, or evolved beyond that owing to the network of people they knew in common from French Canada, or from the streets and factories in Lowell, remains unknown.

As the above examples illustrate, the economic contributions of single French-Canadian female workers were diverse, depending on a variety of factors such as age, living arrangements, and household patterns of participation in the labour market. Women of

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<sup>26</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 218, ward 3, dwelling 782, family number 33; and district 553, ward 1, dwelling 420, family number 485.

the same age and marital status did not necessarily live in the same kind of household. Rather, they resided in households that could differ in organization, income level, and economic requirements. These conditions, together with the vicissitudes of the local labour market, characterized by ethnic and gender hierarchies, largely defined the economic roles of single female workers.<sup>27</sup> Although they were not integrated into the family economy in a uniform way, a large number of these single female workers played an indispensable role in French-Canadian households.

### 6.3.2. *Married French-Canadian Women*

As the participation of Lowell's French-Canadian children in wage labour sharply declined, married French-Canadian women played an increasingly important role in their contribution to the household. Not all of these working women were wives who supplemented their husbands' wages. Women at times worked in addition to their children, contributing to the family wage. The trend over time, however, was that more married women and fewer children worked. The relationships of these women to their households varied: for the most part, they were the spouses of male household heads, but they could also be daughters, lodgers, other members of the family, or even the heads of the household themselves, in the case of an absent husband. Their economic contributions also varied according to their living arrangements and household organization: women who resided in a household headed by their spouse tended to work less frequently than those who lived in a household headed by their parents or in-laws; some wives worked along with their husband and children while others

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<sup>27</sup>Turbin, *Working Women*, 76-102, especially 90.

toiled as the only secondary wage contributors. At other times, as female heads of household, some were the providers and others stayed home while their children earned wages. Despite these variations, married French-Canadian women had one characteristic in common with older single women and widows: a substantial proportion of them earned wages over long periods throughout their lifetime. This section first examines the changes which occurred in French-Canadian households with regard to their patterns of paid labour force participation, differences in the assumption of financial responsibilities, and the trend towards uniformity as a greater number of married female workers came to reside in a household headed by their husbands.

A number of studies show that in the urban industrial economy married women frequently made up a "reserve resource" of a family's labour power to be called upon only in times of financial need.<sup>28</sup> Where the demand for women workers was particularly high, such as in the textile towns of Roubaix, France or Stockport, England, a relatively large number of married women were drawn into the factories. Yet when other family members, notably children, could earn wages, married women tended not to hold paid work. French-Canadian families in a dozen of textile cities in New England were no exception. For instance, Tamara Hareven's study on Manchester, New Hampshire, sheds light on this point by showing the trade-off between children's and mothers' participation in the labour market. In the households of many textile workers, wives

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<sup>28</sup>Scott and Tilly, *Women, Work, and Family*, 136. A notable exception to this is a case of Paris, Ontario, called "women's town," where its textile industry provided more stable and better-paid employment opportunities to women, both married and unmarried, than to men. See Parr, especially, 15-18.

withdrew from the labour market as the children began to contribute wages to the family.<sup>29</sup>

The complementary roles of children and married women (mothers and wives) in wage labour notwithstanding, French-Canadian children's contribution to their household drastically declined at the turn of the century. Frances Early, in her study on French-Canadian families in Lowell, draws on the data derived from the 1875 *Annual Report of Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor*, and shows that in twenty-six French-Canadian households none of the wives were listed as working, while thirty-six children (age unspecified) earned wages. The earnings of the children represented as much as 39 percent of the total income of these families.<sup>30</sup> By the first decade of the twentieth century, the Immigration Commission reported that, although French-Canadian children in Lowell continued to be the most important wage-earners after male heads, the proportion of the children's contribution had fallen to 29 percent.<sup>31</sup> The significant decline in the contribution of children shows the impact of a series of transformations that had begun earlier in New England, in particular, the anti-child labour

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<sup>29</sup>Hareven, *Family Time*, 208-210. This was not the case of Valleyfield, Quebec, where as late as the end of WWII, a very small proportion of married women participated in paid work. See Cuthbert Brandt, "Weaving It Together" *Labour/Le Travailleur* 7 (Spring 1981): 113-125. See also footnotes 17 and 40 of this chapter.

<sup>30</sup>Frances Early, "French-Canadian Beginnings," 186; Massachusetts, Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *Sixth Annual Report, 1875*, 203, 235-36, 275-76, 307, 311-14, 337.

<sup>31</sup>The Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 271. The Immigration Commission data do not specify the age of the children but include all those appeared as sons or daughters of the household head on the Commission's inquiry.

movement and legislative reforms for compulsory school attendance.<sup>32</sup>

The reduced economic contribution of children in French-Canadian households was partly compensated by their fathers' increased wage-earning capacity. As mentioned in chapter three, by the early twentieth century, many French-Canadian males had secured positions for themselves, in the textile mills and elsewhere, that involved more skill and responsibility than the occupations of the men of an earlier cohort, who had worked as day labourers and unskilled workers. When the contributions of children shrank, the relatively new occupational status of French-Canadian family heads probably made it easier for their families to make ends meet.<sup>33</sup>

The reduced labour market participation of children was also compensated by the growing participation of married French-Canadian women in the labour market. Although the absence of data for Lowell does not allow us to observe this growth from an earlier period, my census data indicate that in 1910 as much as one quarter of the French-Canadian female workforce fifteen years of age or older was made up of married women; ten years later, the proportion remained at about the same level.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>For a fuller explanation, see the section on the demographic profile in chaps. 4 and 5 of this thesis. See also Ramirez, *On the Move*, 127.

<sup>33</sup>I have discussed this point in the previous chapter.

<sup>34</sup>My calculation is based on data drawn from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules. Studies on other New England textile centres clearly reveal the increased presence of married women in the labour market. In Rhode Island, for example, only 3.2 percent of married French-Canadian women brought wages home in 1880. Twenty years later, their proportion rose to 15 percent. See Ramirez, *On the Move*, 131. In Manchester, New Hampshire, 12.6 percent of married women who resided with their husbands in 1900 were in the labour force. See Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, 198. A New England-wide survey undertaken by the Immigration Commission also confirms this tendency. In the cotton textiles, the

These figures indicate that, although French-Canadian married women lagged far behind their children in contributing wages to the household, their participation in the labour market became more important over time. These changes in the patterns of labour market participation among French-Canadian family members occurred as the textile industry was undergoing a series of structural transformations with regard to the age, gender, and ethnic configurations of its labour force. Although the evidence is too thin to support any conclusive hypothesis, the change in patterns of labour force participation of French-Canadian households points to the fact that French-Canadian families were rapidly adapting themselves to the new labour market conditions.

A substantial proportion of married French-Canadian women earned wages either continuously or intermittently throughout their lifetime, as their age distribution suggests (see Table 6.5). Except for widows, these women were on average the oldest in the city's French-Canadian female work force. According to the Lowell census schedules of 1910 and 1920, while employed married women were spread across all age groups, half of them were aged thirty-five years or older, and as much as a quarter were in the upper age category of forty-five years old and over. The majority (more than 75 percent, both in 1910 and 1920) worked in the textile industry. These figures suggest that by the early twentieth century, while some French-Canadian women worked only until the birth of their first child, and then withdrew from the labour market, a large proportion of married women either continued to work many years

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industry that continued to draw the largest number of French Canadians in 1908, more than one third of French-Canadian female workers were married women. Moreover, while the ages of these married women spanned between twenty and forty-four years old, a large proportion was found in the category of thirty to forty-four years old. See *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 396-99. See also Ramirez, *On the Move*, 131-33.



longer or else re-entered the labour market after child-birth, shuttling between work and home. Yet another possibility<sup>35</sup> is that these women returned to paid-work after completing periods of child-rearing.

The census manuscripts also show some examples of working married women who were likely to have worked (some continuously, others intermittently) from the time they were young. Since inspectors were drawn from experienced workers, Marie Houde, a seventy-year-old inspector in a cotton factory, must have worked for many years. Another married woman, Adelin Groleux, fifty-five years old, was working as a mender in a hosiery factory. This skilled woman's work consisted of reconstructing the pattern in defective or damaged woolen or worsted cloth. While the majority (77.1 percent in 1910 and 76.6 percent in 1920) of married French-Canadian women in Lowell worked in the textile industry, there was also a small number who worked at home, either as dressmakers, or as owners of their own family business such as a boardinghouse or a variety store. Ida Dextra, a sixty-one-year old dressmaker, was one example of women who performed this kind of work at home.<sup>36</sup>

Oral interviews reveal the hardships endured by working French-Canadian women during long years of trying to make ends meet. For instance, Valentine Chartrand, the oldest girl in her family, left school on her fourteenth birthday. She told a nun at her school: "My father needs the extra money, and I have to leave." She worked from that day on — and did so for over fifty years until she

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<sup>35</sup>Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, chap. 7.

<sup>36</sup>Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1910, district 861, ward 6, dwelling 184, family number 597; district 860, ward 6, dwelling unidentified, family number 683; Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 185, ward 2, dwelling 22, family number 36.

was well past the age of sixty. Even though a doctor once urged her to quit, she recounted: "My husband's pay wasn't that big, so I needed the extra money." "When I was sixty-two," she added:

I was working part time, and I wasn't well. I had to keep going. Because my husband was sick for four years and a half, in and out of the hospital, and I could see the money going out and getting nothing in. When he died (...), I nearly gave up for two years. I didn't feel like doing nothing, and then I said to myself, Well, you can't give up, you gotta keep going. And I just kept going. I went back to work.<sup>37</sup>

An examination of French-Canadian women throughout their family life cycle reveals fluctuations in the rates of labour force participation (see Table 6.7). In 1910, the rate of married women in the labour force was at its highest prior to the birth of the first child (stage I); whereupon it dropped to its lowest (stage II), and remained so until all children were under eleven years old (stage III).<sup>38</sup> A decade later, the labour participation rate of married French-Canadian women was generally higher throughout the entire family life cycle except for when the family had half of its children aged fifteen or under (stage IV). The general pattern in 1920 was similar to that of 1910. The rate was high before the birth of the first children; dropped to its lowest when the family had one infant child,

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<sup>37</sup>Valentine Chartrand, interview by Mary Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 44-54. In the neighbouring city of Manchester, New Hampshire, women followed similar intermittent patterns of employment, working three to four months a year when their husbands were out of work or "entre les accouchements," as Evelyn Desruisseaux recalls. Even pregnant women, anticipating large expenses for their newborn babies, went back to "donner un coup" at the textile factories. Others worked three or four months so that they could save just enough to buy a piece of furniture for the bedroom or replace a pot in the kitchen. Elmire Boucher and Evelyn Desruisseaux, interviews by Jacques Rouillard, reproduced in Rouillard, *Ah les Etats!*, 87-100; 101-12, especially 93 and 109.

