

# Women's Response to Economic and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century; Moncton Parish 1851 to 1871

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Little is known about the lives of ordinary people of the nineteenth-century. In recent years the new nineteenth-century social history has attempted to redress this imbalance and, indeed, we now have many excellent studies on the lives of people in the last century. However, a great deal of this energy has been expended to gain a clearer understanding of the lives of nineteenth-century men rather than both men and women. Certainly many of the earlier studies, in fact, chose to ignore females altogether. All women are simply anonymous in these studies in much the same way as ordinary men used to be.

There are, it is argued, clear methodological reasons for their exclusion from study. First,

much interest is focused on the nature of the labour force, e.g., the changing composition of the labour force as a consequence of industrialization, occupational mobility, and so forth. Since women's participation in the paid labour force was limited, women are of only passing interest in these studies. For example, Miller [1960:9] argues that males are "the major breadwinners and carriers of the family's hopes and life chances" and thus females are not included in studies of social stratification. Thernstrom provides a similar rationale for his exclusion of women in his studies of Boston [1973] and Newburyport [1964]. Although he suggests that while it may perhaps be less true today, he con-

curs with Miller that the family's hopes and life chances were in the hands of men.

Secondly, since women experience a name change upon marriage, they are much more difficult to trace from census to census. Because of this methodological problem, many studies simply abandon any extensive discussion of the female experience. In addition, those studies which have chosen to focus on women in history have often concentrated their efforts on "notable women." This, however, provides us with little information about most women. As Lerner notes:

The resulting history of "notable women" does not tell us much about those activities in which most women engaged, nor does it tell us about the significance of women's activities to society as a whole. The history of notable women is the history of exceptional, even deviant, women and does not describe the experience and history of the mass of women. This insight is a refinement of an awareness of class differences in history: women of different classes have different historical experiences. [1975:5]

My own work on Moncton Parish 1851 to 1871 [1978, 1979, 1980] by and large, shares this same omission. A lengthy discussion on geographical and occupational mobility rarely mentions women. This paper is, therefore, a beginning attempt to document the lives of the women of Moncton Parish using information available from the census records of 1851, 1861 and 1871. This does not focus on the exceptional women of nineteenth-century Moncton, but on the ordinary women, living their everyday lives. Because these women, like the men of their times, are largely inarticulate, census records provide important evidence of how women dealt with the economic and social conditions of their times.

### **The Research Site: Moncton, New Brunswick, 1851 to 1871**

The twenty-year span 1851 to 1871 is an extremely volatile period in New Brunswick's economic history. Just prior to this time, the colony achieved self-government in internal affairs. This development was not welcomed with great fervour as it signified the disappearance of preferences in the British West Indian markets and the United Kingdom. New Brunswick was highly dependent upon the United Kingdom market, sending from two-thirds to three-fourths of its exports to the United Kingdom in the period from 1831 to 1851 [Saunders 1939:2]. Yet despite their apprehensions, and the initial foundering of the colony - turning first to the colony of Canada and then to the United States for succour - New Brunswickers found that they could indeed compete successfully both in the British and foreign markets. The local shipbuilding industry produced ships for fishing and colonial trade and also for sale abroad.

At first the ships were of poor quality. However, by 1850 New Brunswick ships had achieved an excellent reputation and were well-known throughout the world [A. W. Currie, 1942:55]. The pessimism of the late 1840s turned to a new wave of optimism. The age of shipbuilding heralded a new economic prosperity. New Brunswickers devoted themselves almost exclusively in this period to shipbuilding and to its complementary industry, lumbering.

Moncton's destiny was intimately linked with the shipbuilding industry, the shipyards employing as many as a thousand men at one time [Spicer, 1968]. An equal number of men were employed in cutting timber [Larracey, 1970]. By 1850, the shipping trade had become important enough that Moncton was made a port of entry. Moncton's prosperity is further reflected in the decision of the town to incorporate on April 12, 1855. In the same year, Moncton's first bank, the Westmorland Bank, was esta-

blished [Machum, 1965:25]. The expansion of world trade in this period guaranteed the market for wooden sailing ships.

The entry of much more efficient iron steamships into trade after the American Civil War had very serious economic ramifications upon New Brunswick. The end of the War saw the revitalization of the American shipping trade. In 1854, at the peak of its shipbuilding, New Brunswick built 135 vessels with a total tonnage of 99,426. In 1868, one of the most dismal years for the economy, only 84 vessels with a tonnage of 24,419, were built [Saunders, 1939: 111].

