

## “THE ORDINARY NEEDS OF LIFE”:

### *Strategies of Survival for Single Women in 1901 Victoria*

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“LOOKING AT MARRIEDS, I often wonder how much is love and how much the ordinary needs of life,” mused Emily Carr, arguably Canada’s most famous ever-single woman.<sup>1</sup> In Carr’s lifetime, the ideal of companionate marriage and heterosexual romance were understood to be the chief fulfillment of women’s lives. But, as Carr observes, under that veneer of mutuality (not, however, equality), the fact remained that marriage was the chief mode of survival for adult women in Canada across all divisions of race, ethnicity, or region. Yet for a variety of reasons, a significant proportion of Canadian women did not marry, especially before the Second World War. How did women like Carr provide the “ordinary needs of life” for themselves (and often others) outside the marriage bond?

The woman who did not marry had a very different experience of work, economic survival, legal status, and social interaction than did her married (or widowed) counterpart. Living arrangements, family relations, and (often) the pursuit of lifelong waged labour marked her life as significantly different from the married woman’s. As women in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States moved from legal infants to voting citizens through the decades between 1880 and 1930, the transition and struggle in these years from women’s constrictive identification with nature and motherhood to autonomous personhood can be seen in the lives of women who did not take up marriage but, instead, remained outside traditional roles. Yet this period also saw a

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Carr, journal entry, “Valentine’s,” 14 February 1935, in Susan Crean, *Opposite Contraries: The Unknown Journals of Emily Carr and Other Writings* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2003), 97. Throughout this paper, I employ the term “ever-single” in speaking of women who never marry, which, in contrast to “never-married,” de-centres marriage as the invisible norm for women and opens up the possibility of singleness becoming a legitimate referent of its own. I use the more general term “single” as a broader category to encompass the shared conditions and experiences of all never-married women at a particular point in time, such as the 1901 Census, regardless of their eventual conjugal dispositions.

strengthening of negative stereotypes around the unmarried woman, from the unwanted spinster to the diseased prostitute to the dangerous lesbian.<sup>2</sup>

Thus marital status was an essential division between women, one that cut across class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Just as Joan Scott envisions gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes” and “a primary way of signifying relationships of power,”<sup>3</sup> marital status fractures the gender of women into identities that are deeply structured by relations of power and privilege, and complicates the interfaces of race, class, age, and sexuality in women’s lives. Without examining the different experiences of women according to marital status, we subsume ever-single women into married women’s experiences – much in the same way that studying the history of any group without reference to gender commonly collapses women’s experiences into those of men.<sup>4</sup>

The study of single women is a growing field of historical and sociological inquiry. However, Carolyn Strange’s *Toronto’s Girl Problem* (1995) as yet offers the only monograph that focuses exclusively on the history of single women in the Canadian context, examining the phenomenon of the “working girl” in Toronto’s industrial sector before 1930 and the middle-class moral anxieties aroused by the spectre of legions of young, unsupervised women out in the city’s streets, partaking of its pleasures and dangers.<sup>5</sup> Work has also been conducted on the opportunities and meanings of work for single migrant Maritime women in the United States, the demographics of ever-single women in Prince Edward Island, and the migration of ever-single British women to the Canadian West. Moreover, some good biographies of ever-single Canadian women have also appeared.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930*, 2nd ed. (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1997); and Laura Doan, *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Joan W. Scott, “Gender: a Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan W. Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 167.

<sup>4</sup> This preoccupation with married women, whether deliberate or not, excludes not only substantial numbers of women who did not marry but also most non-heterosexual women. Thus, without attention to marital status, we risk privileging in our research only the women who fulfilled society’s sanctioned, heteronormative female roles.

<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Betsey Beattie, *Obligation and Opportunity: Single, Maritime Women in Boston, 1870-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000); and Michele Stairs, “Matthews and Marillas: Bachelors and Spinsters in Prince Edward Island in 1881,” in *Mapping the Margins: The Family and Social Discipline in Canada, 1700-1975*, ed. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 246-67; and Adele Perry,

This article traces the varied existence and economic status of the single urban woman in British Columbia, exploring a full sample of single women in Victoria drawn from the 1901 Census of Canada – a census year in which the growth of Victoria's single female population surpassed that of British Columbia and Canada as a whole, making it an interesting site for analysis of single women's lives. Single women played a vital and distinctive role in the fabric of urban life in Victoria: they were its teachers, its nurses, its clerks, and a majority of its domestic servants (Victoria was different from eastern centres in having a high population of Chinese men in service). They were also indispensable in the domestic and economic life of most families – both natal and extended kin – in providing domestic and/or paid labour and caregiving.

The availability of comprehensive, linked census data for Victoria allows a detailed examination of the varying strategies of survival and success pursued by single women in this far western city in 1901. Key questions include: What strategies of survival did these women use? What types of employment sustained most ever-single women? Were most self-supporting? What about their household composition – did most live alone? With kin? With strangers?

After a brief look at the various factors of occupation and income that enabled this population of women to survive, I turn to the variety of living arrangements that allowed their incomes to stretch over expenses, even to support kin. This focus on household-level analysis offers the most interesting and important aspect of this study. As I mined the manuscript census for single women, it became clear to me that we need to look at single women's lives as they were embedded in structures of family and living arrangements rather than simply to compare single women in terms of occupation or income or some other factor that treats single women as though they were, at all times, living completely alone. What we find is that most women in the sample were neither solely dependent upon family nor living completely apart from kin or other ties; rather, they fostered and functioned within networks of mutual support and multiple strategies of survival. We need to move beyond a simple, fixed independent (alone) versus dependent (at home) dichotomy to a

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*On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). Biographies include: Patricia Rooke and Rodolph Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, a Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987); Paula Blanchard, *The Life of Emily Carr* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987); and Jean Barman, *Sojourning Sisters: The Lives and Letters of Jessie and Annie McQueen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

paradigm of interdependence that recognizes the shifting strategies of survival that most single women employed over their lifetimes.

## TRACING THE URBAN SINGLE WOMAN: VICTORIA IN 1901

British Columbia offered exceptional circumstances for White single women, particularly between Confederation and the Second World War.<sup>7</sup> The province was a “late development” frontier with an unusually high ratio of White newcomer men to women. Newcomer men outnumbered newcomer women substantially: the number of women in the non-Aboriginal population was only 25.6 percent in 1881 and had changed little by 1901 (29.1 percent). The high ratio (over 2.3:1 and even higher in rural areas) of men to women in the non-Aboriginal population would continue through 1911 and would only approach parity after 1951. And, by 1901, British Columbia had a majority European-extraction population.<sup>8</sup> Given these conditions, there must have been extraordinary pressures on White newcomer women in British Columbia to conform to social expectations of marriage and motherhood as there were more than enough bachelors to go around. Yet the substantial numbers of single women (approx. 25 percent to 30 percent for women over age fifteen between 1881 and 1901) suggest that a large proportion of the female population were finding identities outside the marital home.