<sup>38</sup>One stage II woman who indicated that she was working in 1910 as a dressmaker at home.

Table 6.7  
Paid Labour Participation Rates of French-Canadian Married Women by Life Cycle, 1910 and 1920

	1910		1920			
	Percent	(N)	Percent	(N)		
		Working Women	Women in the Category	Working Women	Women in the Category	
I	47.8	(11)	(23)	65.0	(13)	(20)
II	14.3	(1)	(7)	-	-	(7)
III	12.8	(6)	(47)	29.4	(10)	(34)
IV	18.8	(12)	(64)	14.8	(9)	(61)
V	19.5	(8)	(41)	55.0	(11)	(20)
VI	21.4	(6)	(28)	74.0	(20)	(27)
VII	45.5	(5)	(11)	81.3	(13)	(16)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Notes: 1.

- Stage I. Wife under forty-five years old, no children
- Stage II. Wife under forty-five years old, one child under one
- Stage III. All children under eleven years old
- Stage IV. Half the children fifteen years old or under
- Stage V. Half the children over fifteen years
- Stage VI. All children over fifteen years old
- Stage VII. Wife over forty-five years old, no resident children

2. The total numbers for 1910 and 1920 do not add up to those of the married French-Canadian wage-earning women because of the women who were classified in the stages IV and V at the same time. These individuals are counted twice.

3. A woman who worked in the stage II in 1910 was an autonomous dressmaker working at home.

and rose considerably once half of the children were over fifteen (stage V), and reached its highest level at the "empty nest" period.

The years from the birth of the first child to the time this child reached working age was the period of greatest need for the household because it was during this time that the child required food and care, yet did not contribute wages. Moreover, mothers who had a child under a year old had a markedly low percentage of employment.<sup>39</sup> This must be explained by the difficulty of balancing employment outside the home with the responsibility of caring for new born babies. Oral interviews with Lowell textile workers do not show any evidence that management extended special treatment to new mothers whereas elsewhere, temporary maternity leaves were at times granted to experienced female workers who had proved themselves to be quick, accurate, and reliable.<sup>40</sup> Explaining the lack of such treatment in Lowell will require further study through a comparative analysis of different textile cities. One may speculate that, to a large extent, the lack of such special treatment for the female workers in Lowell factories may have resulted from the presence of an abundant reserve labour force that was usually continually renewed by the influx of new migrants.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

<sup>40</sup>In Paris, Ontario, for instance, textile factories accorded temporary leaves of absence for child-birth to their experienced female workers. Such allowances encouraged many wives to return to the factories after giving birth. Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 80-81. To my knowledge, there is no evidence of such practice in the New England textile industry in this period.

<sup>41</sup>The Amoskeag Corporation in Manchester, New Hampshire, did not provide special treatment to their female workers either. According to Hareven, however, it was easy for women (and men) who had been employed by the company to return to work after childbirth, completion of childrearing, or employment in other jobs. This indicates that workers in textile manufacturing left and returned to work frequently by today's standards and that the textile companies ordinarily laid off and re-hired their workers. The workers' mobility was considerably reduced in recessions, however. Such patterns of

The acutely felt common need for securing a minimum income notwithstanding, not all working married women shared the same degree of economic responsibility. As one can read from Table 6.8, the labour market participation rate of French-Canadian women was not simply a reflection of their marital status or life cycle: it was also indicative of variations in their family status, depending on their place in the household (as wife, married daughter, head of household, or lodger), the configuration of their household (which members of the household worked), and living arrangements (who headed the households — whether or not the household was headed by the husband, parents or parents-in-laws, or women themselves — and who composed the household). For instance, working married women who were the only secondary wage-earner of the household must have assumed a greater financial responsibility than those women whose children also worked in supplementing the wages of their husbands. Nellie Courtney, fifty-two years old, was a dressmaker who worked for a private family. She lived with her fifty-four-year-old husband, Richard, an inspector in a machine shop. Since neither of their two children, aged twelve and twenty-four, worked, Nellie was the only secondary worker in her household. Clara Couture, a forty-three-year-old spooler in a cotton factory, lived with her forty-seven-year-old husband, Henry, a spinner in a cotton factory. Two of the four residing children were also working: a twenty-two-year-old daughter as a looper in hosiery and a twenty-year-old son as a steam fitter for a railway company.

Clara's economic responsibility to her household was probably less significant than that of Nellie.<sup>42</sup>

Tamara Hareven has advanced the hypothesis that the crucial factor for participation in paid labour for married women was not marriage *per se*, but the very pattern of living arrangements for these women.<sup>43</sup> My findings from the data pertaining to French-Canadian married women in Lowell confirm this point. Married women residing in households not headed by their spouses worked more frequently than those living in households headed by their husbands (not shown in the table). In 1910 and 1920, while half of the French-Canadian women in the former category earned wages,

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employment were probably typical among textile workers at the time. Louise Tilly describes these workers as operatives who "worked for most of their lives, though not necessarily continuously." Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, chap. 9, esp. 243-58; Louise Tilly, "Paths of Proletarianization: Organization of Production, Sexual Division of Labor and Women's Collective Action," *Signs* 7 (1978): 400-417, esp. 415.

<sup>42</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 238, ward 8, dwelling 25, family number 30; district 553, ward 6, dwelling 22, family number 849.

<sup>43</sup>Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, 198-99. In Quebec, as Cuthbert Brandt's study shows, a far smaller proportion of married women participated in the paid labour force. The availability of industrial occupations was clearly more limited in Quebec than in New England cities, and this might have partly influenced their participation rates. As well, while women in Quebec were faced with the same economic needs as their counterparts in Lowell, married French-Canadian women in Quebec may have had recourse to more diverse means — having their children earn wages, tending to gardens, keeping animals, and so on. In addition, cultural factors, including the attitudes of employers, husbands, and married women themselves towards their participation in paid work, as well as the influence of the Catholic Church, must have also played an important role in curbing the rate of women's paid work. I gratefully acknowledge the comments formulated by Professor Denyse Baillargeon on this point. See Cuthbert Brandt, "Weaving It Together" *Labour/Le Travailleur* 7 (Spring 1981): 113-125.

less than twenty percent in the latter category did so.<sup>44</sup> Florence Côté, a seventeen-year-old stitcher, married to Eugène, twenty-one and a machinist, lived with her parents-in-law, Adrien and Emile Côté. Adrien was a labourer and Emile stayed home probably to take care of domestic work. Two of Eugène's sisters worked, one as a cutter and the other as a turner in a hosiery factory, and a brother as a machinist in a machine shop. Another example is Blanche Rhéaume, a married daughter living in the household of her widowed father, Octavie, who, at fifty-five, was a cutter in a hosiery factory. Blanche worked as stitcher and her twenty-seven-year-old husband was a tanner. Blanche's sister and brother also worked as stitchers. Reine, another sister, stayed at home.<sup>45</sup>

The proportion of female workers who were wives of the household head (thus excluding married lodgers) expanded over the decade from 1910 to 1920; clearly these women were increasingly called upon to juggle wage-earning responsibilities and domestic work. In 1910, half of the French-Canadian women in Lowell who were married and employed, lived in households headed by their husbands; a decade later, the proportion had grown to two thirds.<sup>46</sup> Conversely, the proportion of married daughters went down over the

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<sup>44</sup>These findings are similar to the ones in Hareven's study on French-Canadian families in Manchester, New Hampshire, with regard to differences in the labour participation rates between women who were living in households headed by their spouses and those who had other household arrangements. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, 198-99.

<sup>45</sup>Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1910, district 861, ward 6, dwelling 102, family number 356; district 861, ward 6, dwelling 81, family number 256.

<sup>46</sup>Among working women who did not live in households headed by their husbands, a large proportion lived in the household of their parents or in-laws, with or without their husband. The proportion of working women who, although married, lived apart from their husbands was far smaller than that of women who lived with their husband in households headed by someone else.

decade; in 1910, 16.7 percent of working French-Canadian women were married daughters who lived in the households of their parents or in-laws; ten years later, the proportion fell to 10.6 percent. These changes point to the fact that not only did a growing proportion of French-Canadian women reach marriageable age by 1920, but also a greater proportion of them came to live in the households headed by their husbands, rather than by their fathers or fathers-in-law. A consequence of this change was that, in comparison to the conditions in 1910, by 1920, these married women were less likely to have a family member (for instance, a grandmother) at home who would take care of young children. Now, these married women had to perform domestic work and child care as well as earn wages. This was the case of Dora, a twenty-two-year-old French-Canadian immigrant, who worked as a knitter at a hosiery. She was married to a Massachusetts-born Irishman, Frank McGorv, twenty-one years old, who worked as a confectioner in an ice cream company. The couple had two infant children. Without any other member of family residing in the household, Dora probably had to find someone — her mother, mother-in-law, a neighbour, friend, or a nursery — to take care of the two young children while she was at work.<sup>47</sup>

Another implication of the fact that a greater proportion of married women lived in the household headed by their husbands was a trend towards a smaller variety of women's relationships to the household. A growing proportion of married women was listed as wives of the household heads and conversely, the proportion of those listed as heads of households and married daughters decreased (see Table 6.8).<sup>48</sup> The available data do not tell us if these married women

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<sup>47</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 218, ward 23, dwelling 158, family number 484.

