

## *Book Reviews*

**Urban Domestic Servants in 19th-Century Canada.** CLAUDETTE LACELLE. Translated from the original French. Ottawa: Environment Canada-Parks, National Historic Parks and Sites, Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History, 1987. 254 p. ISBN 0-660-12335-5 \$15.50.

**Women in the Administrative Revolution.** GRAHAM S. LOWE. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987. xiii, 234 p. ISBN-8020-2657-5 cl. 0-8020-6686-0 pa. \$32.50 cl. \$16.95 pa.

The link between these two studies is women's employment. While very different in most respects, including purpose, scope, and style, they both deal with chapters in the history of female labour. Over the course of the nineteenth century, domestic service became almost exclusively women's domain. Other than the teaching and nursing professions — which were restricted to educated middle-class women — it was virtually the only type of employment open to women who had to support themselves or contribute to family income. The situation changed dramatically after the turn of the century. Clerical work in the burgeoning corporate and government offices became an option for Canadian women. They eagerly accepted these jobs, happy to leave domestic labour to their new-immigrant sisters. Thus began the "quintessential female job ghetto" of the twentieth century, which remains the most formidable barrier to employment equity for women.

Claudette Lacelle's research was occasioned by the desire of the Canadian Parks Service to include servants' quarters in its restoration and interpretation projects. All too often in the past, the servant's room off the kitchen or in the attic was closed to the public because of a lack of information about the original occupants and furnishings.

Lacelle provides two snapshots of domestic servants in major Canadian cities. The first is of those working in Quebec City and Montreal in 1816-20; the second those in Quebec City, Halifax, Toronto, and the Saint-Antoine district of Montreal in 1871-75. In keeping with her main purpose, she focuses on "live-in" domestics, who were by far the majority at the time.

Domestics in the early period were a mixed group of men and women, children, and the elderly. According to an 1818 census of Catholic households taken by a Quebec City priest, which the author uses extensively, approximately half of the

1100 servants in that city were men or boys. Most servants were between sixteen and twenty-five years old and had grown up in the city in which they were employed, in contrast to English and European domestics who were usually from the country. The 196 servant employment contracts that Lacelle identified in notarial records for Quebec City and Montreal indicate that domestics were mainly from labourer or artisan families. Just more than half of these contracts were for children, usually around twelve years of age, being put in service because their families were unable to support them.

Fifty years later, domestic servants had changed considerably. Using 1871 census data, Lacelle determined that these later servants were overwhelmingly (90 per cent) women and mainly immigrants, second-generation immigrants, or country-born. Most were young, single women — about twenty-six years old — working to save money before marriage. They appear to have been better educated than the earlier group. Most were able to read and write. Benefitting from consistent demographic data for the four centres, Lacelle found little difference in servant characteristics between the cities in this period.

Lack of documentation made it difficult for the author to draw firm conclusions about her main interest — the everyday life of a domestic servant. With no testimony from the servants themselves, she combed federal and provincial archives thoroughly (as the extensive bibliography indicates) for indirect sources, including property inventories and house plans, wills, visitors' travel accounts, jail and hospital records, and church death registers. Papers of very wealthy families occasionally contain information about their servants, but Lacelle emphasizes that these situations were atypical. Contemporary upper-class perceptions suffuse late nineteenth-century household guides, servants' manuals, and newspapers, making historical judgements very difficult as the author candidly admits. To fill the gaps in her work, and to situate the Canadian domestic in a broader context, she provides considerable information from research in other countries.

Domestics in the latter part of the nineteenth century led more difficult lives than those preceding them, states Lacelle. Housekeeping standards were higher and employers more demanding. The popularity of the late dinner hour meant that servants worked longer days. In most cases the women worked alone — two thirds of the 1871 households with servants employed only one. Removed from their homeland or rural roots, they were often totally isolated in the large Victorian houses. They showed their dissatisfaction by continually searching for more agreeable situations, which led the "masters" to label them irresponsible. Lacelle formed the impression that the essential character of domestic service changed over this fifty-year period. Early in the century, the servant, while hardworking, seemed to have been integrated into the household, and domestic service served a vital social function of providing for children and elderly. By the late 1800s, class distinctions permeated the master/servant relationship, creating "a difficult coexistence within a confined space."

Upper-class families with several servants frequently provided the best working and living conditions for their employees. The workload was shared amongst the servants. Food and rooming quarters were usually better than average. These plum positions, however, were reserved for older, experienced women who often

remained with the families for many years. As the author points out, because it is usually the houses of this small élite that undergo historical restoration, it should be remembered that these domestic servants enjoyed better conditions than most.