Many women in the sample<sup>9</sup> would have known Victoria in its boom years of the 1880s, when the city’s population doubled and building construction exploded, only to see its economic and demographic stature eclipsed in the 1890s by the vigorous mainland city of Vancouver. In 1901 Victoria was in decline, having lost most of its naval and manufacturing

<sup>7</sup> Here I am following Ian Haney-López in deliberately adopting the capitalization of “White” to underline its construction as a specific social group and “an unstable category which gains its meaning only through a set of social relations.” Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), xxi. The seeming artificiality of capitalizing the word aids in our ability to see Whiteness as a social construction and one of many raced identities, rather than a “raceless” category whose hegemony makes it too often seem natural or invisible.

<sup>8</sup> European-origin people made up 79.7 percent of the non-Aboriginal population in 1881, 86.9 percent in 1901, and 91.9 percent in 1911. See Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), Table 5, British Columbia Population by Ethnic Origin, 1871–1981, 363; Table 11, British Columbia Non-Native Adult Population by Sex, 1870–1981, 369.

<sup>9</sup> Of the 402 women in the project sample, 78 were born in British Columbia (19.4 percent), 108 in other parts of Canada (26.9 percent), and 216 were foreign-born (53.7 percent). Of the foreign-born, 112 had immigrated to Canada by 1890; however, it is not possible to say when they (or other Canadian-born women) may have arrived in British Columbia.

base. Yet it still retained an outward image of gentility and prosperity from the development of the 1880s, boasting an extensive tramway network, street lighting, and telephone system, and a downtown core of brick and stone buildings dominated by the CPR's Empress Hotel and the Legislature buildings.<sup>10</sup> Although Victoria (and the province as a whole) did not have the large complex of manufacturing that provided employment for young single women in the east, single women's traditional occupations remained in demand, especially domestic service, teaching, nursing, and the needle trades.

Tables 1 and 2 offer a glimpse into the numbers of single women in Canada, British Columbia, and Victoria in 1901:

TABLE 1  
*Women age fifteen or over compared to thirty and over, Victoria, BC, and Canada, 1901*<sup>11</sup>

	ALL WOMEN	SINGLE WOMEN	SINGLE WOMEN AS % OF ALL WOMEN
15 YEARS OR OVER			
Victoria	6,102	2,148	35.2
BC <sup>a</sup>	1,843	447	24.3
Canada <sup>a</sup>	84,543	32,110	38.0
30 YEARS OR OVER			
Victoria	3,439	402	11.7
BC <sup>a</sup>	1,031	54	5.2
Canada <sup>a</sup>	48,156	7,003	14.5

<sup>a</sup> These numbers are from the Canadian Families Project, National (5%) Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada, January 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Barman, *West beyond the West*, 117-18.

<sup>11</sup> *Historical Statistics of Canada*, Series A78-93; viHistory Project, 1901 Census of Vancouver Island database (Victoria), <http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1901/census1901.php?page=main> (accessed May 30, 2006); Library and Archives Canada, 1901 Census of Canada, [http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02012203\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02012203_e.html) (accessed May 30, 2006). While the percentage of single women over age fifteen for Canada is close to the figure calculated from the Historical Statistics of Canada (38.2 percent), the sample for British Columbia is in fact somewhat low in comparison to published tables – only a 90.55 percent correlation. See Canadian Families Project, *The National Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada User's Guide* (Victoria: Canadian Families Project, 2002), 10.

TABLE 2  
*Women age thirty or over, Victoria, 1881-1901*

	ALL WOMEN	SINGLE WOMEN	%
1881	906	80	8.8
1891	2,105	206	9.8
1901	3,439	402	11.7

Source: viHistory Project, 1891, 1891, and 1901 Census of Vancouver Island databases, <http://vihistory.ca/content/census/census.php> <July 2007>.

In Table 1, I divide these into women over a base marriageable age of fifteen (to capture the full cohort of single women – “eligible” singles who would eventually marry together with the ever-single population) and women over age thirty in order to reflect the numbers that were likely to remain ever-single (see discussion below). At first glance, the demographic comparison between country, province, and city presents a straightforward picture of the result of a low population of “eligible” women: the percentage of single women in the province is consistently lower than the percentage in Canada as a whole, regardless of age group. Yet the question should be not why British Columbia’s numbers are so low compared to those of other provinces but, rather, why they are so *high* given the overwhelming male-to-female ratio (and strong colonial imperatives to marry). Victoria in 1901 had over 10 percent more single women above the age of fifteen and more than twice the percentage of single women aged thirty or over than did British Columbia as a whole. As Table 2 illustrates, in Victoria the number of single newcomer women was growing.

A priority in developing this study was the question of what age constitutes the line between the “eligible” single woman and the “confirmed spinster.” This issue is vital for two reasons: to determine which women in the population would be seen, and see themselves, as (relatively) autonomous adults rather than as liminal youths still “eligible” for marriage; and to mark the age at which it is highly likely that a woman would remain ever-single. An age cut-off is the common method used by demographers to determine the populations likely to remain ever-single: this is most often (for reasons of fecundity) at or around age fifty. In her study of Canadian marriage patterns in 1901, Stacie Burke defines the 45-54 age cohort as the key for determining the level of “never-marrieds” in the population.<sup>12</sup> Yet there seems to

<sup>12</sup> Stacie Burke, “Marriage in 1901 Canada: An Ecological Perspective,” *Journal of Family History* 26, 2 (2001): 192.

be some compelling cultural evidence to set the line for this study not at forty-five or fifty, as do most demographic studies, but at thirty. As Susan Cotts Watkins notes, "It is the community that sets the rules for entrance into and exit from the marriage market."<sup>13</sup>

A British Columbia teacher wrote in to the women's editor at the *Family Herald and Weekly Star* in 1912: "I am now 28, and the future looms ahead of me, with the sole prospect of teaching from morning til night, the rest of my days. [...] It therefore appears I shall some day be shelved as an old maid."<sup>14</sup> And in 1918 Senator L.O. David felt there was a clear line between the "eligible" single woman and the firmly established "spinster," moving that unmarried women under age thirty should be disenfranchised because they should be concentrating on "preparing themselves to fulfill the duties of their noble position."<sup>15</sup> Additional support was found in the average age at first marriage for women in British Columbia, pegged at 22.6 years in 1901.<sup>16</sup> This trend of nuptiality in the early twenties for women provides some context for the teacher's lament that, at age twenty-eight, she was already feeling like she would never marry, assuming that the majority of young women of her community were already well established in marriage and childbearing by her age.

