

*The Neglected Majority : The Changing Role of Women in 19th Century Montreal **

by D. Suzanne CROSS **

In recent years, historians have responded to the preoccupations of contemporary society by greatly increasing their activity in the fields of social and urban history. Studies on poverty, the working classes, conditions of labour and minority groups have proliferated, but few devote more than a page or two to those aspects of the problem which concerned the female population. It is impossible to say whether this cursory treatment of women in society is due to the scarcity of sources for their study, or whether it reflects attitudes, often unconscious, on the part of historians who conceived of women as another "minority" group, which, lacking political power, is assumed to be devoid of social and economic significance. No doubt both factors operate, one re-enforcing the other. As a result disproportionate emphasis is placed on some aspects of society to the virtual exclusion of others, thereby distorting our understanding of the whole. This paper by its very title is open to just this criticism, but it has been undertaken in an attempt to restore the balance, and to indicate some of the sources which are available although not widely known for the study of women.

The nineteenth century was generally speaking a period of rapid urban growth characterized by large scale migrations of men and women into the towns from the surrounding countryside. Immigration from the British Isles also contributed to the increasing population of cities, although the evidence suggests that it was of much less importance in Montreal than in some North American towns. Periodically, as in the early twenties, the thirties, the late forties and again in the early eighties, the stream of immigrants to Montreal turned to a flood, yet comparatively few remained to make the city their home, and the majority passed on to Canada West or the United States.

The first part of this paper examines the growth of the female population in Montreal and the distribution of women by age and location in the different parts of the city and its suburbs. As the countryside offered even less opportunity for young girls than for young men, women participated in the movement from over-populated rural areas to the towns of Quebec and New England, thereby greatly increasing the female proportion of the urban population. This trend was not peculiar to Quebec. The predominance of

* An earlier version of this paper was presented to the 52nd annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Kingston, Ontario, June 1973.

** Ph.D. candidate, University of Ottawa. The helpful comments of Professors J. T. Copp and Micheline Dumont Johnson are gratefully acknowledged.

women in many American towns in the second half of the century has been noted elsewhere.¹ There was a great demand for servants in Brookline, Pasadena and Newton, all towns with a high *per capita* income, and the textiles towns of Lowell, New Bedford and Fall River offered employment in the mills.

Women moved to the towns and cities in order to earn their living, and the second part of this paper discusses the opportunities for employment which Montreal afforded. The establishment of manufacturing on a relatively large scale created employment, and women became the mainstay of the labour force in at least one industry and formed an important sector in several others. Women, many of them married, worked out of necessity in order that they and their dependents might survive. The seriousness of the plight of many working class families was recognized by the religious orders who established a number of day care centres thus enabling many women with children to supplement the family income by working outside the home. It will be shown that Protestant and Catholic women did not share the same experiences, as several of the roads open to the former were closed to the latter. Occasional reference is made to the women's religious orders and the charitable organizations run by women, but only within the context of their effect on the employment scene.

II

Sex ratios indicating the number of females per hundred males have been computed for Montreal, Quebec City and the Province of Quebec, and are given in Graph I. In a population with an equal number of males and females the ratio is 100 when females predominate the figure is above 100;

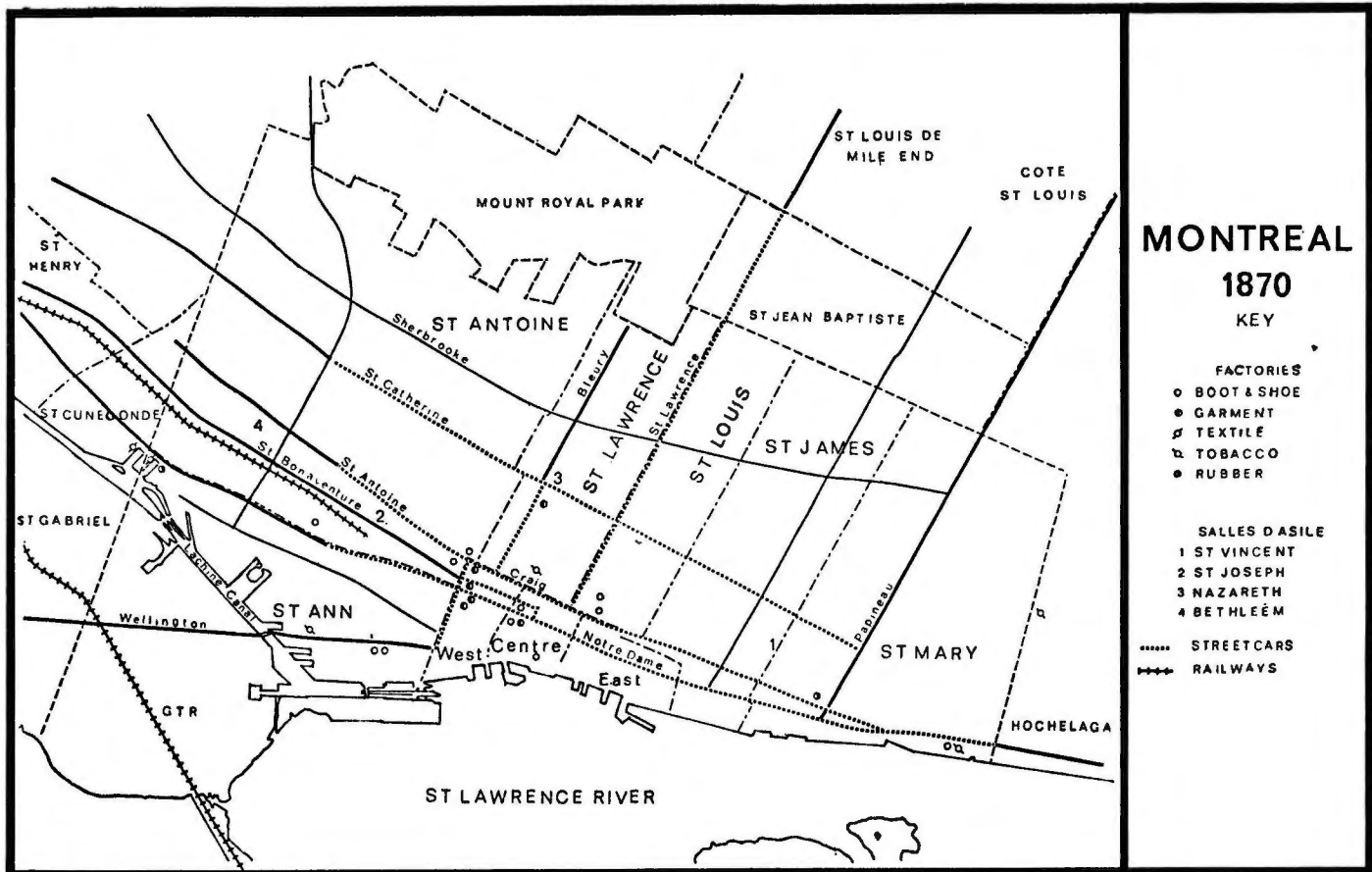
Table I: SEX RATIOS (NUMBER OF FEMALES PER 100 MALES) BY AGE GROUP FOR MONTREAL, 1844-1901

	<i>Under</i> 15	15-19	20-29	<i>Over</i> 30
1844	98.5	128.2	106.6	95.7
1851	101.3	126.4	134.0	95.5
1861	97.5	114.6	126.5	101.9
1871	100.6	138.8	132.8	111.8
1881	100.0	127.6	136.2	115.2
1891	102.9	119.6	122.4	112.2
1901	102.3	116.8	120.2	112.6
χ^2	.24	46.39*	51.99*	7.20

Source: *Census of Lower Canada, 1844*; *Census of Canadas 1851*, vol. I, table 3; 1861, vol. I, table 5; *Census of Canada, 1871*, vol. II, table 7; 1881, vol. II, table 8; 1891, vol. II, table 1; 1901, vol. I, table 7.