<sup>48</sup>These percentages represent a significant drop in the proportion of female-headed households but the causes of this decrease are unknown.



Table 6.8  
Distribution of French-Canadian Married Female Workers According to Pattern of Wage Earning in Their Household  
of Residence, Lowell, 1910 and 1920 (Number by Individuals)

Other wage earners in household	Head	Wife	Daughter	Other Family	Lodger	Servant	Total
<b>1910</b>							
Only male household head worked					1		1
Only male household head and spouse worked		23		1	1		1
Only male household head and other family members worked		1	6				
Male household head, spouse, and children worked		4					
Female household head and other family members worked	4		2				
Only female household head worked	1						
Unidentified					3		
Total (N)	5	28	8	1	5	1	48
Percentage	(10.4)	(50.0)	(16.7)	(2.4)	(10.4)	(2.1)	(100.0)
<b>1920</b>							
Only male household head worked		1					5
Only female spouse worked		1					1
Only male household head and spouse worked		17					1
Only other family members worked			1				
Only male household head and other family members worked			3				
Male household head, spouse, and children worked	1	12			1		1
No one worked (Female-headed household)							1
Only female head worked							1
Only female head and other family members worked			1				
Only female head worked (single-woman household)	1						
Total (N)	2	31	5	-	1	8	47
Percentage	(4.3)	(66.0)	(10.6)	-	(17.0)	(2.1)	(100.0)

Source: Compiled by author from Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

Note: Because numbers are rounded, the total percentage may not equal one hundred.

without spouses had been abandoned by their husbands or if the husbands were temporarily away from home. Unless their absent husbands were sending money home, the sustenance of these households definitely required secondary wage-earners. In Clouatre's family, for instance, the income of a forty-seven-year-old mother, Agnès, who worked as a weaver, was supplemented by two sons, Joseph, nineteen, and William, sixteen, who both worked as house painters. The youngest son, who was thirteen years old, was listed as being at school.<sup>49</sup> Regardless of her legal status, the heavy responsibility of managing without a spouse is something that Agnès shared in common with her widowed co-workers.

The above analysis has shown the variety of financial responsibilities of married women and some of the factors that define the extent of these roles. Evidence presented in this section clearly reveals that a substantial proportion of women were involved in paid work for many years of their lives. Changes that occurred to the living arrangements of the French-Canadian married women during the decade from 1910 and 1920 point to the trend towards a reduction of diversity in married women's relations to their households. These changes incited married women to perform different responsibilities both at home and at work.

### *6.3.3. Widowed French-Canadian Women*

Loss of a male spouse, either by desertion or death, laid bare the fragility and flexibility of French-Canadian families in Lowell whose economy was largely dependent on men's earnings. It also revealed the inequality of local labour markets that invariably

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<sup>49</sup>Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1910, district 861, ward 6, dwelling 81, family number 269.

offered higher wages to male workers than to their female counterparts.<sup>50</sup> Widows represented but one extreme of an irregular continuum which included the separated, the deserted, and non-supported — each different in their legal status but similar in the challenges they faced.<sup>51</sup> The majority of widows (over 60 percent) did not work outside the home, which indicates the influence of the family wage ideology as well as the impact of the local labour market conditions that perpetuated the division of labour based on gender. Yet a significant proportion of French-Canadian widows in Lowell adjusted to their loss by participating in the labour market: their labour force participation rate was twice as high as that of married women. In either case, the primary concerns of widows were the following: to reconcile the responsibilities of paid and unpaid work; and to secure supplementary sources of income, usually by sending children to work.

That widows sought gainful employment more frequently than married women can be explained by the financial difficulties faced by their households after the death of the principal male wage-earner. Given the low wages of female workers, however, these women rarely earned enough to compensate for the lost income that their spouses had formerly provided.<sup>52</sup> In the light of such difficult

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<sup>50</sup>An exception was the case of young workers in the textile industry. The average weekly wage for French-Canadian girls between fourteen and seventeen years of age was higher than that of their male counterparts. I discuss this point further in the forthcoming pages of this section. See also Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 251-54.

<sup>51</sup>Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families*, 183.

<sup>52</sup>For the labour market participation and household organization of widows, see a study by Bettina Bradbury on Montreal's working-class families in the second half of the nineteenth century and a study by Suzanne Morton on Nova Scotian women in the 1920s. Bradbury, *Working Families*, chap. 6; Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburbs in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

economic conditions, one might expect even more widows to seek work outside the home.

Our Lowell findings suggest that, at times, widowed women, as the heads of households, tried to conform to the prevailing social and cultural norms — the family wage ideology — by sending their children to work, while staying at home themselves, and therefore maintained the employment patterns of the majority of married women with their spouses. Not surprisingly, however, because of their difficult material conditions, a significant number of them (40 percent) were not able to sustain the conventional pattern.<sup>53</sup>

There may have been another more pragmatic reason for the majority of French-Canadian widows staying out of the labour market.<sup>53-a</sup> In households where there were adult sons, it made good sense to send them out to earn wages rather than participating in the labour force. This was because a man's wage tended to rise considerably when he moved into young adulthood, whereas a woman's wage did not increase significantly. In Lowell's cotton factories, Canadian-born girls between fourteen and seventeen years of age received a wage of \$6.09 compared to the \$5.01 per week earned by the Canadian-born boys of the same age category. However, Canadian-born female cotton workers aged eighteen or more made on average \$7.08 (an increase of only 16 percent),

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<sup>53</sup>A similar pattern for the participation of widowed women in the labour force has been found in Tullylish, Ireland. Marilyn Cohen, "Survival Strategies," 307-08.

<sup>53-a</sup> According to my calculation based on the census data, among the widow-headed households, when adult sons or daughters were working for wages, widows themselves tended to stay home. In 1910, of eighteen households where male and female childrens were earning wages, seven widows also worked whereas eleven stayed out of the labour market. In 1920, the figures are eighteen, six, and twelve, respectively.

considerably surpassed by an average of \$9.77 for their male counterparts (an increase of 95 percent).<sup>54</sup> This meant that a widowed mother earned no more than her young adult daughter, and far less than her adult son. It was, thus, economically more advantageous for a widowed woman to have her son, rather than herself, work for wages. Similarly, since daughters could expect to earn roughly the same wages as their widowed mothers, the latter might reasonably prefer to stay at home and depend on the wages of their female (as well as male) children. This may have been particularly true of older widows. By sending their adult children to work, therefore, a widowed mother was able to perpetuate the conventional work pattern.

The crucial factor underlying the widows' limited participation in the wage labour market despite their households' necessities was doubtless the advanced age of the women and their subsequent difficulty in keeping pace with the production speed at the textile factories. The age distribution of widowed female workers support this hypothesis. Working widows were the oldest among French-Canadian female workers. The majority were aged forty-five or older (58 percent in 1910 and 50 percent in 1920), and a quarter were between thirty-five and forty-four (see Table 6.5). Their relatively advanced age probably rendered it more difficult for them

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<sup>54</sup>Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 251-54. The differences in the wage increase between men and women were largely a result of job mobility within the industry. In an interview, a female weave room inspector, occupying one of the highest positions women could achieve in the textile factories at the time, reveals that men went into weaving with the idea of getting a job loom fixing, slashing, or of going into the machine shop. "That [weaving] was their stepping stone to something else. It was almost like a career ladder, up the ladder, you know." In contrast, female weavers mostly stayed as weavers because they didn't have "anywhere to go." Narcissa Fantini Hodges, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 81-91, especially 90.

to assumed the work load assigned to them in the factories. Moreover, factories were reluctant to employ older women.

The occupational distribution of widowed women corroborates the above hypothesis underlining the significance of age. Like other female workers, most of them were employed in the textile industry. But there was also a significant proportion of widows — a proportion far larger than among single or married French-Canadian female workers — in non-industrial employment, particularly in the service sector, boardinghouses, and for private families. In 1910, over three quarters of single and married French-Canadian women were working in textile factories, while only a small proportion (one percent for single workers and 2.8 percent for married ones) worked in boarding and domestic services. By contrast, among widowed French-Canadian female workers, as many as one third worked in the service sector. In comparison to women of other marital statuses, a relatively smaller percentage (61 percent) of widowed women were employed in the textile industry. A decade later, although the proportion of French-Canadian women of all marital categories who worked in the textile industry increased, the relative proportion of widowed French Canadians in the service sector remained significant. More than one out of ten working widows were in this sector, as compared to 4.3 percent for married women and less than one percent for single female workers.<sup>55</sup>

It is impossible for us to single out the advantages or disadvantages of these occupations in comparison to other employment possibilities.<sup>56</sup> This is because the available data do not,

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<sup>55</sup>Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules.

<sup>56</sup>Irish immigrant women were well known for their strong presence in domestic services in the past. On the west coast, a large number of Japanese immigrant women took up these jobs. See Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War*

unfortunately, offer any information on the wages that widows earned as housekeepers or servants nor on their former job experience,<sup>57</sup> work schedule, or working conditions. Nonetheless, the significant presence of widowed women in these jobs suggests that selling one's labour power as an experienced housekeeper constituted a practical and common alternative to industrial employment. One might assume that these women lacked industrial skills or formal, specialized training, leading them to concentrate on certain household services that they had learned at home. This explanation does not seem plausible, however, given that earlier in life — before and/or after getting married, or prior to being widowed — these women were likely to have worked in textile manufacturing in the city, as did their married and single sisters. The reasons for their predominant presence in the service sector must lie elsewhere.