Using age thirty as my division, I then proceeded to develop a *full* sample of all unmarried women thirty years or over in the census of Victoria in 1901, with a total of 402 entries. The very productive intersection of the manuscript census, city directories, obituaries, cemetery records, and vital statistics has allowed me to build a rich dataset on this full cohort of single women.<sup>17</sup> An important element of my sample

<sup>13</sup> Susan Cotts Watkins, "Spinsters," *Journal of Family History* 9 (1984): 310. This special issue on spinsters in the *Journal of Family History* set the line at age thirty-five.

<sup>14</sup> "Penelope" (British Columbia) in "Prim Rose at Home," *Family Herald and Weekly Star*, 30 October 1912. Reported in Norah L. Lewis, ed., *Dear Editor and Friends: Letters from Rural Women of the North-West, 1900-1920* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 100.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Rasmussen, Lorna Rasmussen, Candace Savage, and Anne Wheeler, *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976), 230. Nineteen of fifty-two votes cast supported David.

<sup>16</sup> Burke, "Marriage in 1901 Canada," 193, Table 2.

<sup>17</sup> Thanks to the efforts of historians, genealogists, and Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the entire manuscript census for Victoria in 1901 is available in multiple online formats. viHistory (<http://vihistory.ca/>), a project of historians at Malaspina University College and the University of Victoria, offers an online, searchable database of census, city directories, tax rolls, and other records covering Vancouver Island and Victoria for 1881-1901. The excellent BC GenWeb site (<http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/bc.htm>) includes a text version of the 1901 census indexed by name and page, with many records containing annotations based on obituaries, cemetery records, and personal information supplied by volunteers. LAC, through its Archivia.net service, also provides the 1901 census online in its entirety as digitized versions



structure is that I not only record individuals' information (including occupation, earnings, relationship to head of household, "colour," country of origin, religion, and property held) but also the names, relationship to head, occupations, and incomes of their entire household.

## TRACING OCCUPATIONS

In 1901, 402 women, or 11.7 percent of the population of women in Victoria age thirty or over, reported themselves as "single." As seen in Table 3, approximately half (199) reported holding one of forty discrete occupations.<sup>18</sup> A second group (eleven) reported a status such as "Retired," which implied that they had at one time laboured for wages or had some kind of independent means, such as "On Income."<sup>19</sup> The rest (192) had "None" and "Unknown" (blank) in their occupation field. Women in the sample who lived within their birth family homes were especially unlikely to have economic information recorded – making it difficult to determine whether such information had simply not been provided or whether they were indeed totally supported by their families.<sup>20</sup> (Women living with their widowed mothers, however, were more likely to report at least an occupation if no other details).<sup>21</sup>

These two groups – those with given occupations/means and those without – form the main division between the women in this sample. However, this seemingly straightforward distinction in the census does not produce a simple binary pair of socio-economic identities for single women – economically dependent women within their birth family home and independent, self-supporting working women. Instead, a range of identities included not only both of these but also women who adopted

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of each page ([http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02012203\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02012203_e.html)). As well, all women in the sample have been searched in the British Columbia Archives online vital statistics database of birth, baptism, marriage, and death registrations (<http://search.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-6797B5/gbsearch/Births,Marriages,Deaths>).

<sup>18</sup> Occupations were drawn from the census as well as corroborated or corrected through obituaries, city directories, and, in the case of sex trade workers, police records.

<sup>19</sup> This includes "Not Given" recorded with either an income or a designation of "Own Means" or "Retired" in the "Employment" column.

<sup>20</sup> There is also the issue of under-enumeration and under-representation of women's work, which is noted by many historians. See Kris Inwood and Richard Reid, "Gender and Occupational Identity in a Canadian Census," *Historical Methods* 34, 2 (2001): 58; Peter Baskerville and Eric W. Sager, *Unwilling Idlers: The Urban Unemployed and Their Families in Late Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 46-48.

<sup>21</sup> A interesting related problem is the lack of reporting of income by male heads of affluent families (which helps, in part, to determine the class and social standing of their single adult daughters). This is missing for the most prominent of Victoria's families, possibly from a sense of propriety on the part of census takers and/or privacy on the part of these families.



TABLE 3  
*Reporting of occupations by women in project sample*

	#	%
Some occupation listed	199	49.5
Retired/not given/independent means	11	2.7
None/unknown	192	47.8
	402	100.0

a variety of other strategies of survival, including taking lodgings and clustering with female kin and friends.

We need to keep in mind that female socio-economic "dependence" on the family was a common and acceptable economic role for single women even, while, at the same time, families depended on female labour to function. Many single women did not have formal occupations and depended on their families, kin, or other means for their financial support. Yet, at the same time, families depended deeply on the unpaid domestic labour of women, which supplied a vital economic function, and many poor families also relied on the work of girls and women in raising livestock; taking in laundry, sewing, or boarders; and selling home produce to supplement household earnings.<sup>22</sup> Thus the nature of single women's "dependence" was deeply related to the class and economic means of their families as a whole.

The fortunes made by the founding families of Victoria in business, resource extraction, and land development gave them a prominent place in colonial and provincial politics as well as ascendancy in the social hierarchy of the city. The daughters of the second and third generations in these families were able to maintain their social position and financial independence without marriage. Kathleen O'Reilly, Susan and Josephine Crease, and Jane and May Tolmie all reported neither occupation nor income; however, as daughters of some of the wealthiest and most socially prominent families in Victoria, the wealth to which they had access and their leisurely and comfortable lifestyles set them apart from the majority of single women living at home.