These figures reflect the extraordinary decline in British markets. The aegis of the British Colonial Empire had almost totally disappeared. In addition, the new age of steam gradually rendered the Maritime product obsolete, as iron replaced wooden ships.

The creation of a modern ever-expanding economy disrupted and then destroyed the old order of economic life, and casualties lay strewn along the road of progress. [Higgs, 1971:1].

In Moncton, the railway had not yet emerged to replace the shipbuilding industry. The new industrial age had shattered the shipbuilding industry, wreaking disaster on Moncton. The *Moncton Daily Times* of 1889 reflecting on these events summarizes the results most succinctly:

Altogether it was a bad smash, and the talk of the countryside for miles around and sank the little town in the deepest of commercial gloom. (Majority Edition, 1889, *The Moncton Times*)

This prosperity and subsequent decline had important consequences for Moncton. The earlier period witnessed an immigration of young individuals to work in the booming shipbuilding industry as well as a recruitment of workers

from the farms (Medjuck, 1970). This created a housing crisis resulting in many families sharing households with kin and unrelated boarders. The decline in wooden ships left Moncton economically devastated.

These changes are reflected by the large numbers of people attracted to Moncton in the 1851-1861 decade, as is indicated by a population growth rate of 51.3 percent for the adult population. During the period 1861-1871 the population grew by only 14.7 percent. A particularly dramatic change occurs to the foreign-born population. Many immigrants who had come to participate in the boom emigrated again in search of opportunities elsewhere (Table 1). Those who remained were able to do so largely because they were already farmers or were able to become farmers. This accounts for the enormous growth of the farm sector (Table 2). How did the women of this community respond to this industrial expansion and subsequent decline? What were their lives like in this period of turmoil?

TABLE 1  
Population Increase, 20 Years of Age and Over by Sex, Native-Born and Foreign-Born, 1851-1861, 1861-1871

Sex	Percent Increase			
	Native-Born		Foreign-Born <sup>1</sup>	
	1851-1861	1861-1871	1851-1861	1861-1871
Male	53.3%	39.0%	17.5%	-24.0%
Female	52.6%	38.7%	142.6%	-33.5%
Total % Increase	52.7%	38.9%	53.4%	-28.8%

<sup>1</sup> In the 1851 census, there is no variable called "Birthplace". However, "Date of Entry into Colony" is provided and, thus, a distinction between native-born (born in colony) and foreign-born (immigrant to colony) can be made.

TABLE 2  
Distribution of Labour Force by Occupational Sector  
1851, 1861, 1871

Sector	1851	1861	1871
Farming and other primary	33.9%	42.7%	54.4%
Building	22.1	7.8	6.3
Manufacturing	15.6	13.5	10.8
Transportation	0.5	5.1	3.1
Dealing	3.8	6.3	4.6
Banks, government and public service	4.3	5.6	5.7
Domestic and personal	9.7	12.5	5.2
Industry not known	10.0	6.5	9.9
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	729	1211	1336

#### Data Sources

The major data source for this research are the census records for the Parish of Moncton in the County of Westmorland for the census years 1851, 1861, and 1871. This is supplemented by local histories and records of the period.

Perhaps the most serious obstacle facing any study using nineteenth-century census material is the nature of the data. While social historians have shown great ingenuity and creativity in analyzing such data, the accuracy of census information itself is problematic. The data for this study share this problem. Brookes [1976], using letters of inquiry sent by census enumerators during the taking of the 1861 New Brunswick census, illustrates the strange and confusing problems encountered by the enumerators. The enumerator for Petersville, District 2, Queens County, John Murphy, in a letter to the Provincial Secretary in 1861 illustrates this problem as follows:

Sir

I have forth with maild the severl Schedules that ihave filed up

there being no nomanufactuers in country places il leves the Schedules containing such not filed—

Sir ihave done the best icould and if there is any erer found it has been Done for the want of knowing better

And ihope you will excuse me

And by doing

Iremain your humble Servant

John Murphy

While John Murphy may have done his best, how good was his best? There is little we can do to guard against the inaccuracies that may have been made by nineteenth-century enumerators (some of whom appear barely literate themselves). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that all conclusions from nineteenth-century data (no matter how statistically sophisticated the analysis may be), are subject to this limitation. Given this reservation about the accuracy of the census, we concur with Timothy Anglin [editor of the *Morning Freeman* of Saint John] who wrote in 1861

The census returns, as taken of late years in many countries, possess great interest. They afford much useful information, dispel many erroneous ideas, and form the basis of most important legislation. In these Provinces accuracy has never been attained, and even in the returns of this year there are many items which are far from correct.