This is a very good study of a little-understood institution of nineteenth-century Canada. Despite the source limitations, Claudette Lacelle has given us a thorough and interesting account of domestic servants in the last century. It is a nice companion to the work of Marilyn Barber on the immigration of British female domestics to Ontario in the late nineteenth century. The text is well illustrated with house plans, cartoons, drawings, and property inventories showing the furnishings of servants' rooms. Seven documents are reproduced as appendices. They range from excerpts of the trial testimony of a servant who in 1814 charged her employer with rape, to an 1897 letter to a Roman Catholic religious order urging it to establish a school for domestics.

*Women in the Administrative Revolution* is an analysis of the causes and consequences of the feminization of clerical work in the twentieth century. Sociologist Graham Lowe explores why and how employers broke with entrenched traditions and began to recruit young women for the many new jobs in the administrative offices of their rapidly expanding corporate and government bureaucracies. He has produced a major study in historical sociology, involving the integration of empirical data on Canadian workplace organization and labour force participation with current theoretical concepts and research from the United States and Britain.

Lowe claims that modern clerical work became a segregated and secondary labour market for women because of a convergence of economic, organizational, social, and ideological factors. He examines how the development of corporate capitalism and state activism after 1900 necessitated complex, efficient, and cost-effective administrative structures. "The hallmark of the administrative revolution was the creation of large, centralized office bureaucracies, coupled with the increasingly strategic role of administration in regulating all aspects of economic activity." New professional office managers sought to rationalize their operations by adapting scientific management techniques already applied in the factory, including standardization of procedures, task specialization, functional organization, and cost accounting. Changes in organization and practices were at once facilitated and required by mechanization.

The administrative revolution radically changed the nature of clerical work and the work environment in general. In a process similar to that which destroyed the craftsman, the responsibilities of the nineteenth-century generalist male clerk or bookkeeper were fragmented into a series of repetitive, low-skill tasks performed under strict management control. Factory-like conditions were most extreme where production was organized around a machine, as in the typing pool or Hollerith punch-card department.

Employers increasingly began to hire young, single women for these new clerical jobs. There was a growing supply of educated females, some of them graduates of the new business colleges. Although their wages were less than men's, women proved quite compliant. From their perspective, office work was much superior to most other types of jobs open to them, particularly domestic service. It provided better pay and working conditions, status, and independence for a few years before

marriage. Male clerks, on the other hand, showed no interest in the new jobs which paid relatively little and offered no possibility of career advancement. They set their sights on the smaller number of supervisory and management positions in the developing two-tiered clerical labour market. On the broad ideological level, this type of office work — short-term and supportive — matched well with the changing ideologies about the role of women.

Lowe emphasizes that the timing, pace, and pattern of the administrative revolution and clerical feminization varied among nations, industries, and companies. He plots the steady growth in clerical employment in Canada from 1891 to 1971 using census data, and clearly demonstrates the surge before 1921 and between 1941 and 1951. In 1891, males accounted for more than 85 per cent of clerical workers. By 1941, 50 per cent were female. Feminization proceeded most rapidly from 1891 to 1921. The increase in female clerks exceeded 166 per cent in each decade, for a total absolute increase from 4,710 to 90,577. Finance, trade, manufacturing, and the service industries were in the vanguard. The most dramatic shift was in the financial sector where women workers increased from 1 per cent to 50 per cent of the clerical work force in thirty years.

Lowe's analysis of the administrative revolution and feminization of clerical work in Canada is based primarily on his research on seven major corporations and three governments. They were chosen because they were in the forefront of organizational development and because of the available archival material. In the financial sphere, he selected the Bank of Nova Scotia, Sun Life Insurance, and Manufacturers Life Insurance. Also included were Canadian Pacific Railway, Bell Telephone, Imperial Oil, and International Business Machines, as well as the federal, Ontario, and British Columbia governments. He makes extensive use of job classification plans, staff bulletins, employers' associations' convention proceedings, journals, annual reports, and Royal Commission studies, as well as some correspondence and minutes.

The case studies of banking and the federal civil service are fascinating. Banks lagged behind other Canadian financial institutions, notably insurance companies, in hiring women. Here social class and gender ideologies interacted in a unique way. Slowly banks began to hire female stenographers and secretaries. One bank manager wanted to put a high screen around his first female employee in 1901. However, there was strong resistance to using women as tellers on the grounds that only middle-class males could instill public confidence in money matters. The war forced a change in attitude and hiring practice, as 40 per cent of male Canadian bank employees enlisted. Having tried unsuccessfully to have their male clerks exempted from conscription on the grounds that they performed a function vital to the economy, the bankers had to accept middle-class females as tellers. In the post-war economic boom, many of these women retained their jobs because new branch openings absorbed the returning men. By the time of the economic recession in the 1920s, banking employment was assuming its modern gender division. Women were accepted as tellers and ledgerkeepers; men increasingly were hired solely for more senior positions.