* Significant at or beyond the .05 level of confidence.

¹ Warren S. THOMPSON and P. K. WHELPTON, *Population Trends in the United States*, Demographic Monographs, vol. IX (New York: Gordon and Beach, 1969), p. 192.



where males are in the majority the ratio drops below 100. Throughout the period women outnumbered men in Montreal and Quebec, and the proportion of women increased steadily from 1851 to 1881. In 1891 and 1901 the proportion of women continued to increase in Quebec, whereas there was a slight decrease in Montreal. The ratios for the cities contrasted with those for the Province as a whole: at mid-century there were fewer women than men in the Province, but from 1871 to the end of the century, the ratios remained stable.

The sex ratios for the different age groups in Montreal are shown in Table I. The ratios were calculated for four groups: children under the age of 15; girls between 15 and 19; young women from 20 to 29 and mature women over 30. The most striking feature was the high proportion of girls and young women. The ratios in the children's group were all very close to 100, whereas the ratios for the girls and young women's groups were well above 100. In these two age groups women outnumbered men for every year studied. The high ratios among the girls could not be attributed to a carry-over effect from the children's group in the previous decade, as there were almost equal numbers of males and females in the children's group. The arrival of large numbers of young girls in Montreal was the cause of the high ratios in that group. The ratios for the young and mature women's groups were, at least in part, due to the carry-over effects from the girl's group for the previous decade. The ratios for the mature women's groups were noticeably higher from 1871 onwards, but did not equal those of the girls and young women, and it seems likely that they were due to the carry-over effects already mentioned rather than to large scale migrations of older women. As early as 1844 there were already a large number of young girls in the city, and it seems safe to assume that the majority of women who continued to come to Montreal throughout the century were, upon arrival, in their mid and late teens or early twenties.

The male and female population were distributed unevenly throughout the city, as can be seen by the sex ratios for the wards shown in Table II.

Table II: SEX RATIOS (NUMBER OF FEMALES PER 100 MALES) FOR THE WARDS OF MONTREAL, 1861-1901

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
East	82.5	105.5	107.0	105.7	61.0
Centre	98.0	141.8	100.7	128.8	186.3
West	100.0	149.0	98.1	95.5	95.1
St. Anne	98.7	101.5	103.1	98.5	97.9
St. Antoine	113.2	114.3	124.3	118.6	120.5
St. Lawrence	110.4	118.0	120.7	115.5	111.7
St. Louis	110.7	120.5	117.0	118.6	113.1
St. James	102.1	118.6	118.8	115.7	114.1
St. Mary	103.1	108.6	108.9	104.9	108.2

Source: *Census of Canadas* 1861, vol. I, table 5; *Census of Canada*, 1871, vol. I, table 1; 1881, vol. I, table 4; 1891, vol. I, table 1; 1901, vol. I, table 7.

Women greatly outnumbered men in St. Antoine, St. Lawrence, St. Louis and St. James throughout the second half of the century. St. Antoine was essentially a middle- and upper-class residential area, although labourers and artisans resided in the lower part of the ward. Industrial establishments were restricted to the extreme south east corner. Large numbers of domestic servants were employed in the wealthy Protestant homes along St. Antoine street. In 1871, 66 per cent of the total number of servants for the whole city were employed in Montreal West.² A cursory examination of the census returns for 1861 and 1871 revealed that most of these servants were young Irish Catholic girls. The location of a number of factories employing women which were within walking distance of the central area largely explained the high proportion of women in St. Lawrence, St. Louis and even St. James (see map). It was important for women to live close to their jobs, because .05¢ car fares were a major item for the worker who earned only .50¢ to .75¢ a day. Tickets were available at six for .25¢ and twenty-five for \$1.00, but these sums represented a large outlay for the poor. Special workmen's tickets for use in the early morning and evening were not introduced until 1892. Even the new rate of eight tickets for .25¢ was beyond the means of most working women.

The proportion of women in St. Anne's and St. Mary's wards was lower than in the wards already mentioned. St. Mary's in the east end was an area of rapid population growth and appeared to share the characteristics of the new suburbs which are discussed below. The situation of St. Anne, a well-established and predominantly Irish Catholic ward, was different. The ward was close to the Lachine Canal, the harbour and the Grand Trunk Railway yards, all of which attracted male labour. There were some local factories employing women, but many daughters from homes in St. Anne's went into domestic service in neighbouring St. Antoine.

The population of West and Centre wards, which, together with East ward, formed the core of old Montreal, declined steadily in the second half of the century. These wards constituted the commercial and retail centre of the city, but there was also a concentration of garment and shoe factories in West and Centre. In the 1850's merchants and their male clerks lived over the business premises, but when the Montreal City Passenger Railway began operations in 1860, many left the area to reside away from the centre of the city. It is difficult to account for the fluctuations in the ratios in these wards, but it should be pointed out that the differences were not very important because the populations were small. A majority of only a few hundred of either sex in a small population can produce extreme ratios, but would be of little significance in a larger population. The small proportion of women in East ward in 1861 was due to the presence of the garrison at the Quebec Gate Barracks, but satisfactory explanations for the other fluctuations have not been found.

² *Census of Canada, 1871, vol. II, table 3.*

During the last thirty years of the century, population growth was more rapid in the suburban villages of Hochelaga, Côte St. Louis, St. Louis de Mile End, St. Jean Baptiste, Ste. Cunégonde, St. Henri and St. Gabriel than in Montreal itself. With the exception of Hochelaga, the sex ratios were similar to those in St. Mary's ward falling between 102 and 108, although in a few instances there were as low as 98. The ratio for Hochelaga village was 130.2 in 1871 and 115.7 a decade later. The Hudson Cotton Company and the W. C. MacDonald Tobacco Company were both located in Hochelaga, and many women were employed in their factories. During the 1880's, however, the Canadian Pacific Railway attracted over a thousand men to work in its shops and yards which were constructed in the east end. Part of the area was annexed to Montreal in 1883 and the ratio for Hochelaga ward was 105.7 in 1891 and 103.9 in 1901. There were few employment opportunities for women in St. Louis de Mile End, Côte St. Louis, St. Jean Baptiste and St. Gabriel. The stone quarries in Côte St. Louis attracted men to those suburbs and industry on the Lachine Canal and the nearby Grand Trunk shops provided plenty of employment for men in St. Gabriel. Ste. Cunégonde and St. Henri were industrial suburbs: the Belding Paul silk mill, the Merchants Cotton Company, the Montreal Woollen Mill and several establishments manufacturing food employed considerable numbers of females, but many were married women which tended to maintain an even sex ratio. These opportunities for women were also counter-balanced by the numerous industries along the Lachine Canal which created work for men. Although a few wealthy citizens employed servants in their suburban homes, the demand for domestic was small in the lower middle- and working-class districts.