Even with this restriction, these records can provide us with many important insights into life in the nineteenth-century. The census manuscripts of Moncton Parish are among the few records left behind by nineteenth-century women. As such, they provide important insights into their lives and their abilities to deal with economic change.

**Sex Distribution**

One of the most dramatic effects of the boom of the 1840s and early 1850s in Moncton is on the sex distribution of the population, particularly the foreign-born. In the 1851 census only 42 percent of the population twenty-years of age and over are female. By 1861 and 1871 this changes to a more balanced distribution with approximately 48 percent of the population being female in both years (Table 3). In the period 1851 to 1861 the growth rate of the female population is over twice that of the male population (73.8 percent and 36.6 percent increase respectively). How can we account for this development?

TABLE 3  
Population 20 Years of Age and Over by Sex  
1851, 1861, 1871

Sex	1851	1861	1871
Male	57.8%	51.9%	51.4%
Female	42.2	48.1	48.6
TOTAL %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	1247	1899	2178

An examination of the sex distribution of the adult foreign-born versus native-born population can help explain these changes. In 1851, the

sex distribution of the foreign-born population is very skewed (72 percent male, 28 percent female). What this suggests is that men have migrated alone to Moncton in 1851, most likely attracted by the booming shipbuilding industry. By 1861 and 1871 the ratio of males to females in the adult foreign-born population has become far less skewed, (Table 4).

Foreign-born women seem less likely to have migrated to the colony in the earlier years. It seems likely that men have come to Moncton from abroad in the hopes of starting a new life in the dawning years of the shipbuilding industry. During the boom of the 1850s foreign-born women also migrate to the colony either as the wives or to become the wives of these immigrant men.

Did these socio-economic changes in Moncton Parish more generally affect such critical life decisions as the age of marriage, the start of families and the number of children a couple might have? We will first begin by a consideration of mid-nineteenth century marriage patterns in Moncton Parish.

**Marriage Patterns**

If we examine only those twenty years of age and over, 61.5 percent, 66.8 percent and 72.9 percent of the population of Moncton are mar-

TABLE 4  
Population 20 Years of Age and Over by Sex,  
Native-Born and Foreign-Born - 1851, 1861, 1871

Sex	Native-Born			Foreign-Born		
	1851	1861	1871	1851	1861	1871
Male	49.1%	49.3%	49.3%	72.4%	56.2%	58.0%
Female	50.9	50.7	50.7	27.6	43.8	42.0
TOTAL %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	780	1191	1654	467	708	524

ried or widowed in 1851, 1861, and 1871 respectively. We see in the course of the two decades a gradual increase in the proportion of those who ever marry. This trend has been largely continuous in Canada generally into the mid-twentieth century (Kalbach and McVey, 1971:267). This steadily increasing proportion of those ever married over the period 1851 to 1871 in Moncton Parish can, in part, be accounted for by the sex composition of the different populations.

If we look at our population by sex, we can see that this pattern of increasing marriage is more the case for males than for females (Table 5). While there is an increase of only 2.0 percent in the proportion ever married for females from 1851 to 1871, this increase is 17.4 percent for males. Also females are more likely to marry than males in all three years.

TABLE 5  
Percentage Ever Married, 20 Years and Over  
Males and Females - 1851, 1861, 1871

Year	Percentage Ever Married		
	Females	Males	Total
1851	74.0%	52.4%	61.5%
1861 <sup>1</sup>	69.9	63.9	66.8
1871	76.0	69.8	72.9

<sup>1</sup> Since marital status is not given in the census of 1861, marital status was implied. It is possible that older widows may have been inadvertently considered single. This possibility of underestimating the number of ever married is more problematic for women than for men since the number of older widows exceeds older widowers.