To a lesser degree, middle-class women like the Carr sisters (Edith, Alice, Lizzie, and Emily) also benefited from the opportunities found

<sup>22</sup> Bettina Bradbury, "Gender at Work at Home: Family Decisions, the Labour Market, and Girls' Contributions to the Family Economy," in *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings*, ed. B. Bradbury (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1992), 183-87; Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, 116-22.

by men like their father Richard Carr, a small businessman involved in trade in the colony and city of Victoria. Upon their parents' deaths, the siblings lived together on an income in their comfortable family home, and a trust fund paid for Emily's art education abroad. Later in life, Alice, Lizzie, and Emily lived respectable if austere single lives in homes built near each other on small lots created from their father's original land. However, all needed to pursue some additional strategies of survival, from private teaching to taking in boarders.<sup>23</sup>

For women without such class and economic advantages, it is apparent that many lived in very straitened circumstances, often on small means with a widowed mother or siblings, or relying upon other strategies, such as taking in lodgers. Although it is difficult to determine exactly the economic position of many women for whom no family incomes are given, clearly the "dependent" single woman occupied a range of socio-economic positions.

What about the women who did have a means and amount of income recorded? These data, when coupled with household-level analysis, allow a more in-depth look at the economic circumstances of approximately half the women in the project sample, and they give a productive sense of the strategies of survival employed by women through paid work and household composition.

From the list of individual occupations reported by women in the sample, it is clear that the majority of occupations held by single women thirty and over in the 1901 project sample were located in the area of traditional "women's" work – in fact, *single* women's work: domestic service, teaching, nursing, retail sales, clerical work, and the needle trades.<sup>24</sup> There are also a few surprises: an "insurance agent" held a position traditionally coded masculine; and a "machine operator" is the sole example of a single woman aged thirty or over holding an industrial job typical of young single women's work in eastern Canada.<sup>25</sup> Several women were also employers or self-employed (twenty-two, or

<sup>23</sup> Blanchard, *Life of Emily Carr*, 58, 137. Emily Carr would pursue a wide range of strategies, including teaching art, selling pottery, breeding dogs, taking boarders, renting suites in the building she owned, and (later in life) selling her paintings. All of these activities necessitated at least a middle-class education and control of adequate property.

<sup>24</sup> Journalism, although a draw for educated single women after 1900, was not one of the occupations reported by any woman in 1901.

<sup>25</sup> See Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*. In 1901 Victoria, only thirty-nine single women (mostly in their teens) reported an industrial occupation. Occupations included needle trades (shirt makers and one "Sewing Machine Worker"); confectionary, biscuit, and soda water production; printing and bookbinding; and cigar making. See viHistory Project, 1901 Census of Vancouver Island database (Victoria), <http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1901/census1901.php?page=main> (accessed May 30, 2006).

TABLE 4  
*Occupations reported in project sample, by category*

	#	%
Domestic/household service	46	23.1
Nurse	34	17.1
Needle trades (employee)	26	13.1
Teaching	21	10.6
Clerk retail	15	7.5
Nun/missionary	14	7.0
Needle trades (self-employed)	9	4.5
Private music & art instructor	8	4.0
Sex trade	8	4.0
Clerical/office	6	3.0
Boarding/lodging housekeeper	3	1.5
Managerial/administrative <sup>a</sup>	2	1.0
Performer (arts)	2	1.0
Janitorial	2	1.0
Merchant	1	0.5
Industrial/manual labour	1	0.5
School matron	1	0.5
	199	100.0

<sup>a</sup> Includes high school principal and Mother Superior – both administrative positions.

5.4 percent), including dressmakers, a dry goods merchant, private arts teachers, and lodging-house keepers. But the overwhelming majority were employees.

The forty individual occupations found in the sample were distilled into fifteen categories for easier analysis:

In 1901 Victoria, single women were turning to – or mainly restricted to – traditional occupations for their strategies of survival. A comparison with women workers across Canada reinforces this concentration in traditional female occupations (see Table 5).

Here, single professional women in the sample greatly outstrip the national participation levels of women in professions, while manufacturing and personal service are lower by 10 percent and 16 percent, respectively. Given British Columbia's economic status as primary resource-extraction province, the lower manufacturing level is not a surprise.

TABLE 5

*Comparison: Distribution of women by leading occupational groups, Canada 1901; and single women thirty or over, Victoria 1901*

	ALL WOMEN, CANADA (%)	SINGLE WOMEN 30 OR OVER, VICTORIA (%)
Professional (incl. Nuns) <sup>a</sup>	14.7	41.2
Personal service	42.0	26.3
Manufacturing and mechanical	29.6	19.1
Commercial and financial	2.4	9.3
Clerical	5.3	2.1
Other (incl. Managerial)	6.0	2.1
	100.0	100.0

Source: Alison L. Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 475, Table A.7; 1901 project sample.

<sup>a</sup> Note: The inclusion of nuns in the professional category is probably not usual; however, because all of the nuns in the sample were actually performing professional occupations such as teaching and nursing, they are justifiably included here. The school matron and missionary in the sample both acted mainly as social workers – a category otherwise absent in the sample – so are included in the professional category as well.

The difference in “personal service” – which includes all types of domestic service and boarding/lodging housekeepers – might be explained in several ways, including the low numbers of women as a percentage of total population, competition from Chinese men, and the rate at which younger women dropped out of domestic service. Although domestic service occupations (servant, housekeeper, cook, governess) include the highest number of women in the project sample, the percentage of women aged thirty and over in domestic service was low. As we can see from Table 6, single women thirty or older make up less than one-fifth of general domestic servants and under 30 percent of housekeepers. Only the more responsible and autonomous positions of cook and governess reach parity, but the number is quite small in any case. Although domestic service was considered an eminently respectable female occupation and generally offered the security of room and board (and thus less need for an adequate living income), the conditions of work, including hard physical labour, long hours, isolation, lack of personal space, possibility of abuse, and the potential to be “on call”

TABLE 6  
*Proportion of single women in domestic service, 1901 Victoria*

	ALL	UNDER 30	AGE 30 OR OVER	AGE 30 OR OVER AS % OF ALL SINGLE WOMEN
Domestic/general servant/ housemaid	175	147	31	17.7
Housekeeper	40	27	11	27.5
Cook	5	3	2	40.0
Governess	2	1	2	66.7
	223	178	46	20.6

twenty-four hours a day made it the least “independent” of occupations, and it was likely a less attractive choice than some others.<sup>26</sup>

One other important single women’s trade that could be considered “personal service” is the sex trade. Prostitutes offer only a shadowy presence in the project sample. It is impossible to tell directly from the census which women in the sample, if any, might have made money offering sexual services as no occupation such as “prostitute” or, to use the contemporary terms, “sport” or “sporting woman,” is reported.<sup>27</sup> But there are some clues as to who might have participated in the trade. No fewer than nine heads of household from the sample occupied two blocks of Chatham Street in the heart of Chinatown, where most of the addresses appear for prostitution offences in the Victoria Police charge books for 1901-02 (specific blocks of Herald and Broad also appeared).<sup>28</sup> Matching names to addresses from the charge books, at

<sup>26</sup> Helena Gutteridge, the Vancouver correspondent to the *Labour Gazette* in 1916, named long hours and lack of leisure time as reasons that women avoided domestic work when other work was available. See Department of Labour, *Labour Gazette: The Journal of the Department of Labour* 16 (Ottawa: Department of Labour, May 1916), 1,191. The isolation and vulnerability of domestic service also carried a high risk of sexual harassment and assault. Karen Dubinsky finds that the numbers of domestic servants assaulted by their employers in her 1880-1929 Ontario study was “striking” and accounted for over half of workplace assaults in her sample. See Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 52-53.