Women came to Montreal to earn their living and also to find husbands. With women outnumbering men the competition for husbands was keen, but the chances of success were more favourable than in rural areas where few of the sons of farmers had any hope of acquiring enough land to support a family. As most of the young men and women who came to the city had little or no money with which to set up a home, early marriage was uncommon. In 1891 only 1.5 per cent of married women and .2 per cent of married men were below the age of 20. Women were generally younger than men at the time of marriage. The incidence of marriage in both the male and female population increased as the century progressed. In 1861, only 32 per cent of women and 32 per cent of men were married, but these percentages rose to 41 and 43 per cent respectively in 1891.³ By 1891 many of the single men and women who had flocked into Montreal in the previous decades had married. Marriage had to be postponed until such time as a couple had saved for the necessities of a home, and the husband could support a family. It became, however, increasingly common for French Canadian married women to go out to work. This practice may have encouraged couples to

³ Computed from the *Census of Canada*, 1861, vol. I, table 5; 1891, vol. II, table 9.

marry earlier and live on their combined earnings rather than wait until the husband could support a family on a single wage.

III

Information on the employment of women in the 19th century is fragmentary, and for the early years almost non-existent. Prior to the establishment of factories, working class women had to rely on domestic service, cleaning, washing, sewing and caring for children. According to the 1861 Census, two per cent of women were engaged in sewing as seamstresses or dressmakers. Domestic service was the major source of employment as indicated by Table III. No explanation has been found for the great drop in the number of servants between 1844 and 1851, and bearing in mind the arrival of thousands of Irish immigrants in the late 1840's, an increase rather than a decrease in the number of servants would have been expected. Some women were already moving into factory work, but it is doubtful if this adequately explains the decline in the number of servants between 1844 and 1851. It is unwise to place too much confidence in the early census, and it is possible that the number of servants given for 1844 is too high or that for 1851 is too low. The number of servants had increased by 1871 but so had the population, and contemporaries commented on the shortage of servants.⁴ Throughout the 1870's the "servant problem" agitated the ladies of Montreal, and there was probably truth in the complaint that girls preferred working in the factories.⁵ Hours of work were extremely long and conditions bad in the factories, but at the end of the day a girl was her own mistress which was far from the case with the servant who was subject to the rules of the household at all times. At least one editor thought that the ladies were to blame for the reluctance of young girls to enter domestic service. Servants, he said, were badly paid, over-worked, given little or no time off, inadequately housed and fed and subjected at all hours to the capricious demands of the mistress. From the point of view of the employers,

Table III: THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE SERVANTS IN MONTREAL

	<i>No. of servants</i>	<i>% of female population</i>
1844	3,013	9.2
1851	915	3.1
1861	2,770	6.0
1871	3,657	6.4
1881	5,898	7.9

Source: *Census of Lower Canada*, 1844; *Census of Canadas*, 1851, vol. I, table 4; 1861, vol. I, table 7; *Census of Canada*, 1871, vol. II, table 8; 1881, vol. II, table 14.

⁴ *Montreal Herald*, 10.7.1871, 7.9.1871, 19.11.1872, 21.11.1872, 5.2.1873.

⁵ *Herald*, 7.9.1871, *Post*, 4.3.1882.

matters had improved slightly by 1881, and there was one servant per 4.8 families as compared with one per 5.8 families in 1861.⁶

Domestic service created employment for some women and at the same time released others from devoting all their time to the cares of the household. Increasing numbers of middle- and upper-class women had leisure to devote to social and recreational activities and also to charitable organizations and higher education as witnessed by the foundation of the Montreal Ladies Educational Association in 1871. The shortage of servants was a matter of real concern to the ladies of the upper classes. Various attempts were made to alleviate the problem, but even so supply could not keep up with the demand. The Misses Rye and McPherson, who ran one of several servant registry offices, periodically arranged for young girls to come from England to take up domestic work in Montreal. In 1871, J. E. Pell of the St. George Society suggested that he be given financial assistance in order to tour the villages of England and persuade girls to come to Montreal.⁷ Several charitable organizations concerned themselves with finding employment, particularly in domestic service, for women. The Protestant House of Industry and Refuge established a servants' register in 1867⁸ and the Y.W.C.A., which began its work in Montreal in 1874, immediately set up a committee for domestic servants.⁹ The Women's Protective Immigration Society also tried to channel immigrants in this direction and occasionally advanced passage money to suitable girls.¹⁰ The Montreal Day Nursery functioned as an informal employment office by the end of the century. Anyone wanting charwomen on a daily basis informed the Nursery, and when mothers brought their children in, they were directed to the available work.

The shortage of servants was only one aspect of the problem. Most girls entering service lacked any experience, and few employers wanted to invest the time and effort in training them. Attempts to provide some preliminary training were made periodically, but it is doubtful that these efforts were very satisfactory. In 1860 the Home and School of Industry made the training of young girls for domestic service one of their principal objectives.¹¹ Later they instituted a special class for girls of eight years and up in order to train them in housework.¹² Kitchen Garden classes were organized for little girls below the age of seven, and the class at the Day Nursery was reported to be one of several operating in the city. Kitchen Gardens originated

⁶ Computed from the *Census of Canada*, 1861, vol. II, table 16, 1881, vol. I, table 2.

⁷ *Herald*, 7.9.71.

⁸ *Report of the 4th Annual Meeting of the Protestant House of Industry and Refuge*, p. 7.

⁹ Mary Quayle INNIS, *Unfold the Years* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1949), p. 21.

¹⁰ *Herald*, 22.11.1881.

¹¹ *12th Ann. Rep. of Home and School of Industry*, 1860, p. 3.

¹² *21st Ann. Rep. of Home and School of Industry*, 1869, p. 4.

in the United States and the idea was introduced to Montreal by a Miss Huntingdon of New York.¹³

IV

A separate listing for men and women in industrial occupations was first introduced in the Census of 1871. Although the number of servants in Montreal declined between 1844 and 1861 and did not reach the 1844 level until 1871, the female population rose from just under 33,000 to over 57,000. It can be seen from Graph II that by 1871 women played an important role in a number of industries, and we can infer that they had been doing so for some time. Many of the industrial establishments employing women were founded in the 1850's and 1860's, and some even earlier. J. & T. Bell began manufacturing boots and shoes in 1819, and the business was still flourishing in 1894.¹⁴ Brown and Childs employed some 800 hands in the boot trade by 1856.¹⁵ During the 1850's, at least six more sizeable factories were established, and another four in the 1860's.¹⁶ The location of these and most of the factories mentioned below can be seen on the map.

Several garment factories, some of which were very large, were in operation in the mid-century. Messrs. Moss and Brothers dated from 1836, the shirt manufacturer John Aitken and Co. from 1851 and the clothing firm of Messrs. McMillan and Carson from 1854.¹⁷ H. Shorey and Co., which later became one of Montreal's largest clothing factories was established in 1865.¹⁸ Two textile mills, one for woolen and the other for cotton cloth, began manufacturing in 1852 and 1853 respectively in the vicinity of St. Gabriel's Locks.¹⁹ The tobacco factory of the W. C. MacDonald Co.,²⁰ the

¹³ *Ann. Rep. of the Montreal Day Nursery*, 1889, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Montreal Illustrated, 1894: its Growth, Resources, Commerce, Manufacturing Interests, Financial Institutions, Educational Advantages, and Prospects; Also Sketches of the Leading Business Concerns which Contribute to the City's Progress and Prosperity* (Montreal: Consolidated Illustrating Co., 1894), p. 298.