One may speculate that, given that working hours were less restrictive in boardinghouses than in factories, employment in the service sector helped widowed women fulfill their twin responsibilities: on the one hand, to generate income, and on the other hand, to continue their housekeeping tasks.<sup>58</sup> It is also

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*Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

<sup>57</sup>Although the Immigration Commission data shows the occupational experience of French-Canadian women in general, the data do not differentiate these women according to their marital status. See Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, vol. 10, 241-42.

<sup>58</sup>The marked presence of widows working as housekeepers was not unique to French-Canadian immigrants in Lowell. Unfortunately, there are no comparable data for French-Canadian women in other New England cities for the same period. Bettina Bradbury reveals that in Montreal in the second half of the nineteenth century, to work as a housekeeper for a boardinghouse was a practice frequently found among widows. See Bradbury, *Working Families*, 197-200. I would like to thank Professor Denyse Baillargeon for an insightful comment regarding the work choice of widows.

possible that widows preferred service sector jobs which required less routine and a greater diversity in work than did operative work in the manufacturing sector. Thus the work of providing board and services became a pragmatic strategy for the survival of a large number of widows and their families.

Working widows in the service sector provided their labour in several forms. Most of them worked for private families, or privately or commercially run boardinghouses. Those with minimal capital but extra space ran their own boardinghouses by converting a part of their home. For example, Octavie, a 72-year-old widow, was listed as a proprietor of a boardinghouse. Her two sons, aged forty-eight and thirty-five years old, worked as house painters and her forty-one-year-old daughter as a spinner.<sup>59</sup> Even among other widows who did not formally list their homes as boardinghouses, it was common to find one or two lodgers or roomers living with them.

With the low wages that women earned,<sup>60</sup> it was crucial for most of the families headed by widowed women to secure supplementary sources of income or to reduce the cost of living. Widow workers often shared with their children the responsibility for supporting the household. The census manuscripts offer us some examples. Take, for instance, two widows, Julie Bédard and Malvina St. Peter, both in their fifties, the age category of most French-Canadian widowed workers. In the household of Julie, who worked as a housekeeper for a private family, two sons brought home

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<sup>59</sup>Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1910, district 186, ward 2, dwelling 10, family number 298.

<sup>60</sup>The Immigration Committee reprinted that the average annual earnings of female workers eighteen years of age and over was \$283, in comparison to \$463 of their male counterparts. Immigration Commission, *The Immigrants in Industry*, vol. 10, 260, 263.



additional income. Thirty-seven-year-old Joseph owned and ran a boardinghouse, and twenty-six-year-old John worked as a printer in a cotton factory. Mary, an eighteen-year-old daughter, did not list any work or indicate attendance at school. She was probably working without wages at her brother Joséph's boardinghouse while taking charge of housekeeping work.<sup>61</sup> Malvina St. Peter, a spinner in a cotton factory, lived with her married son, Frank, and his family. He was thirty-three years old, working as a boilerman. His wife, twenty-nine years old, stayed home with her two sons, one several months old, the other six years old.<sup>62</sup>

Widows without children of working age found alternative living arrangements for themselves as a way to reduce the uncertainties in their daily living. For example, Emma Guilmet, a thirty-four-year-old widowed spinner at a cotton factory, had a daughter of thirteen and a son of eleven. They lived in the household of Emma's sister, who was married to a labourer and had three children of ten, nine, and seven years old. Even with the financial help of her brother-in-law, however, Emma must have had a hard time keeping her family above the poverty line.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, living with her sister's family was an important survival strategy for Emma as well as for other widows without wage-earning children.

A small number of widows were listed as boarders or live-in housekeepers. In such cases, these women were self-supporting or

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<sup>61</sup>Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1910, district 846, ward 3, dwelling 213, family number 391.

<sup>62</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 576, dwelling 103, family number 179.

<sup>63</sup>Fourteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1920, district 219, ward 6, dwelling 20, family number 33.

acted as the principal wage-earner for the family. Vitaline Bisson, a thirty-three-year-old widow and stitcher at a hosiery factory, boarded with the family of Edward and Victoria Burel, who had a fourteen-year-old son. Edward was a carder at a cotton factory and Victoria occupied the position of stitcher in a hosiery factory.<sup>64</sup>

Women without spouses were clearly the most hard pressed among French-Canadian female workers in Lowell. While the majority did not work, a good proportion of widows worked, and in order to meet the need to secure sufficient wages they sent their children into the labour market. When they failed, they sought solutions in the larger circle of extended families, while a handful of them remained self-supporting or the principal wage-earner for the family. The hardship of these widows was enhanced by the daily need to provide for their household members. Some overcame these challenges by engaging in service sector jobs while others took the responsibility of domestic chores or sent their children into the wage labour market.

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My examination of the working lives of French-Canadian women of varying marital status reveals the diversity of economic responsibilities undertaken by female workers. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, French-Canadian women in Lowell played an integral role in the economic well-being of their households. Their roles ranged from those of supplementary wage contributors, to sole financial providers, to self-supporting workers. Their patterns of employment also varied, and while some women

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<sup>64</sup>Thirteenth U.S. Federal Census Schedules, 1910, district 861, ward 6, dwelling 81, family number 259.

worked continuously throughout their lives, others worked intermittently or on a temporary basis. Their economic role was defined not only by their age and marital status, but also by a complex set of factors which included living arrangements and household structure, and particularly their relationships (or lack thereof) to male wage-earners. Despite the variations in work life, these women all shared a common obligation — that of performing domestic work. Whether working for wages or not, their contribution did not remain confined to supplementing the family income. On the contrary, their contribution to the family budget was often coupled with all the duties of maintaining the home. The following section addresses the question of the extent to which French-Canadian women in Lowell were expected to take charge of domestic responsibilities and the ways in which they manage to combine housework with wage-earning activities.

#### 6.4. UNPAID WORK

Performing paid work did not reduce the burden of housekeeping for French-Canadian women. Although the division of domestic work along gender lines was not always clearly defined, oral interviews reveal that in contrast to men's relatively limited contribution, French-Canadian women were generally responsible for most of the domestic work regardless of their working status outside the home. In the early twentieth century, together with the mass production of food and clothes, household technology was spreading rapidly in the United States. Nonetheless, as far as most households in Lowell were concerned, the so-called time- and labour-saving devices and housekeeping facilities (such as gas stoves, electric light, running water, and refrigerators) did not make

an immediate impact.<sup>65</sup> Like women in most working-class families, French-Canadian women, married or single, did not have the financial means to take advantage of this new technology. The domestic setting for many working-class women and their families was the gloomy, crowded living space of cold-water tenements, which often lacked electricity. The tenements were filled with cheap, galvanized objects such as beds, tubs, and lunch pails. A coal stove was essential for heating the apartment, as well as for cooking and heating water for the endless washing. Gas lamps, sometimes even kerosene lamps, lit the kitchen where family members gathered to eat, pass the evening, or even take a bath.<sup>66</sup> In these tenements, wives and daughters cooked meals, cleaned, sewed, washed, ironed and mended clothes for the entire family. They also shopped, paid the bills, managed the household budget, and exchanged services outside the home, such as nursing, midwifery, and child care. By carrying out these tasks, none of which were financially compensated, women played crucial roles that contributed to the welfare of their families.

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<sup>65</sup>Since most Lowell families did not have refrigerators, they used ice chests or ice boxes in order to keep food from going bad. Grace Burk, the daughter of an Irish mother and a Swede father, told her interviewer:

"[...] We had the iceman. We had the old-fashioned ice chest, lift the cover and put the ice in it. When you needed ice, you had a card, 'Ice,' and you'd put it up in the front room window. And when he[d] come by and see that card, you needed ice, and he'd bring the ice in. There would be a pan underneath the ice chest, and we had to empty it every night or it would overflow on the floor."

Grace Burk, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 55-63, esp. 59. During my interviews in April 1993, Paul Bordeleau, a son of French-Canadian immigrants to Lowell in the early 1920s, confirmed this practice.

<sup>66</sup>Henry Paradis, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, especially 245; *ibid.*, 31. See also Emma Skehan, interview by Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 111-12; chap. 3 of this study.

Work performed by women outside the formal economy included three types of work: housekeeping, care-giving, and other income-generating practices. Joan Smith has called this last type of work "subsistence-sector labour."<sup>67</sup> It drew much time and energy away from work at home. At times, with the help of their children, women sold sandwiches, took in boarders, and, when driven by extreme need, scrounged or even stole in order to make a few extra dollars.<sup>68</sup> At other times, they simply did without. However, the very

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<sup>67</sup>Joan Smith, "Non-wage Labor and Subsistence," in *Households and the World Economy*, ed. Joan Smith, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Evers Hans-Dieter (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1984), 64-89, especially 70. Michaela Di Leonardo adds another category of women's work, "kinship work," by which Italian women in San Francisco brought extended families together for holiday celebrations, took charge of ritual observances like birthdays, decided upon visits, wrote cards, and gave presents. Through this work of kinship, women established bonds that reached beyond nuclear families. See Michaela Di Leonardo, "The Female World of Cards and Holidays; Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship," *Signs* 12 (Spring 1987): 440-53; Di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience*.

<sup>68</sup>Henry Paradis, a son of French-Canadian immigrants to Lowell, recounts his experience of doing things "on the side" as late as in the 1930s. He sold cold beer to his friends who gathered at his place to play cards. He charged ten cents a bottle and paid his mother a dollar for the electricity to use the refrigerator. As he tells in an interview,

"[...] I could probably make three cents a bottle. But, you do that two, three times a week, it gets to be a lot of money at the end of the week. And I was well known; I was very popular with the city of Lowell."