The Canadian Civil Service went to considerable lengths to restrict and control female employment in its ranks. By 1908 there were some seven hundred women among the three thousand inside workers. In 1910, women were restricted to the

lowest division of jobs, regardless of their qualifications. The practice of sex labelling of jobs began, leading to a 1918 amendment to the Civil Service Act allowing sexual restriction for job competitions. Married women were barred from permanent jobs unless they were self-supporting. Lowe concludes that "the treatment of women in the Canadian federal civil service is one of the more blatant examples available of how some major employers used sophisticated bureaucratic measures to corral women into the lowest occupational grades."

Lowe also examines the development of stenography, which was "cast into a female mould during its formative stage." Typing seemed particularly well suited to the contemporary image of femininity. Most importantly, from an employer's perspective:

a woman is to be preferred for the secretarial position, for she is not averse to doing minor tasks, ... which would irk and irritate ambitious young men, who usually feel that the work they are doing is of no importance if it can be performed by some person with a lower salary.

Organizations with a large stenographic component, such as Sun Life, created highly-structured, closed classification systems for these women, ranging from the junior typist to the experienced clerk. Once typing had been successfully labelled as a female occupation, other office machine work was viewed in the same way.

To explain the feminization process, Graham Lowe uses certain current sociological concepts, such as labour market segmentation, patriarchy, and occupational sex typing. He is highly critical of Harry Braverman's influential thesis on the proletarianization of clerical work. Lowe argues that many of the conditions Braverman identified as signs of a decline from the middle class into the working class were due, instead, to the mass entry of women into office work. These women did not personally experience proletarianization; on the contrary, their new employment gave them better wages, working conditions, and status than they might otherwise have anticipated. This would help to explain their apparent acceptance of highly regulated, menial work.

In 1986, 55 per cent of Canadian women over fifteen years of age were employed outside the home for pay, compared to 76 per cent of the men. Approximately one third of these women are performing routine clerical work such as word processing, filing, recording, and checking. The important change in the 1970s and 1980s is that increasingly women are remaining in the labour force throughout their working lives, with only short breaks for childrearing. This is one reason for the mounting demand for greater equality of opportunity and rewards among men and women in the labour market. In an effort to achieve this goal, various educational programmes and on-the-job initiatives, such as affirmative action and pay equity, are being implemented in some organizations.

As it was intended, *Women in the Administrative Revolution* is a major contribution to this drive for fundamental change in gender relations in the workforce and society generally. By documenting and analyzing the development of the female clerical job ghetto, Lowe has provided an essential tool for change. As he emphasizes, there is considerable need for further case studies and cross-national compar-

isons of matched industries, as well as attempts through oral history to determine how clerks, both female and male, responded to their situations. However, this is a seminal study, which suggests many paths for future research. With a caution that it occasionally seems repetitive and circuitous in presentation, this book is highly recommended.

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**Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935.** CRAIG HERON. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988, 223 p. ISBN 0-7710-4086-5 \$14.95.

Craig Heron's recent contribution to the Canadian Social History series, *Working in Steel: The Early Years: Canada, 1883-1935*, is a valuable survey of a seminal aspect of Canadian industrial development. Earlier contributors to this series have explored the role played by women, immigrants, and the working class in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada, as well as a wide variety of other themes. Heron's focus is on the steel industry in a period of transformation, a time of radical change from small-scale craft-dominated methods to a new era of mass production.

The book contains four main sections: "Corporations," "Machines," "Labour Power," and "Resistance," of which the first, at least for the non-specialist, is the least readable. Heron's heart, unlike that of Peter C. Newman, is patently not in Canada's corporate boardrooms, and both the author's and the reader's spirits flag in the navigation of the densely-written chapter which traces the establishment and early development of Canada's four major steel plants in Sydney, New Glasgow/Trenton, Sault Ste. Marie, and Hamilton.

The pace picks up noticeably in "Machines," a clearly-written and sure-footed survey of the technological processes of iron and steel production and the ways in which those methods were modernized during the "Second Industrial Revolution" at the beginning of this century. But it is in his examination of the men who made the steel that Heron shines: the supervisors, often setting impossible production targets or demanding bribes in return for "favours;" the skilled men, struggling to maintain their privileged positions as the new technology threatened to render their talents obsolete; and, most sharply realized of all, the labourers, often immigrants desperate for a steady job no matter how demanding, hazardous or poorly paid. Heron proceeds, in "Resistance," to trace the roots of collective action in the form of industrial unionism, and it is in "Labour Power" and "Resistance," that his pro-labour sympathies are most clearly revealed.

If it cannot always be called objective and dispassionate, this book is nonetheless a scholarly and useful study. Because it is so well-written and so carefully researched, its few flaws stand out all the more starkly. Heron's archival net, widely cast, encompasses repositories from Cape Breton to Hamilton, but this reviewer must be forgiven some parochial disappointment at not finding a single reference to McMaster University's impressive labour holdings, although photographs from McMaster's Labour Studies collection (not part of the Archives) do appear. This neglect of a primary Hamilton source is the more surprising when one considers the