It must be kept in mind that the sex ratio for adults is particularly skewed in 1851 in favour of males (57.8 percent of the population is male). A partial reason that only 52.4 percent of males are married is that there is a disproportionate number of males in the population. As the proportion of adult males to adult females

approaches equality (51.9 percent in 1861 and 51.4 percent in 1871 are male) so in turn does the proportion of males married to the proportion of females married, although the latter in all cases exceeds the former. If we examine marital status by nativity for those twenty years and over, we see further evidence that the immigration into the colony of a disproportionate number of young men further disrupted marital patterns. As Table 6 indicates, in 1851 native-born men are more likely to be married than foreign-born men, but native-born women are less likely to be married than foreign-born women. This suggests that young, single women were highly unlikely to emigrate by themselves but rather women migrated with their husbands, or migrated to join husbands.

While we have seen that the likelihood of males marrying is greater as the sex ratio of the population approaches one, this is not the case for women. In fact, the likelihood of a woman marrying is not greatly affected by the radical shift in the economy and is at all times greater than the likelihood of a man marrying. It may be suggested that while the actual percent of ever-married women seems virtually unaffected by economic changes, age of marriage may increase as the economy worsens. Unfortunately, age of marriage is not available from our data. However, an examination of marital status for each age group will suggest the age of marriage.

Table 7 indicates that the rather low rates of marriage can be largely accounted for by the number of young men who are single.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is not until the age group 30 to 39 that we find over half of the men in the age group married. This suggests that there is throughout the entire period a postponement of marriage until the early thirties for men. Women, on the other hand, marry earlier than their male age cohorts. In all three census years almost half of the women in the age group 20-29 are married.

TABLE 6  
Marital Status by Nativity by Sex for Those  
Twenty Years of Age and Over - 1851, 1861, 1871

1851	Male		Female	
	Native	Non-native	Native	Non-Native
Single	41.0%	55.3%	28.2%	19.4%
Married or widowed	59.1	44.7	71.7	80.7
Total %	100.1	100.0	99.9	100.1
N	383	338	397	129
1861				
Single	39.8	33.0	31.6	27.0
Married or widowed	60.2	67.0	68.3	73.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0
N	588	403	607	311
1871				
Single	36.4	20.6	25.8	16.8
Married or Widowed	63.6	79.4	74.2	83.2
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	816	305	838	220

When we compare marriage rates for 1851, 1861 and 1871 we see that for males in each age category the rates of marriage are the lowest in 1851 (with the exception of the age group 60 years of age and over). This can be largely accounted for by the disproportionate number of males in the 1851 population, discussed earlier. Women, on the other hand, have not altered their age of marriage from year to year. The number of single females aged 20-29 years of age is somewhat higher in 1871 than in 1861, suggesting a slight postponement of marriage. There is the possibility that some women postponed marriage as the shipbuilding economy declined. This difference between the years, however, is reasonably small. Marriage patterns among young women are not greatly altered during the decade 1861 to 1871.

In order to determine somewhat more accurately the age at which most women marry, we

further broke the age category 20 to 29 years old, into 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 years old. As Table 8 indicates, most women do not marry until they are in their late twenties. Thus, while between 57.8 percent to 65.1 percent of 20 to 24 year olds females have never married, only 31 percent of 25 to 29 year old females have never married. For women in their late twenties the likelihood of marriage is unaffected by the economy.

The image of the young teenage bride is totally inaccurate for Moncton. Even in 1851, when there is an imbalance in the sex composition of the population and thus one would expect more young women to be married, only 4.3 percent (7) of all women under 20 are married.

The economic difficulties throughout the 1860s appear not to have greatly influenced the

TABLE 7  
Proportion of Ever Married and Single Persons  
By Age and Sex - 1851, 1861, 1871

Marital Status	20-29		30-39		Age 40-49		50-59		60 and over <sup>1</sup>	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1851										
Single	80.4%	46.1%	31.7%	13.6%	27.6%	9.1%	26.5%	5.8%	24.1%	26.5%
Married or widowed	19.6	53.9	68.3	86.4	72.4	90.9	73.5	94.1	75.9	73.5
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0
N	265	206	180	132	134	88	83	51	58	49
1861										
Single	71.7	46.8	18.8	15.6	11.8	9.6	9.3	16.9	28.6	45.9
Married or widowed	28.3	53.2	81.2	84.4	88.2	90.3	90.7	83.1	71.4	54.1
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	350	361	244	243	170	145	107	89	112	74
1871										
Single	72.7	50.8	21.2	12.6	7.2	6.4	4.6	6.7	5.2	9.8
Married or widowed	27.3	49.2	78.7	87.4	92.8	93.6	95.4	93.3	94.8	90.2
Total %	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	342	372	282	262	209	202	153	120	134	102

<sup>1</sup> see footnote, Table 3

decisions of young women to marry. This suggests several possibilities:

1. that the norm of marriage is sufficiently strong that other considerations do not alter these norms;
2. that daughters and wives are important economic actors and can contribute to the well-being of the family even in difficult economic times. Women are not passive to the economic structure around them, but are able to find mechanisms to help deal with economic hardship. Since nineteenth-century Moncton women did not, by large, participate in the paid labour force nor acquire their own land, there was no need to postpone marriage in order to acquire capital. The vast majority of nineteenth-century

women live either in the homes of their fathers or their husbands.