Henry Paradis, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 244-254, especially 247-48. Another example was Alice Lacasse, a French-Canadian immigrant daughter in Manchester, New Hampshire, in the early twentieth century. In an interview, Alice reveals a variety of activities that her mother, Maria, did at home in order to earn extra money. She made all the clothes for her family, took in boarders, rented rooms, and sold sandwiches to the girls working in the Amoskeag factories if they didn't bring their lunch. Maria recalls, "My husband was just across the street, and he used to whistle from the millyard and tell me how many sandwiches he wanted." See Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 254-261. For the income-engendering activities of women in earlier industrial cities, see Bradbury, *Working Families*, 168-181; Christine Stansell, "Women, Children, and the Uses of the Streets: Class and

purpose of this type of work — to generate income — differentiated itself from other forms of domestic work that did not involve any exchange of money or services. Even when paying bills, an action of monetary transaction, one's labour was not financially compensated in a direct manner. The difference between income-generating "housework" and other forms of domestic work is even more striking when considered within the context of the early twentieth century, when women's growing participation in the labour market enabled them to bring home an increasing amount of income on a more regular basis. While the need for other income-generating activities diminished significantly with their participation in the labour market, the number of hours they spent on housekeeping and providing care did not change substantially.<sup>69</sup> The following discussion, taking into account these differences, focuses on two kinds of unpaid work performed by women: housekeeping and the providing of care.<sup>70</sup>

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Gender Conflict in New York City, 1850-1860," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 307-35.

<sup>69</sup>Smith, "Non-wage Labor and Subsistence," 64-89, especially 70. See also Joan Smith and Kirsten Mellor, "Reproducing the Sexual Division of Labor," unpublished paper in the possession of the author, 1982. For an example of stealing coal, see Nicholas Georgoulis, interview by Blewett, reprinted in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, an interview, 257.

<sup>70</sup>In the following discussion, I have made extensive use of a collection of oral history projects conducted from 1979-81 and 1984-86, and published under the title, Mary Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990). Under the aegis of the Lowell National Historical Park, the National Park Service, and the University of Lowell's Special Collections, historians including Blewett, Judith K. Dunning, and Marc Miller as well as librarian Martha Mayo and a number of liberal arts students captured the life stories of former Lowell textile mill workers. For the purpose of comparison, I have also referred to other oral history collections, namely Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach's *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City* and Jacques Rouillard's *Ah les Etats!* which provide us with interviews with former mill workers in the cities of Manchester, Lawrence, Fall River, and Holyoke.

#### 6.4.1. Housekeeping and Looking After Family Members

The sheer quantity of time and energy required for women's domestic work made claims on the organization of a woman's time that were very different from those of a man's time, and this was felt on a daily, weekly, and even life-long basis. The Lowell factories opened their gates as early as six-thirty in the morning, six days a week. Wives and other female family members began their day long before other wage-earning family members in order to ensure that these other wage earners would be awake, fed, and ready on time for work. Del Chouinard recalls his mother's tasks in the morning:

My mother, she'd get up in the morning and make breakfast for the entire family. My father was a meat-and-potatoes man, three times a day. There was no such thing as just a bowl of corn flakes; that wasn't his bag. He'd need meat and potatoes, three times a day.<sup>71</sup>

Similar accounts were also found among other immigrant working-class families, such as Greeks, Irish, and Swedes.<sup>72</sup>

Women had to be healthy, hardy, and strong to carry out such physically demanding and time-consuming daily household tasks, which included washing floors, windows, walls, and clothing. Children were recruited into the household routine at the earliest possible age in order to help their mothers with the work.<sup>73</sup> A mother's task seemed endless and she was continually short-handed.

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<sup>71</sup>Del Chouinard, interview by Blewett, reprinted in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 264-72.

<sup>72</sup>See, for instance, Nicholas Georgoulis, interview by Blewett, reprinted in *ibid.*, 255-63.

<sup>73</sup>Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work, and Family*, 142.

When a woman was not physically well, the entire household suffered.

When helping their mothers at home, sons and daughters were generally assigned different chores. Sons were responsible for the more physical work outside, whereas daughters were expected to do more of the indoor work, even though the latter was equally time-consuming, and occasionally even more physically demanding than the boys' tasks. It was the duty of sons to haul coal and wood from the cellar up the backstairs of tenement buildings after they had helped their fathers chop wood into stove-length pieces. Daughters were counted on to do such work as scrubbing floors, washing dishes, ironing their brothers' shirts, and minding the younger children, often at the end of the day or during weekends, in addition to the work they performed at the textile factory. An interview with Lucie Cordeau reveals the clear division of labour at home:

After a while, my mother was not too well, so one of my older sisters stayed with her all the time to help her with the housework. Me and my sister had special household chores. We had a large tenement, a large kitchen. We had no linoleum, but floors with big wide boards, and every week we had to scrub that floor on our hands and knees. Me and my sister. We had the toilet in the hallway, and we had to scrub that and scrub the hallway. And the stairways. The boys had to lug the wood and the coal and do the shopping. Me and my sister had to do the dishes, and the pots and pans were big. It was too much work for us.<sup>74</sup>

The lives of women and their families were ordered around household chores. Henry remembers that for his family, as for his neighbours in Little Canada, Monday was "washday." People in the neighbourhood had clothes lines spreading from one building to the

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<sup>74</sup>Lucie Cordeau, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 74.



other. They would take their washed clothes outside in a basket and hang them on the line. Children would gather under the water dripping from the hung washed clothes (Figure 6.1). Henry recalls:

Every Monday you thought it was raining, it was dripping so much. In the summertime the kids would get underneath there; it looked like a bath.<sup>75</sup>

Women would sew almost all the clothes for their families. Yvonne Hoar's mother used to pay a penny for surplus stockings that the bargain basement stores would order in bulk from hosiery

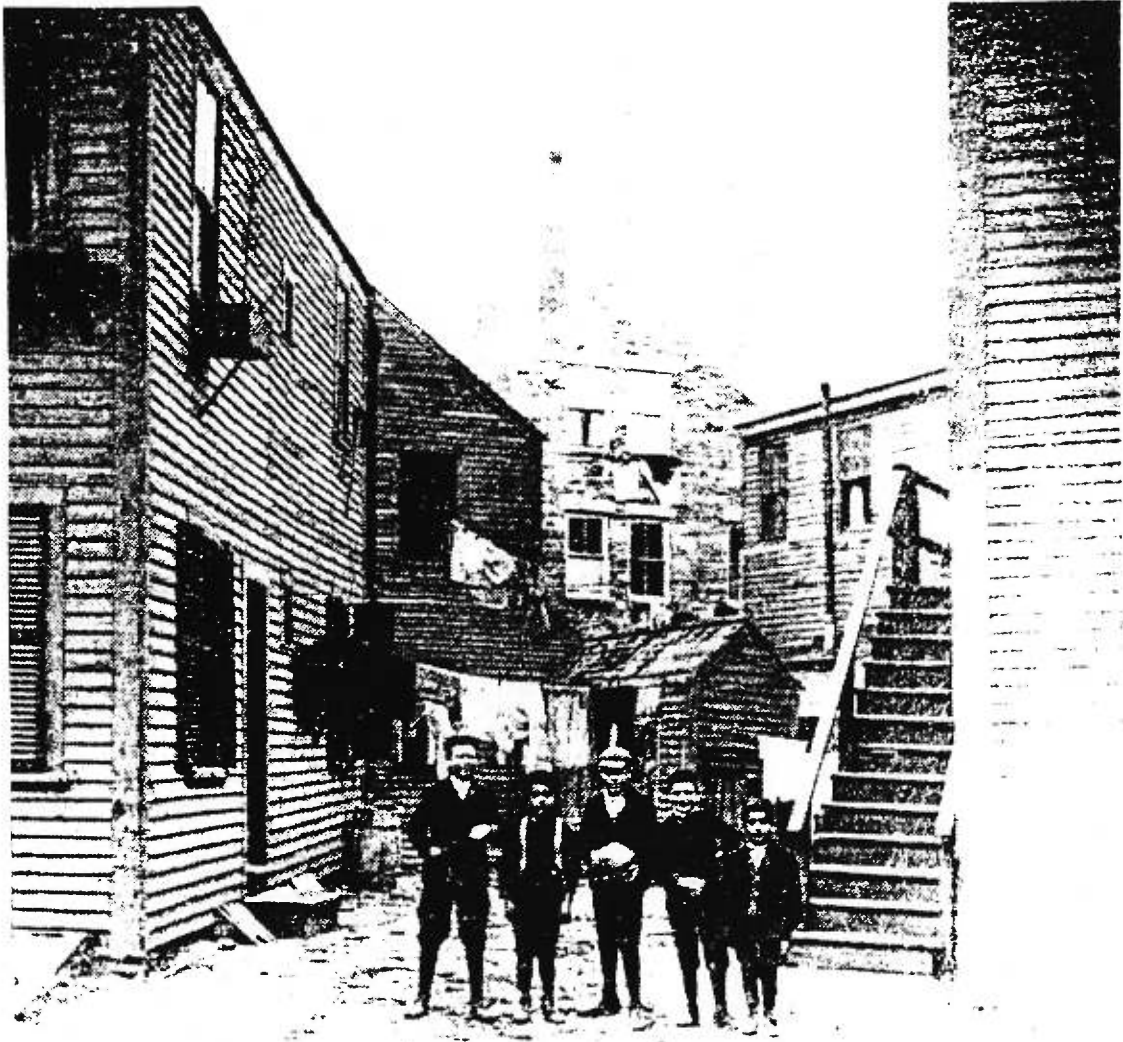
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<sup>75</sup>Henry Paradis, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 245. An interview by Evelyn Desruisseaux in Manchester, New Hampshire, also reveals an orderly day-to-day schedule of the household tasks. Her interview illustrates that domestic chores assigned to men and women moulded their social time differently.

"Le samedi après-midi, on (les filles) lavait nos robes blanches et on empesait le linge de sorte que notre après-midi, on ne le voyait pas. On se dépêchait car, le soir le *chum*, quand on en avait un, venait nous rencontrer. Les semaines passaient sans qu'on les voie. Le dimanche, on allait à la messe. Dans l'après-midi souvent, quand on avait un ami, il venait nous voir. D'autres garçons préféraient se reposer. Le soir, c'était la veillée. C'était la vie que menaient les garçons. Nous, on arrangeait notre linge et on faisait nos commissions. Ça nous donnait peu de temps, car, dans ce temps-là, on se couchait le soir. Ce n'est pas comme aujourd'hui."