<sup>27</sup> Unlike, surprisingly, Vancouver – where one enumerator took care to list the “sports” of Dupont Street in 1901 (the term was subsequently crossed out for each but was still legible). See Census of Canada 1901, Burrard District (Vancouver City), D17/2, 3, 31, 32.

<sup>28</sup> City of Victoria Archives, Victoria Police Court, Charge Book, 1901-1902. CRS 114 1684, vol. 1.

least eight women in the sample were heads or employees of known “houses of ill repute.”<sup>29</sup>

Nearly all of these women should be seen as either businesswomen or self-employed. Only one was clearly an employee, as one of the “girls” in Stella Carroll’s infamous parlour house in the Duck Block on Broad Street.<sup>30</sup> Some of the women living in small houses on Chatham and Herald might have been sole operators, serving the trade directly. But others with larger premises would have employed other women as well as have served food and alcohol. The most successful businesswoman (of any kind) in the sample was Alice Seymour, who ran her upscale “carriage house trade” from the eleven-room house she owned on Kane Street and enjoyed the tacit protection offered the madams who catered to the members of the elite Union Club and stayed out of the media spotlight.<sup>31</sup> Although the conditions of work for some prostitutes were extremely harsh, especially for the Chinese “crib” prostitutes and women who solicited in the streets, for those in the cleaner, safer “parlour house” end of the trade conditions could be quite comfortable and good money could be made.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the incomes made in the parlour house trade were approached only by those in the project sample who had professional careers or who owned “legitimate” businesses.

Evidently, single women who would not marry pursued – and required – professional and/or high-paying, traditionally female jobs. It should not be a surprise that they would concentrate on teaching, nursing, domestic service, clerical work, and the needle trades, with some turning to the marginal but lucrative sex trade. Given the continued cultural

<sup>29</sup> Although women charged as “inmates” from the addresses of these heads appear in the police records (often several times), the heads themselves do not, with the exception of Marie Burman. See Police Court, Charge Book, 1901-1902, 184, “Mary Bowman” [Marie Burman], 11 November 1901. This is not surprising, as both Victoria and Vancouver had a policy allowing a “restricted district” for the sex trade at this time as well as one allowing the operation of an extralegal “licensing” system through levies of fines. Stella Carroll’s house on Broad Street, opened in 1900, had twice-yearly “raids” for five years, with fines ranging from fifty dollars (the standard “inmate” fine) to one hundred dollars (likely what Carroll, as the “keeper,” would pay). See Linda J. Eversole, *Stella: Unrepentant Madam* (Victoria: Touchwood Editions, 2005), 72.

<sup>30</sup> Eversole, *Stella*, 72.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>32</sup> Tamara Adilman, “A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia, 1858-1950” in *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women’s Work in British Columbia*, ed. Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 58. Ruth Rosen notes from her survey of prostitutes’ earnings in several American cities before the First World War that “the average brothel inmate or streetwalker received from one to five dollars a ‘trick,’ earning in one evening what other working women made in a week.” See Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 148.

resistance to married women working outside the home (although many working-class wives in particular did engage in paid labour) and the simple fact that single women were the great majority of workers in all waged work performed by women before the Second World War, we need to see these occupations as *single women's work*.

Thus it is logical that women who chose or who were compelled to be ever-single would enter these occupations with a cohort of other single women and simply keep working in them after other women dropped out upon marriage. And we also need to consider that, for some women, the choice of an occupation that yielded security, survival, and even advancement could be seen both as an enabling condition and as a conscious strategy to remain ever-single.

## INCOME AND SURVIVAL

Women who reported earnings in the sample revealed a great disparity in income. Although wages for predominantly female occupations in British Columbia were generally higher than those in the east, the crucial measurement of economic survival is the purchasing power of these incomes against the cost of living.<sup>33</sup> Using the *Labour Gazette's* schedules of retail prices and rents for 1901, I determined a baseline cost of living for a single woman (renting a house or boarding) in Victoria at \$300.<sup>34</sup> This makes it possible to look at the earnings of the 1901

<sup>33</sup> For example, in 1901 female teachers in British Columbia were the highest paid in the country (average of \$553.08), especially in comparison to Ontario (\$307.75) and the Maritimes (\$237.61 for New Brunswick and \$237.66 for Nova Scotia). See *The Canada Year Book 1907* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, King's Printer, 1908), 160, Table 73. Wages for domestics through the turn of the century were also higher in British Columbia. See Robin John Anderson, "Domestic Service: The YWCA and Women's Employment Agencies in Vancouver, 1898-1915," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 25, 50 (1992): 310.

<sup>34</sup> The cheapest arrangement for renting (four-room house for \$7 per month with \$143 per year in food, fuel, and utilities) or lodgings (\$20 per month) gives a yearly outlay of about \$227 to \$240 for food and lodging alone, without ancillary expenses such as clothing, transit, medical, leisure, furnishings and household goods, or repairs. The Ontario Bureau of Industries annual budget for a female industrial worker in 1889, understood to be the bare minimum for survival, had a \$67.31 allowance for clothing and \$20.61 for unnamed expenses (out of a total budget of \$214.28). A \$60 to \$80 addition to our 1901 budget is thus not unreasonable. This gives a good working minimum income of \$300 per year. "Schedule of Retail Prices of Supplies for Domestic Consumption," November 1901, in Department of Labour, *Labour Gazette* 2, June 1901-June 1902 (Ottawa: Department of Labour, 1902), 278-79; "Schedule of Monthly Rents of House for Workingmen and Schedule Showing Rates Paid for Board and Lodging by Workingmen," November 1901, in Department of Labour, *Labour Gazette* 2, June 1901-June 1902 (Ottawa: Department of Labour, 1902), 280-81; Baskerville and Sanger, *Unwilling Idlers*, 223, Table B3. *Annual Report of the Bureau of Industries for the Province of Ontario*, 1889, pt.4, qt. in Lori Rotenberg, "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century,"



project sample in context. With this baseline in mind, an arrangement of the earnings table to reflect increments of \$300 would look like this:

TABLE 7  
*Annual Earnings, project sample*

	#	%
Under \$300	53	36.55
\$300-599	53	36.55
\$600-899	27	18.6
\$900 or more	12	8.3
	145	100.0

The great majority of the sample had incomes that ranged from precarious to merely comfortable; only 8.3 percent had incomes that could be considered “well paid” in terms of the baseline cost of living (three times larger and commensurate with the lower end of male professional and small business incomes). How did the set of sixty-four women who only just made the baseline of \$300 (eleven women) or less (fifty-three women) survive?

Identifying high-earning occupations would seem to be one way to determine which women had a better opportunity to make ends meet and which were likely to live precariously on or under the \$300-baseline. Yet measuring income by occupation is not so straightforward when all women reporting earnings in the sample are polled for incomes rather than having them calculated according to a simple mean wage. A wide range of wages was reported for most of the occupations. Because the discrepancy was so wide in some areas, the use of the mean is not a very effective way to determine the economic viability of some occupations. To offer a clear picture, in the following table key individual occupations (along with all Retired/Not given/Unknowns giving incomes for comparison) are highlighted according to both mean and median:

We can see that some occupations had a large income spread. Certain occupations, like stenographer and saleswoman, had a better lower threshold but capped out earlier, at about half the top wage of teachers,

in *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, ed. Penny Goldsmith, Bonnie Shepard, and Janice Acton (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 48.

TABLE 8:  
*Top 15 individual occupations reporting income plus "Retired/not given/  
 unknown," ranked by highest median income*

	# IN SAMPLE	# REPORTING INCOME	LOWEST	HIGHEST	MEAN	MEDIAN
High school principal	1	1	1200.00	1200.00	1200.00	1200.00
Boarding/ lodging house- keeper	3	1	900.00	900.00	900.00	900.00
Sex trade worker	8	1	800.00	800.00	800.00	800.00
Milliner	4	4	480.00	1000.00	745.00	750.00
Teacher <sup>a</sup>	21	13	600.00	1200.00	742.00	705.00
Retired/ not given/ unknown	208	9	100.00	1080.00	622.50	550.00
Stenographer	4	3	300.00	600.00	480.00	480.00
Nurse/trained nurse	34	18	60.00	720.00	424.17	465.00
Saleswoman	4	4	300.00	500.00	395.00	390.00
Dressmaker	22	20	200.00	1000.00	422.30	375.00
Clerk (retail) <sup>b</sup>	11	11	180.00	480.00	353.64	360.00
Tailor/ess	8	7	275.00	450.00	365.00	360.00
Cook	2	2	240.00	400.00	320.00	320.00
Housekeeper	11	8	120.00	500.00	265.50	260.00
Music teacher	7	7	120.00	900.00	390.00	240.00
Domestic/ general servant <sup>c</sup>	31	26	96.00	600.00	242.31	190.00

<sup>a</sup> Includes only full-time employees.

<sup>b</sup> Includes all iterations of "clerk."

<sup>c</sup> Includes "housemaid."

milliners, and dressmakers. Other occupations, like teachers, actually had a high wage across the board. Although we have only one income given for boarding/lodging housekeepers, it would seem reasonable that the number of boarders would determine income, and, at an average of \$20-\$24/month, three to four boarders could offer a fair to high income, depending on outlay for board and expenses (whereas a sole boarder would likely only be a supplement to other strategies).<sup>35</sup>

Although only one woman from the sample who can clearly be identified in the sex trade gave an income (Maud Murphy, making \$800), this does indicate what a self-employed woman might achieve (and Murphy's was the smallest income in her house). We can also see from the declared income of high-end parlour house madam Stella Carroll (\$1,800) that a very good income could be made by single businesswomen in the trade like Alice Seymour, who declared no income but whose "lodgers" made up to \$1,000 each.<sup>36</sup>

If we look at the same data according to highest wage earned, we can see that some occupations (like dressmaker, nurse, and music teacher), where the mean only hovered above the \$300 minimum, had the potential to offer a quite comfortable living for some individuals. We can also see that the women who report an income but no occupation (the majority listed as "retired" in some capacity or living on "Own Means") fare generally well among the reported occupations here, indicating that independent means (likely from rents and inheritances) was also a viable strategy of survival open to some single women.

In terms of pursuing survival or even prosperity, the incomes achieved by the women in the project sample reflect the potential of some occupations to render a decent wage across the board and the potential of others to fluctuate wildly. Even in careers such as nursing and dressmaking, which offered a potentially comfortable-to-high wage, some women made substantially less, ensuring that entrance to even these traditional, high-paid female occupations was not a guarantee of survival for single women. And the high income of known sex trade workers explains prostitution's utility as a strategy of survival for single women,

<sup>35</sup> Department of Labour, "Schedule of Monthly Rents of House," 280-81. Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, 143, note that the hiring of servants to service a high-volume boarding house could eat much of the income; the unpaid labour of single daughters and sisters could make a significant difference to this.

<sup>36</sup> Eversole, *Stella*, 72. However, given the high prices charged by the better parlour houses, it is entirely possible that madams at least were reporting incomes that would seem commensurate with their visible consumption (as well as the alternate occupations they might have claimed) rather than their actual incomes. Alternatively, they may have reported their net rather than their gross income, after operating expenses, fines, and graft payments.

although its illegality and nature as a trade for young women would have made it more difficult to sustain long-term income as a worker than would have been the case in other trades (such as dressmaking).

Thus it is crucial to examine the strategies beyond income that women might have utilized for survival. Because the \$300 baseline used here is premised on a single person's support and maintenance, the issue of earnings and relative affluence becomes much more complex when dependents, lodgers, and kin enter the equation, as they do in most households in the sample.

