

adoption of Communism. Those interested in medical history will also be enthralled by anecdotes of Chinese medical practices; however, those hoping to understand the role of the missionary wife will be tantalized, but not fully satisfied. Readers will be impressed with Margaret's courage, but will yearn to know more about what Margaret herself did in China and how she coped with her choice to become a missionary wife.

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**The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950.** Joy Parr. *University of Toronto Press, 1990, Pp. 314 hardcover.*

Joy Parr has made a remarkable contribution to feminist debates about the impact of class and gender on people's historical experience. She rejects "an ahistorical hierarchy of oppressions" (8) and, through a close examination of "the relationships among industry, domesticity, and community" (6) in two Ontario towns, argues persuasively that class and gender are made and experienced simultaneously. *The Gender of Breadwinners*, winner of the Canadian Historical Society's prestigious Macdonald Prize, and reviewed in the *Canadian Historical Review* as the "most important monograph" on Canadian history in many years, will have a significant impact on the writing of Canadian history for many years to come. Parr's work provides an interpretative framework for the reconsideration of Canada's industrial revolution.

Like all good history, *The Gender of Breadwinners* is rooted firmly in time and place. Parr explores the historical experience of women and men between 1880 and 1950 in the two Ontario industrial towns of Paris and Hanover, chosen to represent a "women's" town and a "men's" town. Paris was a knitwear town. Penman's, its major employer, deliberately recruited and maintained a largely female skilled workforce. The company's reliance on these skilled women workers had a significant impact on industrial and domestic relationships and

created a community in which all-female and female-led households were common. In Hanover, the major industrial employer was the furniture industry, an industry which relied on skilled male labour. The domestic, community and industrial life of Hanover conforms much more closely to our notions of what is normal in a patriarchal society. The periodization of the book follows the industrial development of the towns from the implementation of the protective tariffs on Canadian manufactures of the National Policy to the end of the second world war when the industries in both towns were "moving from hesitant maturity into decline" (4).

In addition to her fine historical sensitivity to the specifics of historical context and experience, Parr employs sophisticated methodological and theoretical approaches to tease out, strand by strand, the knotty problems of the relationships between skill, gender and power. Her meticulous attention to detail is both demanding and rewarding for her readers. The questions she has addressed are complex and difficult ones that required the blending of traditional historical sources (such as business and government records and newspapers) with oral interviews and the application of a variety of theoretical approaches. These approaches include a careful attention to language and the use of the life course as an analytical device.

The result of her effort is a rich and complex work. Parr's descriptions and analysis of the daily lives of her subjects at home, at work and in the community permit us to glimpse the historical processes that create gendered and class identities. Chapter Three, "When Is Knitting Women's Work," is a brilliant discussion of the relationship between gender and skill. Through a detailed examination of the labour process and technological change, Parr offers convincing evidence that skill is not an absolute, but a socially constructed and constantly negotiated quality which has ramifications for all of us. Again, in Chapter Four, "Womanly Militance, Neighbourly Wrath," Parr offers important insights through meticulous attention to tensions generated by the conditions of a strike. She argues that respectability, "the touchstone of womanly authority" (104), was created in domesticity, not in the work-

place, and supported a womanly militance that was vulnerable to attack from opponents in both the industrial and domestic setting. As we travel through the life course with many of the female workers at Penman's, we are constantly reminded of their struggles and their difficulties in negotiating their lives through their experience as industrial workers, as members of a community, and as members of families and households.

The application of the same approach to the men of Hanover is equally fruitful, and it is perhaps one of the ironies of the book that the men of Hanover have been brought back to the fullest life and vigour, not the women of Paris. It would appear that there are a number of reasons for this. Novelty is obviously a factor. Gender analysis has still not been applied to male experience to the extent that it has been to women's. So, too, is the fact that Hanover conforms to patriarchal "normalcy." This social and historical fit empowered the men of Hanover and encouraged them to find the voice to express their concerns. Their story is in many ways a happier one than that of the women of Paris. Historians do not engage in "what ifs," but Parr's examination of life in Paris allows her to explore a question many of us ask. What if women's work was recognized as skilled and valuable to employers? The answer is not very heartening. The pervasiveness of the surrounding patriarchal values sharply limited the benefits that the skilled female knitters enjoyed as a result of their skill and their employer's need. That message is reinforced by the comparisons of life and work in the two towns.

*The Gender of Breadwinners* is not an easy read. The careful attention to detail of local experience is both a strength of the book and an obstacle for the reader. Parr's style is dense and sometimes cryptic. It would have been helpful if she had offered her readers some guidance, perhaps with more extensive introductions and conclusions to each chapter. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the book is structured as two parallel narratives. The difference between the two towns is substantial and significant; the treatment of each is lengthy and detailed; the arguments, complex. Parr, herself, addresses this problem in the conclusion of

the book, but more comparisons and fuller explanations of the differences in the main body of the text would have been helpful.

There is another feature of the book which begged for more attention. Parr mentions only in passing that Agnes McPhail, Canada's first member of Parliament, sat for a riding that included the town of Hanover. That Agnes McPhail, a woman and eventually a member of the CCF, represented this "men's" town raises some interesting questions about the complexity of relationships between class and gender. Although provincial and national politics are outside the scope of the book, it does address community attitudes, and McPhail's relationship to the broader problems piques a number of questions.

Joy Parr's *The Gender of Breadwinners* makes a significant contribution to the history of Canada. It expands our knowledge about the historical experience of Canadian women and men, and it raises important questions about gender, class, and power. Parr's exploration of those questions has changed the agenda and the terms of debate in Canadian history. Canadian historians will not be able to ignore the questions which she raises, and gender will no longer acceptably be ignored in debates about Canada's industrialization. Parr's contribution to feminist scholarship is equally important, and this fact is underscored by the relevance of her research and conclusions to the struggle of Canadian women for pay equity today. *The Gender of Breadwinners* represents the culmination of two decades of feminist history in Canada and charts some important new directions for the future.

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**Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth.** Anne Finger. Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1990, Pp. 203 paperback.

Anne Finger's book *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth* puts a personal face on the issues of disability rights and reproductive