Evelyn Desruisseaux, interview by Rouillard, reproduced in Rouillard, *Ah les Etats!*, 101-11, especially 106.

Figure 6.1  
Children and Laundry Clothes Lines, Lowell, 1912



Source: Thomas Dublin and Paul Marion, *Lowell: The Story of an Industrial City*, 73.

Note: This photograph was taken in the Acre where the Irish immigrants once heavily concentrated. By 1912 the Irish dispersed throughout Lowell and other immigrant groups came to live in this neighbourhood.

manufacturing factories. Yvonne recalls:

She'd [Yvonne's mother] pick them [odd stockings] over. Then she would take them home and sew them, try to match them as best she could and sew them together. Then when you wore your long johns in the winter with those black stockings over them, you'd be bow-legged, lumpy — what a mess! That used to irritate me more than anything in my life. I used to cry every time I put them on in the morning; in fact we all did.<sup>76</sup>

Married women were ingenious in stretching and effectively managing their families' limited incomes. Bargain hunting for the groceries was part of their daily routine. By baking their own bread and biscuits, making ice-cream at home, and on occasion preparing special meals like salmon pudding bread with fried rice,<sup>77</sup> Lowell's French-Canadian women treated their family as best they could with the little they had. As Henry said about his mother at the interview, "she always looked after us very, very well. [...] My father was a good worker, never a big provider, but my mother manipulated the paycheck to make both ends meet."<sup>78</sup> When times were hard, Del's parents cashed their children's five and ten cents [a week] insurance policies. He recollects:

If times would get hard and my father would be out of work, they'd cash in one of the small insurance policies and start us another one once they got back on their feet. And that's the way they managed to get through. They always found a way out.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Yvonne Hoar, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 115-25, especially 117.

<sup>77</sup>Henry Paradis, interview by Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 244-46.

<sup>78</sup>Del Chouinard, interview by Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 265.

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

In such a way, women stretched limited resources, found ways to cut costs, and managed to pool extra sources of cash.

#### 6.4.2. *Caring for the Young Ones*

Probably one of the most onerous tasks at home was to care for young children. Again, women were almost wholly responsible for this task. When a significant proportion of married women with young children were working for wages, finding the time to care for these children became a serious problem, though men rarely assumed this responsibility. Occasionally, fathers played with their children and took them out on weekends.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, changing, bathing, and supervising children — all part of the daily care routine — were considered to be "women's work," regardless of the men's free time and whether they were working or not.<sup>81</sup>

When the wife was not around, a female relative such as her mother, mother-in-law, aunt or sister — living with or near the couple — had to take care of the young children.<sup>82</sup> Families who

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<sup>80</sup>Arthur Morrisette, interview by Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 201-07, especially 203.

<sup>81</sup>Alice LaCasse, one of the daughters of a French-Canadian couple who had emigrated from St. Clothilde, Quebec, to Manchester, New Hampshire, recalls her father's negative reaction to her mother's decision to work outside the home. The LaCasses lived right in front of the Amoskeag factories. When there were big orders, the factories looked for people to work and Alice's mother would "work little stretches at night, from six to nine." Her father, however, didn't want to look after the children. Alice, recalling his words, said at the interview: "That [child-minding] was women's work; his work was outside." The LaCasse Family, interview by Hareven and Langenbach, reprinted in Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 254-73, especially 255.

<sup>82</sup>Louise Tilly and Joan Scott have pointed out that in the textile towns of Roubaix, Stockport, and Preston, the incidence of households with relatives was higher than in Anzin, a coal town, or Amien, a city with a mixed occupational structure. This may suggest a strategy of working married women

lacked the help of female kin sometimes sent their young children to the homes of older women — neighbours or friends — who watched over a large number of youngsters for a fee. Yvonne Hoar describes her child care arrangements:

The baby was three years old; he [her husband] worked and I worked. He'd take the baby up to his mother's, and I'd go to work. Then at night I'd get out of work and go to his mother's and pick him up. He was starting to get rambunctious. Grammy was having a hard time chasing after him. So, there was [the Lowell] day nursery (...) it was a nice place with a yard with swings and teeters and everything. I gave him breakfast, and they had a light lunch in the morning. At noon, they had their dinner, then they had a light lunch in the afternoon.<sup>83</sup>

Other working mothers put older siblings in charge of the infants.<sup>84</sup> Still others who "preferred not to see their children wandering on the street" took the young children with them, and had them sit next to them in a lint-filled spinning room or in the deafeningly noisy weaving room. When their children were old enough to learn, mothers often taught them some of the techniques

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in order to take part in the wage-earning opportunities in the textile factories and, at the same time, to care for their young children. Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work, and Family*, 130-32. See also Rouillard, *Ah! Les etats!*, 142, 152.

<sup>83</sup>Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 118-119. The Lowell Day Nursery was established in 1890 to serve a small number of working mothers. Few families had the financial means to use this private charitable institution. See *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>84</sup>When older children were taking care of younger children, a tragic accident could easily happen. As Yvonne Dionne, one of sixteen children in a French-Canadian family, recounts: "My mother said she always had 'one in the crib and one in the oven,' so it was pretty rough on her. When I was little, she worked in the Amoskeag. She'd leave one of my sisters, who was twelve or thirteen, in charge of us; but my sister wouldn't stay in the house. She'd go outside to be with her friends. One day, I tried to reach the kettle to take it off the stove, and I dropped it and burned myself and one of the babies. My mother never went back to the mills after that." See Marie Anne Senechal, interview by Hareven and Langenbach, reproduced in Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 197-200.

of spinning and weaving.<sup>85</sup> A case in point was Blanche Graham, a twelve-year-old daughter of French-Canadian immigrants, who spent her summer vacations helping her mother spin in the Appleton factory. Her mother taught her how to clean the frames and put in the bobbins. At the same time, her mother made a point of saying that "I don't want you to come work in the mills when you get bigger. I want you to do something else." Yet life did not leave Blanche much choice but to go and work in the textile factories. At the age of fourteen, she lost her mother, became pregnant and, consequently, was abandoned by her strict, unforgiving father. Two years later, she went to work at a hosiery factory, Hub Hosiery, and began a lifelong routine of jobs while bearing and raising five children.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 301-04; 70-72.

<sup>86</sup>Blanche Graham, interview by Blewett, reproduced in *ibid.*, 70-82. An oral history account of Marie Anne Senechal illustrates her family's organization of wage work and child-care responsibilities. Marie Anne, being the oldest child of the family, took care of her younger siblings while her mother went to work in the Amoskeag factory. Just before her mother gave birth, Marie Anne was sent to the factory to replace her mother at work. She recalls those days as a teenager:

"When my mother was still alive, she worked in the mill and I took care of the babies. At ten o'clock in the morning, my mother would go out at our window to see if we were all right. We'd wave, and she'd wave. There was also an orphan girl who used to live with us. Her mother died, and my mother said, 'We might as well take her in. She's a little orphan.' So we took her in. She helped me out taking care of the kids. My mother always worked until the last minute before she had a baby. When she came out of the mill, I went in to work. The little my father made plus the little I made helped."

See Marie Anne Senechal, interview by Hareven and Langenbach, reprinted in Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 274-82.

Women's work also served to strengthen the family's ties to extended kin.<sup>87</sup> In order to carry out certain tasks that could not be done within an individual household, women devised ways to exchange services between households. Yvonne Hoar's oral account illustrates that it was a common practice to call upon grandmothers or other family members for help in child-rearing.<sup>88</sup> By shifting between paid and unpaid labour, performed for their own family and that of another, women played a central role in creating, cultivating, and transmitting strategies to expand the "malleable household border."<sup>89</sup> With the lack — or minimal presence — of a public system of compensation for unemployment, injuries, illness or death, and

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<sup>87</sup>Di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience*. See also footnote 64 of this chapter.

<sup>88</sup>In the neighbouring city of Manchester, New Hampshire, a French-Canadian immigrant daughter, Yvonne Dionne, recalls having been sent to replace her sick aunt at her work. See Yvonne Dionne, interview by Hareven and Langenbach, reproduced in Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 196-200. Joy Parr describes an interesting practice where women — an aunt and a niece, or two sisters — sharing a household divided their responsibilities between income-earning and taking charge of domestic chores. See Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 92-93.

<sup>89</sup>Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 92-93; Phillis Moen and Elaine Wethington, "The Concept of Family Adaptive Strategies," *Annual Reviews of Sociology* 18 (1992): 233-51, especially 237. For discussion on family strategies and women's unpaid work, see also Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms, and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1957); James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): 95-120; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Split Household, Small Producer and Wage Earner: an Analysis of Chinese-American Family Strategies," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 45 (1983): 35-46; Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time*, chap. 8; John Modell, "Patterns of Consumption, Acculturation, and Family Income Strategies in Late Nineteenth-Century America," in *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Hareven and Maria A. Vinovskis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 206-40; Sanders Nee, "Family Capital and Social Mobility: the Incorporation of Immigrants," unpublished paper, 1991, in the possession of the author.

the stigma attached to these schemes,<sup>90</sup> informal arrangements made among families (what we would now call "networking") were indispensable to the survival of most working-class immigrant families.