¹⁵ *Montreal in 1856. A Sketch Prepared for the Celebration of the Opening of the Grand Trunk Railway in Canada* (Montreal: Lovell, 1865), p. 45.

¹⁶ The factories were: A. Z. Lapierre & Son, 1854 (*Montreal Illustrated*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 146); Ames-Holden Co., 1853 (*ibid.*, p. 113); James Linton and Co., 1859 (*Industries of Canada. City of Montreal Historical and Descriptive Review*, Montreal: Gazette Printing Co., 1886, p. 114); J. I. Pellerin & Sons, 1859 (*Montreal Illustrated*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 195); James Whithem & Co., exact date unknown (K. G. C. HUTTERMAYER, *Les intérêts commerciaux de Montréal et Québec et leur manufactures*, Montreal: Gazette Printing Co., 1891, p. 169); G. Boivin & Co., 1859 (*Montreal Illustrated 1894*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 204); George T. Slater & Sons, circa 1864 (*Montreal Illustrated 1894*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 140); William McLaren & Co., circa 1860's (Chisholm & Dodd, *Commercial Sketch of Montreal and its Superiority as a Wholesale Market*, Montreal 1868, p. 50); B. J. Pettener, 1866 (*Montreal Illustrated 1894*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 236); Robert & James McCreedy (*Montreal Post*, Jan. 3, 1885, *True Witness*, Oct. 15, 1890). Thirty boot and shoe manufacturers existed between 1845 and 1853 according to the Montreal Street Directories (1845-6, pp. 224-228, 1852, pp. 270-1) but most were probably very small concerns which did not employ women.

¹⁷ *Montreal in 1856*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁸ *Herald*, 6.9.92.

¹⁹ *Montreal in 1856*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 40.

²⁰ John F. SNELL, *MacDonald College* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1963), pp. 9-10.

"Stonewall Jackson" Cigar factory²¹ and S. Davis and Sons²² were all in operation before 1860. It is reasonable to suppose that increasing numbers of women were employed in these factories from the 1850's or possibly earlier. Manufacturers knew that women and children could do this work just as well as men and would accept less pay.

Most industrial work was located in factories, but this was not the case in the garment trade where diverse conditions existed. There were many small dressmakers', milliners' and tailors' shops, and seamstresses and dress-makers worked in private homes on a daily basis. In the manufacture of men's clothing, although some work was done in the factory, more was farmed out to women working in their own homes on machines that were either rented or supplied by the manufacturer.²³ In 1892 the J. W. Mackenzie Company had 900 hands on their outside payroll, and the H. Shorey Company 1,400 in addition to 130 employed in the factory.²⁴

Graph II indicates those industries in Montreal which relied extensively on female labour. Several occupations, which are listed separately in the industrial schedules of the census, have been combined to form the garment trade.²⁵ The number of women declined in this trade between 1881 and 1891: most of the sub-groups remained unchanged, but tailoresses gave place to tailors. There was also a reduction in the number of men and women in the boot and shoes factories. This industry was experiencing difficulties in the late eighties, and by 1891 the value of products was down by close to \$2 million and salaries by a quarter of a million. There were 129 establishments compared with 171 in 1881. Many factories were established in response to the "National Policy," but limited Canadian markets restricted growth, and it is clear from accounts of the individual factories that few were able to produce at their full capacity.²⁶ In the tobacco, cotton, silk and rubber industries there was a steady increase in the number of females employed, but the garment trade remained the major source of work.

Only industries which employed more than 100 women were included in Graph II, but smaller numbers worked in other industries. In 1871, just under 23,000 men, women and children were classified as industrial workers in Montreal and Hochelaga. Of this number over 7,000 or approximately 33 per cent of the work force were women and girls. There were over 42,000 employed in industry in 1891 of whom approximately 12,000 were women and girls. The number of men in industry had doubled, whereas there were

²¹ *Montreal Illustrated 1894*, ... *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 292.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 294, 296.

²⁴ *Herald*, 6.9.1892.

²⁵ Dressmakers, milliners, seamstresses, furriers, hatters, corsetmakers, shirt-makers, glovers, tailors and tailoresses.

²⁶ *Industries of Canada*, ... *op. cit.*, p. 114; J. KANE, *Le Commerce de Montréal et de Québec et leurs industries en 1889*, p. 76; *Montreal Illustrated, 1894*, ... *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 204.

only 4,500 more women working in 1891 than in 1871, and they comprised 28 per cent of the work force as compared with 33 per cent in 1871.²⁷ During these years new jobs for women were opening up more slowly than for men. The above figures indicate the number of women working on census day, and probably under-represent the number who worked during part of the year. There is no way of estimating the number who worked temporarily when the main bread winner was unemployed or ill. The wage books for the Molson Brewery showed a rapid turnover among the girls in the bottling factory.²⁸

V

There is strong evidence that as early as the 1850's, it was increasingly common for French Canadian married women to go out to work. As an illustration, in 1855 the Sisters of Providence began caring for young children who had been refused admission to schools in the Quebec suburbs, and they established a separate *salle d'asile* in connection with the Hospice St. Joseph in 1860.²⁹ Children between the ages of two and seven were left by their parents early in the morning and picked up in the late afternoon. In 1858 the Grey Nuns opened the first of five similar centres — the *salle d'asile* St. Joseph. The response on the part of parents was immediate, and *l'asile* Nazareth followed in 1861, *l'asile* Bethléem in 1868, *l'asile* St. Henri in 1885 and finally *l'asile* Ste. Cunégonde in 1889. As might be expected, *l'asile* St. Vincent de Paul, *l'asile* St. Joseph and *l'asile* Ste. Cunégonde were located in working-class districts. In contrast *l'asile* Nazareth and *l'asile* Bethléem were on St. Catherine Street and Richmond Square, both of which were prestigious addresses. St. Catherine Street was moderately convenient

Table IV: NUMBER OF CHILDREN ATTENDING THE "SALLES D'ASILE" RUN BY THE GREY NUNS

	<i>L'asile</i> St. Joseph	<i>L'asile</i> Nazareth	<i>L'asile</i> Bethléem	<i>L'asile</i> St. Henri	<i>L'asile</i> Ste. Cunégonde
1863	408	334			
1868	604	795	33		
1872	512	500	100		
1877	484	220	360		
1882	348	400	280		
1887	429	187	324	450	
1892	110	387	312	542	352
1897	130	314	256	604	550
1902	*	298	246	404	380

Source: "Les Rapports des Chapitres Généraux," vol. II, Archives des Sœurs Grises.
* Figures missing.

²⁷ *Census of Canada*, Industrial Schedules, 1871, 1891.

²⁸ 19th century wage books, Molson's Archives.

²⁹ *Le Diocèse de Montréal à la fin du 19^e siècle* (Montréal: Eusebe Sénécal, 1900), p. 299.

Table V: TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN ATTENDING THE "SALLES D'ASILE" DURING 5-YEAR PERIODS

1858-63	1,704
1864-68	3,408
1869-72*	2,848**
1873-77	2,959**
1878-82	6,401
1883-87	5,387
1888-92	7,907
1893-97	9,608
1898-1902	10,126

Source: "Les Rapports des Chapitres Généraux, vol. II.

* 4-year period.