## HOUSEHOLD ANALYSIS

The use of household-level analysis gives us considerable insight into the economic means of wage-earning single women, beyond a simple measure of income level. It is through the relationship to the head of household that we can begin to see the wide range of strategies of survival pursued by single women. Living with kin or roommates, finding affordable lodgings, or taking service in a home or institution were various means of providing shelter (and, in some cases, board as well) and relieving the need to provide independent housing from an often inadequate income. Living arrangements might also reflect ties of obligation, such as responsibility to give economic and/or care support to family members, especially aged parents. We also need to keep in mind that, for single women living outside their birth families, living with kin (or other "respectable" people) was a strategy not only of economic survival but also of social survival.

I have divided the different living situations into categories reflecting several possible settings: own household, lodgings, kin household, place of employment, and institution. Although I have relied on the census definitions of household for the sample, I also adopt Jane Wheelock and Elizabeth Oughton's definition of the household as a basic social unit that is not coterminous with the nuclear family, i.e. "a unit that is bounded by common agreement on the management of its resources."<sup>37</sup> Thus nieces living with uncles, sets of sisters, or other kin arrangements are seen here as part of a larger household economy. Lodgers, on the other hand, although possibly having companionship and other social needs met, should be considered "independent" in the sense of being economically separate from the household.

<sup>37</sup> Jane Wheelock and Elizabeth Oughton, "The Household as a Focus for Research," in *Women and the Economy: A Reader*, ed. E. Mutari and D. Figart (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 139.

Tracing the relationship to head for the full sample reveals that single women utilized a wide variety of household arrangements:

TABLE 9  
*Relationship to head of household, project sample*

	#	%
Head of household	46	11.4
Boarder or lodger	48	11.9
Living with kin	227	56.5
Living with employer (private home, workplace, or institution)	55	13.7
Member of religious community	20	5.0
Inmate of care institution	2	0.5
Unknown	4	1.0
	402	100.0

At first glance, it would appear that nearly one-quarter of the sample (23.3 percent) lived in some form of “independence,” either as a head of household or as a lodger, and over half (56.5 percent) could be assumed to be living in a dependent situation in the homes of parents or other kin. Yet a closer look reveals that most heads of household lived with at least one other person, while many of the “daughters of head” appear in fact to be a major source of economic support for their households. The dynamics of household composition reveal even more about single women’s strategies of survival when cross-referenced to income. Here the sample is broken down into six basic types of relationship to head, with a look, in particular, at the low and high ends of the earnings scale.

Household-level analysis reveals some of the strategies of survival for single women and hints at the class hierarchy into which many single women fit. However, another crucial factor in these women’s lives was race. In the 1901 census, the “Colour” field gave one of four choices: black, red, yellow, or white (for people of African, Aboriginal, Asian, or European descent).<sup>38</sup> As Constance Backhouse reminds us, these

<sup>38</sup> Reported values in the sample were: Black 7 (1.7 percent); Red 11 (2.7 percent); Yellow 2 (0.5 percent); and White 382 (95.0 percent).

indicators were highly value-laden and artificially predetermined the categories of people to be encountered.<sup>39</sup>

The vast majority of women in the project sample can be classified as "White" and were either Anglo-Canadian or immigrated from the United Kingdom or its possessions. Twenty women (5 percent of the sample) can be identified as belonging to a visible minority, and with the exception of the two women born in China and the one born in St. Helena, all women of colour in the sample were born in Canada or the United States. What is striking about the women reporting Aboriginal descent is their relative absence, in part a result of years of surveillance and antagonism towards Aboriginal women in Victoria.<sup>40</sup> Most of the women noting Aboriginal heritage (nine of eleven) were descendants of the cohort of Hudson's Bay Company officials who had settled in Victoria during the fur-trade era with their Aboriginal or mixed-race wives and had aspired to the status of landed gentry as part of the colonial elite.<sup>41</sup>

"Race" was also a category in the 1901 census, but it was one that denoted ethnicities such as "Scots," "English," and "French." In the interest of identifying White as well as racialized women, all women discussed in this section are listed with their ethnic designation, which is determined by looking at a combination of these two categories (i.e., "English" or "African-Canadian").

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<sup>39</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 3-4. The "one-drop" paradigm (enumerators were instructed that any non-White heritage made the individual that particular "colour") and the incredibly limiting schemata of the colour determination renders a realistic count of Métis and mixed-race (let alone *non-Asian*, Black, White, or Aboriginal) individuals impossible. However, it does help to identify individual women who – even if in the second or third generation of White intermarriage – may still have carried the signifiers and social stigmata of, in particular, Aboriginal ancestry. For example, the Tolmie sisters, who could only claim one-eighth Aboriginal descent through their grandmother Josette Legacé Work, were designated as "Red."

<sup>40</sup> Jean Barman notes that the discursive regime erected around Aboriginal women "so profoundly sexualized Aboriginal women that they were rarely permitted any other form of identity" and that, "by default, Aboriginal women were prostitutes or, at best, potential concubines." This led to recurring campaigns to keep Aboriginal women, in particular, out of Victoria. See Jean Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900," *BC Studies* 115/16 (1997-98): 251-57, 264.

<sup>41</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, "Tracing the Fortunes of Five Founding Families of Victoria," *BC Studies* 115/16 (1997-98): 150.

*Head of Household*

As mentioned above, “Head of household” would seem at first glance to indicate independent living. Sixteen of forty-six heads (34.8 percent) owned their own property, most often their residences, but, in a few cases, they owned large or multiple parcels of land and houses, thus supporting an image of independence based on self-support and private property ownership. We might expect the highest-earning women to have the highest incidence of truly independent living arrangements. Yet of the twelve high earners (\$900 or more) in the entire sample, only one was a head of household – Grace Beira (age, 30; ethnicity, French; occupation, lodging house keeper; income, \$900),<sup>42</sup> who lived alone with one young male Chinese servant, Sing. In fact, most heads lived with at least one other person, although that may have been a boarder or dependent kin (none appears with unrelated men who were not boarders or servants). Several lived with siblings, usually sisters.

The heads of household in the low- and middling-income categories either reveal independent (lone) residence or a clustering of women. The heads with the lowest reported incomes likely used a range of strategies of survival. Charlotte Cameron (47, Scots, caretaker, \$120) lived alone. Extra strategies for survival are suggested by the fact that Cameron leased eight acres with two barns or outbuildings, suggesting that she farmed or kept livestock for income.<sup>43</sup>

Some women who, at first glance, appear to have lived alone with low incomes and poor housing conditions may have experienced something quite different. Minnie Williams (30, African-American, unknown) and Georgia Scudder (36, African-American, unknown) were both heads of households and both lived alone in small, three- and six-room leased houses on Chatham Street in the red light district. From the racial and class profiles of this one street, it would seem that these two women lived in a cheap, possibly even ostracized section of town, possibly as prostitutes or with prostitutes as neighbours but, in any case, within the means of poor working-class single women (and Asian men).<sup>44</sup> There is some evidence that Georgia Scudder was not involved in the

<sup>42</sup> Only women who appear in the sample are given age, ethnicity, occupation, and income data (in parentheses). All parenthetical data are taken from the Census of Canada 1901, Victoria District, Victoria (city) Subdistrict, using the cross-referenced census databases discussed above.