Women were always mindful of the principle that the family's need took precedence over individual preferences. As a result, aspirations such as to continue their education beyond the legal schooling age had to be put aside. They sometimes took on roles as "organizers and perpetuators"<sup>91</sup> of this reciprocal kinship system by extending the circle of assistance to their extended families. In the neighbouring textile town of Manchester, New Hampshire, Yvonne Dionne remembers always being sent to help her sister-in-law. In Lowell, Valentine Chartrand, like many other girls, left school on her fourteenth birthday. About a week and a half later, she had a job in the woollen manufacturing industry in North Chelmsford. She recalls:

We had a talk, my father and I. He asked me if I would mind quitting school. He was crying, and he needed help, you know. And I was the oldest, the oldest at home then. And he asked me if I wouldn't mind very much if I quit school. And I said, I did like school, and I hated to leave it. I wanted to go to high school. But when he asked me that I said okay, and I remember telling the

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<sup>90</sup>An oral interview by Yvonne Hoar confirms this point. She has mentioned that in order to earn their money (textile) workers would do any kind of job, no matter how degrading a job might be, rather than go on welfare. See Yvonne Hoar, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 124.

<sup>91</sup>Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, 144. Michael Di Leonardo has extended her research beyond the household so as to cover the interactions of kinship taking place *between* households. According to her, the work for the extended kinship, what she calls women's third work — after domestic work and waged work outside home — goes, by its nature, beyond the confines of individual household. See Di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience*, chap. 6.



sister (we had nuns up there) that I was leaving school, and she felt bad about it, she did. She said, I hate to see you go because you're doing good in your grades and everything. And (in tears) I said, Well, my father needs the extra money, and I have to leave.<sup>92</sup>

Valentine went to the employment office at the city hall to find a job. She could speak English well and was asked if it was hard to leave school. She answered, "Yes, it is but I've got to help my father. [...] I'd take anything."<sup>93</sup>

Decisions as to who should work for wages and who should do domestic work were largely shaped by power relationships within

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<sup>92</sup>Valentine Chartrand, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 44-54, 45.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 45. An oral history account of Yvonne Dionne illustrates the unequal and asymmetrical nature of the family's organization of work. While helping her extended family, Yvonne came to question her share of responsibility.

"As soon as somebody got sick, I was supposed to go and help out: schooling came next. One day, Alice, my sister-in-law, took sick, and Mom told me that I had to go help my aunt, Mrs. Girard. "She's very tired, and she's old and very sick," she said, "so you leave school and go and help her for a few days." That was during the middle of June. We were just going to have our graduation, and they used to have a prize for not missing school. I had gone to mass every morning the whole year, and I had my good conduct and everything. It was all *Très Bien*. The nun called up my mother and said, 'where's Claudia?' (My name was Claudia at the time.) My mother said, "she's helping another family that needed help." "Have her come back right away," the nun said. "She has a prize, a gift coming to her. If she's not here by the afternoon, she loses it." So my mother called me right up. When I got into class, the sister told me, "You almost missed it."

Although Yvonne managed to receive the prize that she deserved, sadly it marked the end of her education. At fifteen years old, like many other girls, she went to work in the textile factory. See Yvonne Dionne, interview by Hareven and Langenbach, reproduced in Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 197-200.

the family, and largely determined by age and gender. Recent historical and sociological studies point out that stratification in a household generally reflected the larger social hierarchy, a husband's wishes commonly held the most sway in a family's economic decision-making process.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, not only did the husband's desires ultimately rule, but they also seemed to regulate the weight of others' wishes.<sup>95</sup> Oral testimonies from French Canadians in Lowell do not provide us sufficient evidence to affirm conclusively this point. Yet, Valentine Chartland's case suggests that particular family strategies did not always reflect the desires of daughters but rather, they represented implicit or explicit compromises of different — and possibly conflicting — individual interests. It is also important to note that women were motivated by their commitment to the family, and closely linked their self-identification to the work they performed, both that with and without monetary rewards.<sup>96</sup> In so doing, they developed a sense of responsibility in the work they assumed and their indispensable role within the family.

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<sup>94</sup>Scott Tilly, "Beyond Family Strategies, What?" *Historical Methodology* 20, no. 3 (1987): 123-25; Nancy Folbre, "Family Strategy, Feminist Strategy," *Historical Methodology* 20, no. 3 (1987): 115-18; Chiara, Saraceno, "The Concept of the Family Strategy and Its Application to the Family-Work Complex: Some Theoretical And Methodological Problems," *Marriage and Family Review* 14, no. 1-2 (1989): 1-18.

<sup>95</sup>Moen and Wethington, "The Concept of Family Adaptive Strategies," 239.

<sup>96</sup>Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 101-02.

### 6.4.3. Parental Care and the Responsibilities of the "Second Mother"

In the absence of sufficient social services, adult sons and daughters were expected to take charge of their aging parents as well as of their younger siblings. In addition to their already burdensome economic responsibilities, single daughters in particular often assumed most of the obligation of providing care to their elderly parents. The burden was most strongly felt by the daughters of widow-headed households who often had to submit to the fate of a temporarily — if not perpetually — postponed marriage. The question of who should care for elderly parents at times became an emotionally charged issue which created tensions and conflicts, and usually came to a head at the time of a marriage proposal. Oral interviews with Lowell's French-Canadian women do not show the same family tensions as those that had been caused in the instance of a French-Canadian daughter, Marie Anne Senechal, in Manchester, who postponed her marriage as long as forty years.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, considering French-Canadian women's various domestic tasks and financial contributions, one could confirm Tilly and Scott's speculation that a daughter's marriage revolved more often than not around the question of when one should marry rather than whom.<sup>98</sup>

As was the case with Lucie Cordeau discussed above, for daughters who lived with their widowed fathers the obligation to remain in the family was felt even more strongly. After the wife's death, the oldest unmarried daughter was usually expected to take the role of the family's "second mother" and manage the household

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<sup>97</sup>Marie Senechal, interview by Hareven and Langenbach, reproduced in *ibid.* See also footnote 98 of this chapter.

<sup>98</sup>This interpretation is largely influenced by Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, *Women, Work, and Family*, 192.

and take care of younger siblings. The responsibility of a second mother ranged from making everyday financial decisions to caring for younger siblings and their father, and providing moral support for family members. Lucie Cordeau was sixteen when her mother died. Soon after, her older sister also passed away and Lucie became the only girl left at home. When she was twenty-nine, her father told her, "Lucie, you better get married. I won't live forever."<sup>99</sup> When she eventually got married, she was already thirty-six, quite late by the norms of the time, according to which an unmarried woman over twenty years old was considered to be an old maid.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Lucie Cordeau, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 73-80, especially 75.

<sup>100</sup>For a similar discussion, see Marie Anne Senechal, interview by Hareven and Langenbach, reproduced in Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 274-92, especially 280. There are abundant examples of French-Canadian daughters postponing their marriage. Cora Pellerin, for instance, remained single until she was thirty although she had known her husband-to-be for ten or maybe eleven years. Another example, Marie Anne Senechal, endured forty years of courtship until she was finally married at age sixty-seven. After five years of marriage, she was widowed:

"My husband and I waited forty years to get married. Forty years! The first year I met him, he was eighteen years old and I was six years older. I couldn't get married because I had to bring up a family, and he had to take care of his family. I thought I'd never marry. I was sixty-seven years old when I got married. And I'm seventy-nine now. It was too much of a wait, when I think of it now, because I would have been happier if I'd got married. But when you don't know, you just stay that way."

See Cora Pellerin, interview by Hareven and Langenbach, reproduced in Hareven and Langenbach, *Amoskeag*, 239-35.

Lucie recalls in an interview:

At that time, when the mother died, the older girl used to take over. As they said, the girls, she has a little bit of heart. My father never remarried, and I married only after my father died. [...] The older girl takes over. She's the second mother. She has to supervise and make all the decisions in anything. And if you had a boyfriend, when you have to go back home and cook supper for your father or cook meals for your brothers, the boys never stay long. The friendship never lasts. They say, You take your family before me.<sup>101</sup>

Once again, the daughter's marriage was contingent upon the family's needs. Bound by family responsibilities, single women like Lucie were deeply committed to their family's well-being in terms of making a financial contribution, supporting the daily survival of other family members by transforming their wages into sustenance and shelter, as well as providing emotional care at home.

The commitment of French-Canadian women to the care of their families by no means represented a barrier to their participation in the labour force. Lucie began working at a factory at fourteen years of age and continued to work there until her marriage. For Lucie and many other women like her, the doubled responsibilities of financially supporting, and providing care for, aging parents and younger siblings were not only considered compatible but even obligatory.<sup>102</sup> In this regard, Joan Scott and Louise Tilly have pointed out that in the industrial mode of production, "single women are best able to work, since they have few other claims on their time," as opposed to married women who had to

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<sup>101</sup>Lucie Cordeau, interview by Blewett, reproduced in Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 75.

<sup>102</sup>In her study on Irish Collar Workers in Troy, New York, Carole Turbin also confirms that the responsibility of financial contribution weighed heavily on older single women. Turbin, *Working Women of Collar City*, 83-84.

adjust reproductive and domestic activity with paid employment.<sup>103</sup> Evidence from accounts of Lowell's French-Canadian women challenges Scott and Tilly's hypothesis. Like their mothers and married sisters, most single daughters had other claims on their time. Such claim included, in particular, the tedious and physically demanding nature of early twentieth century domestic tasks in the immigrant households, the care of younger siblings as well as their aging parents, in sickness and in health, and the "myriad other largely invisible pursuits and strategies necessary to survival."<sup>104</sup> For French-Canadian families this meant that women, for the most part, were apparently needed at all times to assume virtually all the entire responsibility of housework. That they carried out paid work did not accordingly reduce their heavy workload at home. Whatever the household structure, women's work at home was crucial for the very survival of their families.

## CONCLUSION

In the early twentieth century, a large proportion of French-Canadian families in Lowell could not live solely on the wages of the male head of the household. Women's paid work was not a free choice; it was necessary for the family's survival. My analysis of French-Canadian women in Lowell has shown great variations in women's responsibilities. Their financial contribution was not uniformly determined by demographic factors (age and marital status), but, more importantly, was defined by a combination of social and economic factors (the family wage ideology and the employment opportunities in the local labour market) as well as household needs (household configuration, residence patterns, and in particular,

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<sup>103</sup>Scott and Tilly, *Women, Work and Family*, 231.