### Fertility Rates

We have in the previous section indicated that there are only minor fluctuations in the age of marriage of women in each decade. What are the effects of the cycle of economic boom and bust on fertility rates?

An examination of crude birth rates<sup>2</sup> indicates that there is some variation among the three years. In 1851 the crude rate is 1.41; in 1861, 1.49; and in 1871, 1.39.

It is tempting to suggest that the slightly higher rate in 1861 is a consequence of the eco-

TABLE 8  
Marital Status of Females 20 to 29 Years Old  
1851, 1861, 1871

Marital Status	Age	
	20-24	25-29
1851		
Single	57.8	31.1%
Married or Widowed	42.0	68.9
Total %	100.0	100.0
N	116	90
1861		
Single	60.1	31.5
Married or Widowed	39.9	68.5
Total %	100.0	100.0
N	193	168
1871		
Single	65.1	31.2
Married or Widowed	34.9	68.8
Total %	100.0	100.0
N	215	157

nommic boom of the early 1850s, and conversely, the lower rate of 1871 reflects the economic bust of the 1860s. However, such a conclusion does not take into account possible differences in the age and marital composition of the population in each of the three years. In order to control for these factors, a breakdown is necessary of the number of children for married women by the age of these women (Table 9).

Among young married women (20-29 years of age) there is a small decrease in the proportion of women with no children and with small families (1 to 2 children) from 1851 to 1861. This suggests that in the period 1851 to 1861 young women are having children earlier than a decade before. However, what is particularly dramatic is the increase in the proportion of young married women with no children from 1861 to 1871, from 12.0 percent to 21.9 percent. Conversely, there are

far fewer small (1 to 2 children) and medium size (3 to 5 children) families in 1871 than in 1861, suggesting further a postponement of childbearing. Thus, as the economic conditions get worse in the late 1860s, it appears that young married women begin to delay having children.

What is particularly noticeable when comparing 30-39 year-old married women across the three decades, is that, by 1871 these women are also postponing starting their families (10.0 percent of 30-39 year-old women are still childless in 1871). Similarly, while the number of small families shows little variation throughout the 20-year period, the combined number of medium and large families of 30-39 year-old women is less in 1871 than in previous years. This age group was only 20 to 29 years old when the shipbuilding industry failed. Thus, the postponement of children and the fewer medium and large families suggest that the increasing hard times of the 1860s affected decisions concerning childbearing for these women.<sup>3</sup>

Again, the group 40 to 49 years old differs in 1871. Here the difference is not so much in terms of women who have no children at all, but rather in terms of family size. There are many more small families in 1871 than in 1851 or 1861. Since this age group was 30-39 years old in the 1860s (that is completing families), it is possible that these women limited family size because of the harsh economic conditions.

In brief, while marriage rates seem only moderately affected by the increasingly adverse conditions, fertility rates are more strongly affected. This limiting or postponement of childbearing must be understood in the context of changes in the larger economy. The decline in the industrial infrastructure supporting shipbuilding leads to labour redundancy. One response to this dislocation is a return to subsistence farming. This return to household-based agricultural production does not represent a natural or "rational" adaptation to the resource base of the area, but

the "irrational" shift of secondary industrial unemployment into primary agricultural underemployment. Under these changed circumstances, limiting or postponing families provided a mechanism for dealing with these new harsh conditions.

It would seem that from this examination of changing fertility rates, that the data suggest that limiting or postponing childbearing was an important mechanism for dealing with hard economic times. This finding challenges the position of Shorter [1973] who argues that changing fertility patterns means a change in

sexual attitudes. Briefly, Shorter argues that rates of fertility rose in Western Europe at the end of the eighteenth-century because of what he defines as "female emancipation." The increased industrialization of Europe meant that working-class women could now work outside the home and this work experience, according to Shorter, changed women's attitudes towards themselves, i.e. they became individualistic and pleasure seeking. Working outside the home, these women were no longer constrained by traditional family ties and family norms, and as such were sexually liberated. This led to increased sexual activity and a subsequent rise in fertility.