** Figures missing for *L'asile Bethléem*.

for women in the lower parts of St. Lawrence and St. Louis and also for those who walked in from the village of St. Jean Baptiste to the north. The Richmond Square site was made available by the Hon. C. S. Rodier, and was no great distance from St. Joseph and St. Bonaventure streets. The decline in the number of children at *l'asile* Bethléem after 1887 suggests that a number came from the parishes of Ste. Cunégonde and St. Henri and later attended the local *salles d'asile*.

The number of children who were registered at the *salles d'asile* run by the Grey Nuns can be seen in Table IV, and Table V gives the totals who attended during five-year periods. A glance shows that considerable numbers of young children frequented *salles d'asile*. It must, however, be asked whether these were children of widowed mothers or of parents who were both living. The registers for *l'asile* St. Joseph for 1858 to 1869 and for *l'asile* Ste. Cunégonde for 1889 to 1891 have been preserved.³⁰ The name and age of each child was inscribed together with the address and occupation of the parent. Very few widows registered their children. It appears certain that many families in which both parents were employed sent their children to the *salles d'asile*. In 1878 the Grey Nuns stated that "*Le but principal de cette œuvre [les salles d'asile] est de donner aux parents de la classe peu aisée, la libre disposition de leurs journées afin qu'ils puissent se livrer à un travail fructueux pour la famille . . .*"³¹ At the opening of *l'asile* St. Henri, the curé M. Remi-Clotaire Decary remarked that "*Les parents pauvres qui travaillent en dehors de leur maison ont le privilège d'aller placer leurs enfants sous la protection bienveillante des Sœurs de l'asile Saint-Henri.*"³² The registers of St. Joseph and Ste. Cunégonde show that almost without

³⁰ *Salle d'asile* St. Joseph pour l'enfance, Registre d'Inscription 1859-1869, m.s.; *Salle d'asile* Sainte Gunégonde, Registre d'Inscription, 1889-1891, m.s. Archives des Sœurs Grises de Montréal.

³¹ *Salles d'Asile Tenues par les Sœurs de la Charité de Montréal*, Montréal: 1878, p. 2, Archives des Sœurs Grises.

³² *1747 Souvenir 1897: Descriptions et Notes historiques sur la Maison des Sœurs Grises à Montréal*, 1897, N.P., p. 3.

exception the children were French Canadian: the Irish and English did not send their children to these particular institutions. The Grey Nuns did not make a regular charge for the care of children, but some parents were able to contribute. For revenue the Sisters depended on donations, bazaars and a small subsidy which amounted to approximately 25 cents per child per year from the Provincial Legislature.³³

The role of the *salles d'asile* in enabling married women with children to go to work needs further consideration. Children below the age of two were not admitted, and the registers show that most of those attending were over the age of three. Although the evidence is not conclusive, it does not appear that the presence of an infant in the family prevented the mother from working. According to contemporary accounts, French Canadian mothers frequently resorted to artificial feeding instead of breast feeding which made possible an early return to work after childbirth provided that some care could be provided.³⁴ It is suggested that children between the ages of 10 and 13 were used to look after the children who were too young to attend the *salles d'asile*. The registers of the parish school of St. Joseph which was run by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame show that the majority of children left after the third grade, but at this age, probably 10 or 11, very few went out to work.³⁵ There were certainly considerable numbers of children available who could function as baby sitters in their own families or possibly for neighbours, thus releasing the mother for work outside the home.

There were few day care centres for pre-school children in the English-speaking community, lending substance to the claim that only French Canadian mothers went out to work. In 1886 a group of ladies approached the Y.W.C.A. and asked for their support in setting up a day nursery. A building was rented on Fortification Lane, and two years later the Day Nursery moved to larger premises on Mountain Street. A comparatively small number of children frequented the nursery: in 1899 attendance averaged twenty-five daily,³⁶ although earlier in the decade it had been as high as forty.³⁷ The charge of ten cents a day per child and fifty cents a week may have kept mothers away. From the annual reports, it appears that the nursery was used by women who were the sole bread winners of the family.³⁸ It is possible that some of the other Protestant charitable organizations took in a few children while their mothers worked, but the facilities did not compare in size or number with those of the Grey Nuns.

³³ *Salles d'Asile*, . . . Montréal, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³⁴ *Herald*, 21.9.1874; S. LACHAPPELLE, *La Santé Pour Tous*, Montréal: 1880, pp. 122-144; LACHAPPELLE, *Femme et Nurse*, Montréal: 1901, p. 43.

³⁵ Registre: Ecole St. Joseph, 309-700/11, archives de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame.

³⁶ *11th Ann. Rep. of the Day Nursery*, 1899, p. 2.

³⁷ *2nd Ann. Rep. of the Day Nursery*, 1890, p. 3.

³⁸ *1st Ann. Rep. of the Day Nursery*, 1889, pp. 3-4.

VI

Other avenues of employment were open to women who had some capital or had the benefit of a sound basic education. The Montreal Street Directories show many women running boarding houses, grocery stores and other small businesses. Other women worked as clerks in retail stores or offices. The typewriter and the telephone were coming into use in the 1880's and 1890's, but were still by no means common. It does not seem likely that many women depended on the typewriter and telephone before 1900.

The care of people, particularly the sick, the destitute and the orphaned, has traditionally been the work of women. The Grey Nuns and the Hospital Sisters of St. Joseph had long undertaken this work in Montreal, and the Congregation of Notre Dame had been involved in education from the earliest days. These orders expanded their work in an attempt to keep up with the rapidly growing city, but the need for additional services became apparent. The 1840's and the 1850's saw many new communities emerge under the direction of Bishop Bourget, and the Catholic charitable organizations became institutionalized by the Church. It is not within the scope of this paper to examine the role of the religious orders, but it should be pointed out that during the 1830's Catholic lay women as well as Protestants were involved in charitable work. The Catholic Orphanage, which was established by the Sulpicians in 1832, was confided to the care of the *Société des Dames de Charité*.³⁹ During the lifetime of the foundresses, the lay administration was vigorous in meeting the needs of the orphanage, but their successors were confronted with serious financial problems in the 1880's and considered disbanding. Assistance from the Sulpicians enabled them to carry on, but in 1889 M^{lle} Morin, who had run the orphanage for many years, retired, and the Grey Nuns were invited to assume charge of the children.⁴⁰ In 1847 the Sulpicians founded a second institution known in its first days as "The House", which was the forerunner of the St. Patrick's Orphan Asylum.⁴¹ The Irish Ladies of Charity were interested in this work from its inception, and during the first years lay women cared for the orphans. The Grey Nuns took over at an early date, but the Irish Ladies of Charity maintained their patronage for many years. *Le Refuge de la Passion*, also established by the Sulpicians in 1861, was directed by the Misses Pratt and Cassant until 1866. It was then taken over by les *Petites Servantes des Pauvres*, and after several changes in management it came under the care of the Grey Nuns who renamed it *Le Patronage d'Youville* in 1895.⁴²

In the 1820's and 1830's Catholic lay women were obviously willing to respond to the needs of society. Bishop Bourget, however, intended all social

³⁹ Marie-Claire DAVELUY, *L'Orphelinat Catholique de Montréal* (Montreal, 1918), p. 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.

⁴¹ J. J. CURRAN, *St. Patrick's Orphan Asylum* (Montreal, 1902), p. 23.