<sup>104</sup>Bradbury, *Working Families*, 142.

availability of child care). The variety of their family responsibilities moulded the rhythm of their lives and their relationship to the larger economy. Distinctions in the economic responsibilities of Lowell's French-Canadian women should not, however, blind us to the substantial inequality and asymmetric relationships with regard to division of labour within their families.

To contribute a share of monetary resources to the family was only one aspect of women's responsibilities. In order to understand better their role at work and at home, it is crucial to recognize the importance of their work outside the formal economy. Families could not be sustained without domestic work, which was largely performed by women. While the economic responsibilities of French-Canadian women in early twentieth-century Lowell varied greatly, the obligation of carrying out housework and providing care appears to have fallen invariably upon women, regardless of their occupational status or that of their spouses or fathers.

Lowell's French-Canadian women found ways to carry out these tasks at home and in the workplace, at times by allocating them among other female members within the household and beyond, at other times by shuttling back and forth between paid and unpaid work. These arrangements were not arrived at without discord and tension, they arose from different, and often conflicting, individual interests within the family; conflicts were usually settled on asymmetrical terms. By making the best of their ingenuity, flexibility, and endurance, women served the family's collective interests and faced the burden and consequences of labour based on gender. When they assumed their responsibilities in paid and unpaid labour, French-Canadian women developed a sense of pride from their indispensability to the family.

## CONCLUSION

"Immigrants are children of capitalism," wrote John Bodnar in his seminal work, *The Transplanted*.<sup>1</sup> In this present study of French Canadians in early twentieth century Lowell I argue that their migration was largely a response to the changes transforming their society of origin. I also demonstrate that migration to, and settlement in, Lowell were greatly defined by local labour market conditions and the available resources in the family and community. Even in the face of many constraints, immigrants never entirely complied with the conditions which were regulated by the social and economic environment. The variety of strategies which they devised during the process of migration and settlement points to a margin of autonomy and to the negotiations these people were capable of conducting in confronting the limits posed by the structural conditions.

To answer the question, "What was the role of the family in the migratory process and how did French-Canadian men and women accommodate their needs and interests while keeping consistent with the goals of their family?" a careful evaluation of the different

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<sup>1</sup>Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, chap. 1, especially 1.



effects of economic change on men, women, and children is required. It also involves a sensitive analysis of human dynamics within the household. These dynamics were not defined by financial factors alone but were also moulded by the family's resources and gender relations within and outside the family. To respond to the above question entails refuting the reliance upon the dichotomies implicit in the "flight from poverty" thesis: traditional versus modern, preindustrial versus industrial. And, it calls for an examination of a dialectic that goes beyond the dualism of pre-migration and post-migration periodization.

My analysis has sought to shed light on the complexity and diversity of the migrants' experiences. It reveals, for instance, the complex patterns of French Canadians' geographic mobility. Such complex patterns of mobility was a result of the diverse strategies which French Canadians devised for the well-being of their families and the organization of their resources. This study also argues for the recognition of the distinctive roles of different family members and in particular, those of women who financially contributed to the household economy and who assumed housekeeping responsibilities. The diversity of these women's responsibilities is rendered visible and meaningful when examined beyond the reductionist dichotomizing categories. Five major conclusions can be offered.

1. Migration did not begin only when the border was crossed; nor did it automatically end with the migrants' arrival in their U.S. destination. Instead, my data show that a proportion of French Canadians continued to exhibit a high geographic mobility before and after their transnational movements. While the personal networks of those who were migrating within a country fell outside the realm of this study, analysis of the sampled French Canadians who undertook the cross-border journeys show that these movements were largely embedded in networks of family and kin.

2. The occupational distribution of French-Canadian men confirms the persistence of the segmentation of Lowell's labour market. Within this hierarchical labour market largely defined by ethnicity, age, and gender, French-Canadian male workers obtained more stable and better-paid occupational positions in the first two decades of the twentieth century, as compared to their forerunners in an earlier period. This upward occupational mobility was largely limited to the blue-collar sector. The working-class profile of French-Canadian male workers notwithstanding, there was also a small nuclei of small business owners and professionals. Whether or not they constituted the middle-class elite of this immigrant group in a contemporary sense remains an open question. The presence of a variety of French-Canadian stores standing side by side with those run by Jewish or Chinese merchants added a lively sociocultural ambience and contributed to a sense of community among the French Canadians in Lowell.

3. Women played a crucial role in French-Canadian families, both by financially contributing to the household and by taking charge of domestic tasks. The extent of their financial responsibilities varied considerably. Their economic roles ranged from those of supplementary wage-contributors, to sole providers, to self-supporting workers. Their patterns of employment also varied and while some worked continuously throughout their lives, others worked intermittently or on a temporary basis. The diversity in patterns of employment and in their share of responsibility was not defined by age or marital status alone, but also by factors such as household organization, living arrangements, and the availability of child care.

4. In contrast to the variety of their financial roles, women shared a common obligation to perform domestic duties, most of which amounted to unpaid work. Their participation in paid work did

not reduce accordingly their burden of maintaining the home as well as of caring for young children and elderly parents. Oral history accounts suggest that in the early twentieth-century, Lowell's French-Canadian women were generally responsible for most of the domestic work regardless of their working status outside the home. The completion of these domestic tasks was crucial for the welfare and, at times, the very survival of their families. Like the women in the nineteenth-century working-class Montreal families,<sup>2</sup> French-Canadian women in early twentieth-century Lowell generally assumed a greater share of, and quite often the entire responsibility for (or "burden of"), their family's domestic work.

5. In connection to the unpaid work that women performed at home, their participation in wage work can be viewed as having constituted a form of housework which was conducted outside the home. This view confirms a thesis advanced by historians such as Heidi Hartmann, who argued against an interpretation that stressed how employment loosened women's ties to family and increased their individual autonomy.<sup>3</sup> In the early twentieth century, a large proportion of French-Canadian households in Lowell could not subsist on men's wages alone, but they survived because these earnings were supplemented by those of other family members, especially of married women. Given the financially constrained conditions of their households, working women contributed most of their earnings to the collective budget. Consequently, their

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<sup>2</sup>Bradbury, *Working Families*, chap. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Heidi Hartmann, "The Family As a Locus of Gender, Class, and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework," *Signs* 6 (1981): 366-96; Ann Phillips and Barbara Taylor, "Sex and Skill: Notes Toward a Feminist Economics," *Feminist Review* 6 (October 1981): 79-88; Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson, "'Nimble Fingers Make Cheaper Workers': An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third-World Manufacturing," *Feminist Review* 7 (1981): 93-95.

participation in the labour force did not automatically translate into a growing share of freedom or emancipation. Oral interviews have revealed a case where the oldest daughter of a family unwillingly quit school in order to work in a textile factory. Another family's daughter complained that when her aunt fell sick, she was obliged to take her aunt's place working in a textile factory. The evidence is still too thin to advance any conclusive statement on the meaning of this diversity of work and the obligations upon French-Canadian women's lives. Still, it can be speculated that women developed a sense of responsibility in their indispensable role within the family.

The multiplicity of variations in French-Canadian women's and men's lives refutes dichotomous views based on the contrast between pre-migration and post-migration periods and between women and men workers. These oppositional categories, drawn partly from conventional wisdom about the process of migration, provide only limited explanations for the life histories of Lowell's French Canadians. These migrants were not simply victims of poverty or urban *habitants* who resisted Americanization by keeping to their old traditions in the socially and culturally isolated *Petit Canada*. Another dichotomized perspective can be found in the approaches developed by specialists of women's studies, who were initially inclined to emphasize the differences between men's and women's experiences.<sup>3-a</sup> Studies in immigration history which increasingly incorporated the interpretations of women's history tended to reproduce such oppositional categories. It is crucial for historians to reconsider the dichotomies that describe migration, family, and gender. Such questioning and rethinking will contribute to a more complex and complete understanding of immigrant women's and men's family relationships and of the ways in which

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<sup>3-a</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *Seeking Common Ground*: introduction, especially xiv.

they accommodated their needs within structural limits. By exploring a perspective beyond obsolete dichotomies, historians can bring to the forefront the subtleties and nuances that coloured immigrants' lives at home and at work.

Now that the need for comparative analyses in immigration studies is strongly recognized, scholars who design future research on immigrant women's (and men's) lives must consider more carefully than ever what is to be compared. Donna Gabaccia urges us to be alert to this new necessity.<sup>4</sup> Are immigrant women to be compared to immigrant men of similar backgrounds, or to women of other groups (including native-born Americans)? Perhaps it is better to draw analogies from across different time periods, as does Thomas Dublin in *Transforming Women's Work*, in which he contrasts the meaning of paid work among "Yankee" operatives in the postbellum period to that of French-Canadian and other immigrant women at the turn of the century. Or, alternatively, should the analysis focus on the diversity found among women who belonged to the same ethnic group but who differed in age, marital status, and role in household composition? By clearly defining the subject and purpose of comparisons, future studies will serve to redress the major shortcomings that characterized early work in ethnic studies and women's studies. The first tended to ignore differences between men's and women's lives, whereas the second glossed over differences among women.<sup>5</sup> Such clarification will enlarge our understanding of immigration history, whose development owes much to these two fields.

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

One of the major challenges for historians of immigration is the task of redefining and refining the existing framework of analysis.<sup>5-a</sup> More efforts are needed which will extend the boundaries of immigration histories of the last two decades that have been characterized by "well-adjusted families, hardworking ethnics, and cohesive communities."<sup>6</sup> This study, in which I deal with the diversity and particularity of migratory patterns, and the everyday work and family lives of Lowell's French-Canadian immigrants, is my first step in this direction.

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<sup>5-a</sup> Sydney Stahl Weinberg, "The Treatment of Women in Immigration History: A Call for Change," *Seeking Common Ground*, 3-22.

<sup>6</sup>Iacovetta, *Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History*, 22.

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