TABLE 9  
Number of Children<sup>1</sup> of Married Women by Age 1851, 1861, 1871

No. of Children	Age					
	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	Over 60
1851						
No Children	57.1%	15.3%	1.8%	3.8%	8.3%	36.1%
1-2	42.9	54.1	21.1	10.0	31.3	41.7
3-5	0.0	30.6	52.6	35.0	33.3	22.2
6 and over	0.0	0.0	24.5	51.2	27.1	0.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	7	111	114	80	48	36
1861						
No. children	66.7	12.0	3.8	3.8	9.5	40.0
1-2	33.3	50.0	18.7	12.2	20.3	32.5
3-5	0.0	37.5	56.7	38.2	50.0	27.5
6 and over	0.0	0.5	20.7	45.8	20.2	0.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	9	192	208	131	74	40
1871						
No. Children	60.0	21.9	10.0	3.2	11.6	27.2
1-2	40.0	42.6	19.2	18.5	31.3	51.1
3-5	0.0	33.3	46.3	35.4	33.0	19.6
6 and over	0.0	2.2	24.5	42.8	24.0	2.2
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	99.9	100.0
N	10	183	229	189	112	92

<sup>1</sup> Number of sons and daughters who are residing in the household.

In pre-industrial European society fertility rates were lower, one must conclude from Shorter's thesis, because of the powerful influence of the family and, thus, the acceptance of traditional sexual attitudes by women. Women were constrained by these ties and hence, unable to be important actors. The impact of industrialization and migration and the increased participation in the labour force that this allowed, changed fertility patterns not primarily because of these structural factors in themselves but because of changes in women's sexual attitudes. The causal sequence must be understood in terms of women's attitudes influencing sexual practices and hence changing fertility.

The data on fertility from this study of Moncton provide little evidence to suggest changes in women's attitudes alone are prime factors in changing fertility. Rather they suggest that women of Moncton Parish are important economic actors at all times and even though most are not *directly* involved in the paid labour force, they are able to respond to changes in the economy. This suggests that women who are not in the paid work force or are in "traditional" families are not powerless (as Shorter would have us believe). Rather, the Moncton data indicate that women in these positions can play important

economic roles (see especially Tilley, 1978, p. 291-292).<sup>4</sup>

### Women and Paid Work

Women's participation in the labour force throughout this period is at all times low. Only 8.4 percent, 12.6 percent and 4.2 percent of all women twenty years of age and over are listed as working outside the home in 1851, 1861, and 1871 respectively. These women in the labour force are overwhelmingly concentrated among servants (48.9 percent, 69.8 percent and 62.2 percent respectively). Males, on the other hand, are most unlikely to be servants.

What is curious about the female pattern of labour force participation is that their experience within the labour force shifts from decade to decade. In particular while 26.7 percent of these women over 20 years of age, are farmers in 1851, only 8.6 percent and 8.9 percent are farmers in 1861 and 1871 (Table 10). Conversely, the number of those listed as being in domestic and personal service increase greatly throughout the twenty-year period (from 48.9 percent to 69.8 percent and 62.2 percent respectively in 1851, 1861, and 1871). Thus, while women's participation in the paid labour force increases from 1851

TABLE 10  
Occupation by Age for Women - 1851, 1861, 1871

Occupation	1851		1861		1871	
	Under 20	20 & Over	Under 20	20 & Over	Under 20	20 & Over
Farming	0.0%	26.7%	0.0%	8.6%	4.4%	8.9%
Manufacturing	0.0	0.0	3.6	5.2	11.1	13.3
Dealing	0.0	6.7	1.8	7.8	4.4	2.2
Banks, Gov't, Public Serv.	7.7	15.5	5.4	8.6	13.3	13.3
Domestic & Personal	92.3	48.9	89.1	69.8	66.7	62.2
Unknown	0.0	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	99.9	99.9
N	26	45	55	116	45	45

to 1861, this is largely a consequence of increases in domestic and personal service. Their opportunities to run their own farms has greatly diminished. While these patterns do not vary greatly from 1861 to 1871, women's overall participation in the paid labour force has shrunk by two-thirds.