⁴² *Le Diocèse*, . . . *op. cit.*, p. 281.

institutions in the Catholic Community to be controlled by the Church, and "*Vélan de piété imprimé à tous les fidèles de son diocèse par l'Évêque de Montréal a fait surgir des nouvelles communautés.*"⁴³ A group of ladies led by M^{me} Gamelin had been caring for sick and destitute women since 1828. The Bishop invited les Sœurs de la Charité de la Providence to send members of their order from France to undertake this work. When the order was unable to accede to his request, he established a local order, and six ladies already involved in the work placed themselves under the direction of M^{me} Gamelin.⁴⁴ In 1844 *l'Institut des Sœurs de Charité de la Providence* was established canonically in Montreal. The lay apostolate of M^{me} Marie Rosalie Cadron and her companions was of shorter duration. In 1845 she left her family, and set up *le refuge Ste. Pélagie* for unmarried mothers. She and Sophie Desmarêts took in eleven girls the first year, but the work grew rapidly and nearly four hundred infants were born at the refuge during the first six years. The Bishop instituted a rule for the ladies in 1846, and the novitiate of *les Sœurs de la Miséricorde* accepted six of those who were already engaged in the work.⁴⁵ One can but speculate on what might have happened had the Bishop been a man of less drive and determination. It is possible that much of the charitable work would have continued in the hands of Catholic lay women working alongside the existing religious orders. As it turned out, the religious communities took over the care of the orphans, the old and destitute, the mentally and physically sick, the blind, deaf and mute, the unmarried mothers and the female prisoners, and Catholic lay women were gradually excluded, from all but a supporting role.

In the Protestant community, women were involved in numerous charitable institutions.⁴⁶ The role of women in these societies varied considerably. In the larger organizations such as the House of Industry and Refuge, there was a board of directors usually composed of prominent businessmen who looked after the financial and legal matters. Various women's committees set the policy and generally directed different aspects of the work. These ladies were usually from the upper classes and gave of their services freely. Finally a respectable older woman was employed as matron to take charge of the daily running of the institution, possible with the assistance of two or three general servants. Smaller societies like the Y.W.C.A., the Women's Protective Immigration Society and the Women's Christian Temperance Union were run exclusively by women.

⁴³ C. de LAROCHE-HÉRON, *Les Servantes de Dieu en Canada* (Montreal: Lovell, 1855), p. 78.

⁴⁴ *Le Diocèse*, . . . *op. cit.*, pp. 261-262.

⁴⁵ E.-J. AUCLAIR, *Histoire des Sœurs de Miséricorde de Montréal* (Montréal, 1928), pp. 14-16, 40, 46.

⁴⁶ The most important included the Female Benevolent Society, The Hervey Institute, the House of Industry and Refuge, the Home, the Y.W.C.A., the Women's Protective Immigration Society, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

VII

The greatest progress made by Protestant women in Montreal was in the field of education and nursing. *École Jacques Cartier*, the Catholic normal school in Montreal, did not admit female students until a women's annex was added in 1899.⁴⁷ In 1869 M^{me} Médéric Marchand opened a private school which later received a subsidy from the Catholic School Commission. This school made an attempt to prepare girls for careers in teaching and office work. Between 1881 and 1901 nearly a thousand girls gained their *brevet d'enseignement* for elementary, model or academic teaching.⁴⁸ It is not known how many of these girls taught, but it does not seem likely that they had much impact on the teaching profession, as lay teachers were in the minority. In 1893 there were 142 teaching sisters and 43 women teachers in the schools controlled by the Commission, and another 400 sisters were engaged in independent schools.⁴⁹ The McGill Normal School opened its doors to student teachers of both sexes in 1857. Women always greatly outnumbered men, although this had not originally been anticipated. The low salaries paid to teachers failed to attract men. The school had some unusual features: tuition was free and financial assistance in the form of small bursaries was given for living expenses. Students whose homes were more than ninety miles from Montreal also received a travel allowance. Male students who had a good academic standing in the school were admitted to McGill College, but this privilege did not extend to women. The aim of the school was first and foremost to produce teachers: students had to sign a pledge that committed them to teaching for three years after graduation.⁵⁰ The original prospectus was not clear on this point: students were required to promise to comply with Regulation 23, but the meaning of the regulation was not explained. At least one student in the first class did not understand this obligation, and Principal William Dawson received a request from a parent that his daughter should be released from teaching for three years.⁵¹ Dawson's reply has not been found, but an application form used at a later date made the rules of the school more explicit. The applicant promised to pay £10 to the Principal of the Normal School if he or she failed to comply with the regulations which were spelled out and included the three-year pledge to teach.⁵²

The financial assistance to normal school students varied from year to year. In 1857 the sum of £8 or £9 was offered.⁵³ The prospectus for

⁴⁷ Adélarde DESROSIERS, *Les Ecoles normales primaires de la Province de Québec* (Montréal: Arbour & Dupont, 1909), p. 182.

⁴⁸ *Nos Ecoles laïques, 1846-1946, Album Souvenir d'un siècle d'apostolat* (Montréal: Imprimerie de Lamirande, 1947), pp. 57-58.

⁴⁹ *An Account of the Schools Controlled by the Roman Catholic Board of School Commissioners*, 1893, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁰ "Prospectus of the McGill Normal School, 1857," Dawson Papers, acc. 927-1-4, McGill Archives.

⁵¹ W. Brethone to J. W. Dawson. 26.2.57, Dawson Papers, acc. 927-4-26.

⁵² Dawson Papers, acc. 927-20-34A.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, acc. 927-3.

1867 refers to a sum of \$36 for students in the elementary and model course and \$80 to those in the academy class.⁵⁴ The following year nineteen female students received \$24 each.⁵⁵

During the nineteenth century 1,664 women obtained the elementary diploma, 978 the model and 160 the academic diploma from the McGill Normal School.⁵⁶ The classes steadily increased in size from an initial group of eleven girls, six of whom came from Montreal, to one of 149 in the 1898-99 session.⁵⁷ Free tuition and the modest bursaries opened a career to many girls who otherwise could not have afforded a college education. Although the pay for teachers was extremely poor, teaching was considered a socially acceptable occupation for respectable girls. It remains a mystery how they managed to maintain their social position on salaries of less than \$100 a year. Teaching was the only career open to women that led to a pension. The average salary for women with diplomas was \$99 in 1899,⁵⁸ but as some teachers at the Montreal High School for Girls received salaries ranging from \$350 to \$600 a year,⁵⁹ many salaries must have been well below the average. Pensions were even more modest than salaries. In 1900 there were twenty-three women in Montreal receiving pensions which averaged \$67.34 for an average of twenty-three years' service. The lowest pension was \$21.87 a year after twenty years of teaching and the highest \$218.77 also after the same length of service.⁶⁰

Before 1871, the McGill Normal School was the only institution concerned with the higher education of women, but in 1884 McGill College opened its doors to women on a regular basis. This enabled graduates of the Normal School, the Montreal High School for Girls and also ladies who attended courses organized by the Montreal Ladies Educational Association to continue their education. A degree from McGill did not, however, immediately open the doors of opportunity to women. As one editor pointed out in 1875, there was no demand for highly educated women outside the teaching profession.⁶¹ The admission of women to McGill had important consequences for the twentieth rather than the nineteenth century.⁶² Only a very small number of women attended McGill College particularly in comparison with the Normal School. The faculties of medicine and law refused to accept women and those who wished to study medicine went to the medical

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, acc. 927-19-8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, acc. 927-20-8.

⁵⁶ *Sess. Pap. Que.*, 63 Vict. 1899-1900, vol. 2, app. VIII, Table G, p. 308.

⁵⁷ Dawson Papers, acc. 927-3, McGill Archives.

⁵⁸ *Sess. Pap. Que.*, 63 Vict. 1899-1900, vol. 2, app. VI.

⁵⁹ Gillian M. BURDELL, "The High School for Girls, Montreal, 1875-1914," (unpublished M.A. Thesis, McGill, 1963), p. 41.

⁶⁰ *Sess. Pap. Que.*, 63 Vict. 1899-1900, vol. 2, app. VIII, Table 1.

⁶¹ *Herald*, 13.4.75.

⁶² Clevendon pointed out that all eight graduates of the first class became "unwavering advocates of women's suffrage" at a later date. Catherine Lyle CLEVENDON, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 217.

school of Bishop's College which was located in Montreal. This institution accepted women after 1890 and ten completed their training before the school merged with the McGill medical school in 1905.⁶³

The Montreal School of Nursing had greater impact in creating opportunities for women in the medical field. By mid-century Florence Nightingale had largely succeeded in establishing nursing as a career for respectable women, although the term nurse was still used synonymously with that of servant in Montreal. As the advantages of trained nurses became increasingly apparent, the medical staff and management committee of the Montreal General Hospital began to examine ways of training nurses and in 1874 the committee corresponded with Miss Maria Machin one of the Nightingale nurses at St. Thomas' Hospital, London. The following year Miss Machin arrived in Montreal for the purpose of establishing a school at the General. She was later joined by several trained nurses.⁶⁴ Financial difficulties prevented the foundation of a school at that time, and several of the trained nurses left. The Y.M.C.A. proposed a course for nurses in 1877, but the hospital was unable to co-operate, and the project was abandoned.⁶⁵ Miss Anna Caroline Maxwell, a graduate of the Boston City Hospital, was engaged in 1879. A circular was prepared announcing that a school offering a two-year course would open in 1880, but it also failed to materialize.⁶⁶ Miss Rimmer, who was in charge of the hospital during the 1880's, had no formal training in nursing, but was a lady of good sense and organizing ability and she improved conditions and attracted a better class of woman to hospital work.⁶⁷

In 1889 the hospital management committee again resolved on the necessity of a training school, and advertisements were placed in the local papers and in American medical journals. Miss Gertrude Elizabeth Livingstone, who had graduated from the New York Hospital's Training School for Nurses, was appointed, together with two trained assistants. In April 1890 the school opened. Nursing as a career immediately attracted women in Montreal: in the first year, one hundred and sixty applications were received. Eighty candidates were admitted on probation and forty-two were finally accepted.⁶⁸ The two-year programme placed emphasis on practical experience, and the curriculum contained only twenty-two hours of lectures. Students were rotated through the different wards and departments, spending a few months in each.⁶⁹ In spite of the large enrolment only six nurses graduated from the first class.

⁶³ Maude E. ABBOTT, *History of Medicine in the Province of Quebec* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1931), p. 67.

⁶⁴ H. E. MACDERMOT, *History of the School for Nurses of the Montreal General Hospital, Alumnae Assoc.* (Montreal, 1944), p. 17-18.

⁶⁵ *Herald*, 6.4.1877.

⁶⁶ MACDERMOT, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

VIII

By 1900 Montreal was the home of thousands of women whose place of birth was in rural Quebec or the British Isles. The demand for female labour had drawn them to the city, and they had made the transition to a totally new environment. Girls who grew up on the farm surrounded by the warmth and affection of a large family had adapted to working in a factory and living in a cramped room or a shack euphemistically called a rear dwelling. Young Irish girls, some newly arrived from Ireland and others the daughters of Irish settlers in the counties north and south of Montreal, had learned to conform to the demands of wealthy Protestant families. These women left no testimony of their loneliness, discouragement and homesickness, but there is no reason to believe they escaped such feelings.

One of the most striking features of the period was the emergence of the French Canadian working mother. We do not know what effect this had on the relationship within the family, but it was probably considerable. The influence of the religious orders in the moral and religious development of French Canadian children was more important than has previously been recognized, as it is now clear that large numbers of very young children passed their formative years in the care of the sisters whose first concern was to instil a set of standards rooted in the catholicism of nineteenth century Quebec. Prayers and catechism were part of the daily fare of the *salles d'asile*, and the importance of this in the formation of religious, moral and social attitudes should not be underestimated.

In a sense this paper raises more questions than it attempts to answer. One of the most interesting relates to the reasons why French Canadian mothers worked, when apparently those of English, Scottish and Irish origin did not. Was poverty generally more prevalent among French Canadians or did the large family make it necessary to have a second wage earner? Alternatively, were some French Canadian artisans buying homes in the suburbs as suggested by the rhetoric in the newspapers? The picture tends to confirm the writer's earlier contention that the Irish made a satisfactory adjustment in Montreal, and were no longer at the bottom of the economic ladder in the post-Confederation years.⁷⁰

As the religious orders proliferated, Catholic lay women were increasingly excluded from a variety of occupations. Within the religious community, however, it was possible for women to rise to positions of great authority and responsibility that had no counterpart in the Protestant community. A high degree of administrative ability and business acumen was required to meet the temporal as well as the spiritual needs of a community. The necessity of accommodating the wishes of the bishop, the chaplain and the sisters while conforming to the civil code, called for diplomacy of a high order on the part of the superior.

⁷⁰ D. S. CROSS, "The Irish in Montreal, 1867-1896" (unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1969), pp. 261-2.

Industrial expansion created jobs for women and lessened their dependence on domestic service. At the same time, the existence of a pool of cheap female labour encouraged the growth of the garment, boot and shoe, textile and tobacco trades. The number of women employed in industry reached a peak in 1881, when nearly 16 per cent of the female population were employed in manufacturing as compared with 8 per cent in domestic service. By 1891 just under 11 per cent of the female population was employed in industry.⁷¹ These figures probably underestimate the total number of women involved in manufacturing over a given period, because it is likely that marriage, childbirth and family responsibilities produced a mobile work force in which women moved frequently between the factory and the home.

No attempt has been made to examine the wages and working conditions of women. The lack of reliable statistical series of wages, prices and costs of living in the nineteenth century makes research in this area difficult, particularly in relation to women. *The Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations between Capital and Labour*, however, contains much information on conditions in the factories of Montreal.