Despite variations in interpretation which may have occurred from enumerator to enumerator in each of the different census years, there seems to have been some common understanding of women's work outside the home. It is far more likely for women who are single or widowed, for example, to be employed. Even women who are married to farmers, and who, no doubt work on the farm, are considered without occupation by all enumerators. Thus, for example, no working women are listed as married on the 1851 census; only 6.4 percent are so listed in 1861; and 1.1 percent are so listed in 1871. This suggests a common agreement across years that married women are not considered part of the labour force. The shift in women's work outside the home discussed here represents a shift in what women are able to do only for those who are not married or are widowed.

These changes in the female labour force participation must be understood in the context of changes in the larger economy. As the opportunities for employment in the industrial sector of the economy decline with the collapse of ship-building many men, especially native-born men, become farmers. It would seem that as farming becomes more of an option for unemployed men, it becomes less of an option for working women. Indeed, for the majority of women particularly in 1861 and 1871, the only alternative is to become a servant. While the economic transformations in Moncton Parish affect the employment careers of men by forcing them back to the farms, for women this means even more restricted opportunities as women are increasingly found in domestic and personal service. This suggests that as farming becomes

more economically necessary, we see a gradual substitution of male labour for female labour. Most women, however, remain totally outside the labour force. These trends, therefore, must be recognized as applying to relatively small numbers of women. At no time are women greatly involved in the labour force outside the home. To the extent that they do participate, they are largely concentrated among servants. The limited opportunities for economic independence that may have been possible as farmers largely disappear for women, as farming becomes more an alternative for men.

These data tend to confirm the position that women who worked did so as a consequence of economic necessity. Domestic service continued throughout the twenty-year period to be the chief employment opportunity for women. We concur with Tilly et al. [1978:300] that women's work was not an experience of emancipation but that work was hard, most likely poorly paid and did not represent a change from women's traditional work.

### **Women Who Head Households**

In nineteenth-century Moncton the vast majority of adult women are found in the households of others, either in the homes of their parents or, subsequently, the homes of their husbands. Women who head households are a rare phenomenon in Moncton in the mid-eighteen hundreds and this is largely a function of widowhood. In 1851 less than 8 percent of all households are female-headed and of these 96 percent are headed by widows. In 1861 6.3 percent of households are female-headed and while marital status is not explicitly given, it seems again that most of these are widows. Finally, in 1871 4.9 percent of households are female-headed and of these 82.1 percent are headed by widows. It is clearly very uncommon for women who are not widowed to head households.

As we indicated above, while most women in nineteenth-century Moncton do not work outside the home, women who head households are likely to be in the workforce. Of the 25 women in 1851 who are heads of households, 60 percent are in the workforce (44 percent as farmers) (Table 11). In addition, 24 percent live on farms with their unmarried sons who are listed as farmers. Since this latter group consists largely of women over 60 years of age it seems that the enumerator has defined them as no longer taking an active role in farming. Given the rigours of farm life, it is debatable whether this is an accurate portrayal of women's participation in farming. What is of interest as well, is that 3 widowed female heads of households run boarding houses (two with 14 and 12 lodgers respectively), and several other women are able to supplement their household incomes by taking in lodgers. Also over one-quarter (28 percent) of these households headed by women are multiple. While women in these circumstances are not direct beneficiaries of the economical prosperity of the early 1850s, they are able to supplement their income by boarding the young men and families coming to Moncton to participate in the industrial expansion. Of significance is that only 16 percent do not appear to have any means of support (either through their own work or that of their residing children).

TABLE 11  
Occupation for Women Who Head Households  
1851, 1861, 1871

Occupation	1851	1861	1871
Not in labour force	40.0%	46.6%	87.2%
Farming	44.0	20.0	7.7
Manufacturing	0.0	0.0	2.6
Dealing	12.0	6.7	2.6
Banks, Gov't, Public Serv.	4.0	4.4	0.0
Domestic & Personal	0.0	22.2	0.0
Total %	100.0	99.9	100.1
N	25	45	39

By 1861, 53.5 percent of women who head their own households are listed as having occupations but the nature of these occupations has shifted. While 44 percent of 1851 women are listed as farmers, only 20 percent of 1861 women are farmers. Instead, over 20 percent of 1861 women heads of households are found in domestic and personal occupations, e.g., washerwomen, housekeepers, house servants, while none are listed as such in 1851. An additional 4.4 percent run boarding houses but these boarding houses not surprisingly only have 2 or 3 boarders. Thus we can see that we have proportionately far more farming women who head their own households in 1851 and 1861. These developments are similar for female labour force participation generally, discussed above.