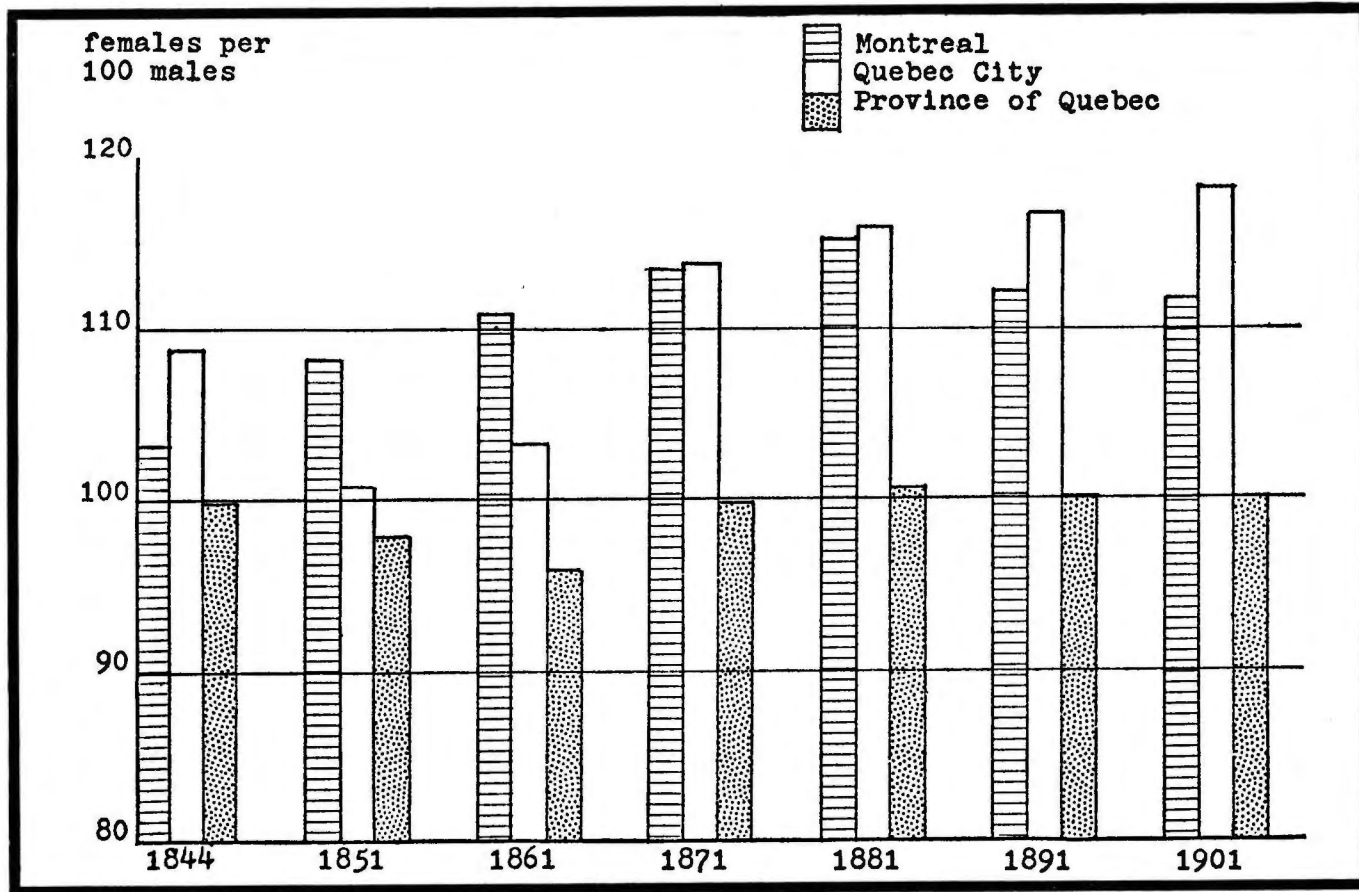
There is room for research in many other areas. The archives of the religious communities contain a wealth of material of interest to the social historian. One would like to know more about the socio-economic background of the nuns. It is postulated that the majority came from a modestly prosperous rural agricultural setting, but research may well modify this view. Fresh interpretations of the orders themselves are greatly needed, but it may be some time before such work becomes possible.

Newspaper are a fruitful source of material on women in the later years of the century, when women's columns and pages became regular features. It may be possible to reconstruct a clear picture of the role of the woman in the family, and to define stereotypes of ideal women with whom young girls identified. Work based on the French Canadian, English Protestant and English Catholic press might reveal distinct stereotypes for the different religious and ethnic groups.

In conclusion it can be said that during the nineteenth century the role of women in Montreal underwent considerable change. At the end of the period they constituted an important but docile element in the labour force. In the unlikely event of a general strike of women, one suspects that the extent of disruption would have astonished Montrealers. As it was women raised no voice against the undoubted hardships of their existence, and few spoke on their behalf.

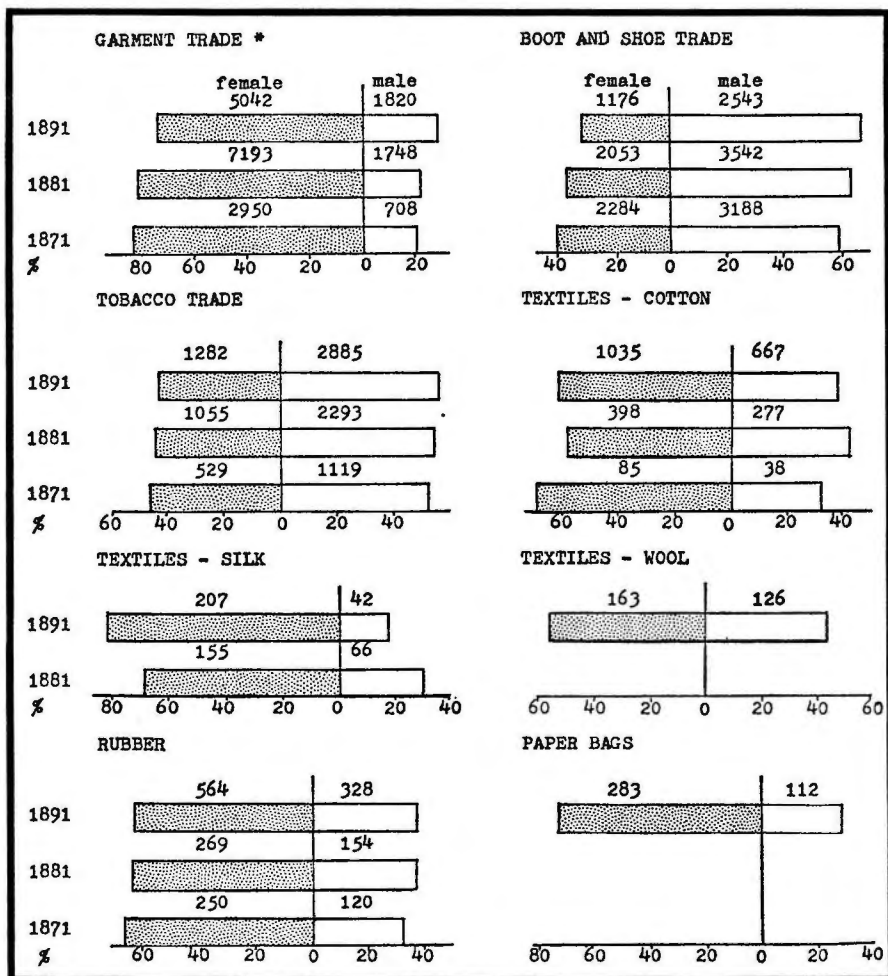
⁷¹ *Census of Canada*, Industrial Schedules, 1881 and 1891.

Graph I: SEX RATIOS FOR MONTREAL, QUEBEC CITY AND THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC, 1844-1901



Source: *Census of Lower Canada 1844*, Jour. Leg. Ass., vol. V, app. 1, 1846; *Census of Canadas 1851*, vol. I, table 3; 1861, vol. I table 5; *Census of Canada 1871*, vol. I, table 1; 1881, vol. I, table 1; 1891, vol. I, table 3; 1901, vol. I, table 7.

Graph II: PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRIAL OCCUPATIONS



Source: Industrial schedules, *Census of Canada*, 1871, 1881 and 1891.

* Composite figure for related occupations.