Like 1851, some women heads of households who are not listed as working had working sons and daughters but here, as well, the nature of their work has changed. A number of very young teenage sons are working as apprentices, and even daughters are listed as working. However, there are over 30 percent (31.1 percent) of these households in which no one seems to be working. Of these 57.2 percent consist of widows with young and/or invalid children; 21.4 percent consist of wives with no resident husband and with young children; and 21.4 percent consist of widows (usually elderly) residing alone. It is very likely that life for these young women with dependent children and no visible means of support was, indeed, very difficult. There appears to have been fewer opportunities for 1861 women heads of households than those a decade earlier.

The 1871 data suggests that very few women heads of households are employed. Only 12.8 percent of these women are listed as working (only 3 as farmers, 1 as a hotel keeper and 1 milliner). However, an additional 15.4 percent live in households in which their sons<sup>5</sup> are farmers, again suggesting that as widowed women age, their sons are considered in charge of the farm, even though the female is still consi-

dered head of the household. An additional 30.8 percent of women heads of households have working sons and daughters. Nevertheless, there are still over 41 percent of households where it appears that no one is working. Again it is reasonable to assume that with no visible source of income and no farms to fall back on, the lives of these women (again, many widowed women with young children) must have been very difficult.

What these data suggest is that for women who headed households, life becomes increasingly more difficult throughout the period. The farm does not provide the same possibilities of trying to eke out a living as it does for male household heads. This increasing lack of opportunities for women, often with young children to support, bespeaks the harsh realities of the nineteenth century economic decline in Moncton Parish.

In his discussion of women in pre-industrial Europe, Vann [1977:192-216] suggests that widowhood created the only major opportunity of women to be independent. While, on the one hand, Vann recognizes that this may have created situations of dire poverty, on the other hand, he suggests that "widows were virtually the only women who had the possibility of economic self-sufficiency and who were free of a man's domestic supervision" [p. 195]. As such, Vann concludes that a demographic situation that produced many widows was favourable to the position of women.

The evidence here presented, however, certainly provides little evidence to suggest that the economic self-sufficiency of women is, indeed, favourable to them. Women work because of economic necessity and are negatively affected by economic decline. Perhaps, for middle-class women in good economic times, widowhood might bring the liberation Vann suggests, but for the ordinary woman of Moncton Parish to be widowed and forced to economically support

one's family, especially as the economy deteriorated, must have been anything but liberating.

## Conclusion

As the above discussion indicates, it is erroneous to assume that the experience of nineteenth-century women paralleled that of men. It cannot simply be assumed that women will fit the empty spaces left in socio-historical analysis. Thus, for example, while women did not postpone marriage, they postponed or limited child-bearing as a mechanism for dealing with a declining economy. Women were not as successful in being able to deal with the occupational world, as the economic bust destroyed even their limited occupational opportunities and relegated most women who worked into the domestic and personal sector of the economy. The limited opportunities to be an independent farmer became virtually non-existent for these women.

At a more general level, research on women in nineteenth-century Moncton will hopefully contribute to the growing recognition of the role of women as important actors in the unfolding of history. The image that "women were largely passive or that, at the most, they reacted to male pressures or to the restraints of patriarchal society" [Lerner, 1975:6] ignores the importance of women's active functioning in society. The more crucial historical questions do not simply debate whether women were active or passive but, rather, attempt to understand how women affect the historical conditions.

## NOTES

1. This pattern of late marriages for males occurs in other nineteenth-century communities - for example, Katz found that in Hamilton most men married late in their twenties: the first age at which a majority of men were married was twenty-seven (Katz, 1975, p. 262-263).
2. Crude birth rate is calculated as the ratio of number of children 0-9 years of age in the population to number of women 15-44 years of age. In order to circumvent possible errors in reported ages of children, the age range 0-9 was used, rather than the number of children born in the last year.

3. It is reasonable to assume that the decision to postpone or limit the birth of children was one that involved both husband and wife. Since women were largely responsible for the care and well-being of children this decision had more immediate impact on women's lives.
4. It is, of course, difficult to determine whether attitudes to childbearing also changed in these hard economic times since there is no evidence from the data on Moncton to determine this. It seems unlikely, however, that major attitudinal shifts could occur over such a short period.
5. Since relationship to head of household is not given we must infer by similarity of name and by age that these men are sons.

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