<sup>43</sup> Her reported occupation as “caretaker” may in fact indicate her perception of her stewardship of her properties rather than her formal employment.

<sup>44</sup> viHistory Project, 1902 Victoria Directory, <http://vihistory.ca/content/bd/1902/bd1902.php?page=streets>, (accessed May 30, 2006).



sex trade – or, at any rate, not publicly identified with it.<sup>45</sup> It may be that there was a stark difference in the lifestyles and living conditions of these two women – “Miss” Scudder in straitened circumstances in a marginalized area and Minnie Williams with the potentially high income (but also high expenditure) lifestyle of the sex trade worker, depending on the rates she could charge.

Other women in this low-income group shared their households with ever-single sisters. Georgina Davey (47, English, unknown, \$200) shared the six-room house on two hundred acres she owned with her sister Mary (37, English, unknown, no income reported), employing a male Japanese servant for \$180 per year, indicating some external funds coming into the household from rents, produce, or other sources. And Harriett Fox (41, English, music teacher, \$120) lived with her sister Catherine (38, English, teacher, \$155) and had a boarder in the nine-room house she owned, another source of income to top up the sisters’ combined \$275 per year. The 1902 city directory entry next door to their address at 36 Mason Street is “St. Catherine’s Home for Old Ladies, Miss Fox, matron” – possibly another hidden source of income.<sup>46</sup>

Heads with higher incomes did not reveal more “independent” living arrangements than did lower income categories but, rather, more interdependence. Some women did have incomes that enabled them to live independently. In the case of Margaret Holmes (62, English, nurse, \$400) and Amy Sweet (55, English, nurse, \$500), the age of these women is an interesting possible factor in their ability and/or decision to live alone: perhaps they were without living siblings or perhaps they had amassed some capital over their careers that enabled them to live independently. However, among women reporting incomes over \$600, only one head lived alone – Ethel Duffie (30, Irish, milliner, \$600), who worked for herself and owned her four-room house on View Street. The fact that she may have conducted her millinery business out of her home may have been a factor in her living alone.

Most higher-earning heads had others living in their households. Several women took in boarders, although the nature of those relationships seems to have varied greatly, from a strictly business ar-

<sup>45</sup> Georgia Scudder is listed as “Miss Scudder” in the 1902 Victoria directory, “Miss” being a title never given to women reported for prostitution offences in the Victoria police record books (but used nearly always for single women reported for dog fines and bicycle-related traffic offences). All women in her block of Chatham (35-52) were carefully listed with the honorific, but none on the next block (1-27) was – and most of those latter addresses can be found for prostitution offences in the Victoria police record books.

<sup>46</sup> viHistory Project, 1902 Victoria Directory, <http://vihistory.ca/content/bd/1902/bd1902.php?page=streets>, (accessed April 12, 2006).

rangement to a hidden connection of friendship and kin. Fanny Archbutt (45, English, music teacher, \$600) lived with one boarder, fellow teacher Mabel Messenger (who was also her younger cousin and later business partner, as revealed in her obituary).

As well, non-kin shared arrangements were possible, such as pairs of female “roommates” or, possibly, intimate partners – such definitions were outside the parameters of the census (and, indeed, contemporary social categories). Alice Williams (36, English, tailor, \$450) lived with a boarder who is also in the sample (Bertha Davis, 32, English, tailor, \$450). The similarity in age, occupation, and income indicates perhaps a relationship of companionship as well as economic contribution. Abbie Gardiner (33, “American,” teacher, \$800) appears to have lived with another single woman, Agnes Gibson (34, Scots, music teacher, \$240), who is listed with an “unclear” relationship to head. This may have been a simple error or it may indicate an equitable, even intimate, relationship that the term “boarder” could not express.

Many also headed households shared with their siblings, usually sisters. This was not necessarily a case of pooling scant resources. The well-off Tolmie sisters – Jane Work (38, Aboriginal/Scots, unknown), May Fraser (40, Aboriginal/Scots, unknown), and Josette (31, Aboriginal/Scots, nurse, \$85) – lived at the family estate known as “Cloverdale” with their brothers, (including the future premier, Simon Fraser Tolmie) and younger sister in 1901, and, a few years later, moved into their own fine joint residence at “Cloverbrae.”<sup>47</sup> In some of these households, the distinction of one sibling’s “heading” the house rather than others might be illusory. However, other kin relationships may not have been that of equals. Emily Carr framed her family’s living and financial arrangements after her parents’ death as fully, even tyrannically, controlled by the eldest sister Edith (46, English, unknown), who was the head of the household in 1901.<sup>48</sup>

### *Lodgers*

Lodgers or boarders would generally pay a flat fee for room and board, avoiding the expenses of maintaining a household on their own. Depending on the rate, a woman with a relatively low income

<sup>47</sup> “Miss Tolmie Is Mourned” (May Fraser Tolmie), *Victoria Daily Times*, 4 January 1934, 1. The Tolmies were grandchildren of Josette Legacé, a Spokane woman of mixed blood, and John Work, a Scot who was a Hudson’s Bay Company chief factor and the largest landowner in early Victoria.

<sup>48</sup> Emily Carr, *Growing Pains* (1946), reported in *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, ed. Doris Shadbolt (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1993), 308.

could, as a boarder, have her basic needs taken care of. Board and lodging in Victoria in 1901 ranged from \$20 to \$24 per month, depending on area, making an output of \$240 to \$288 per year.<sup>49</sup>

Five women in the lowest income category were boarders. Mary Mitchell (30, Irish, dry goods clerk, \$240) lived in a large boarding house where the majority of the twenty-one boarders who reported employment were clerks and merchants, including Maud Elliott (30, English, dry goods clerk, \$480), suggesting that this was a typical and respectable living arrangement that was affordable within Mitchell's salary. It is not known how much of her \$20 per month went to the boarding house: she may have had little left for personal items, clothing, savings, or leisure. But, at double Mitchell's salary, Elliott was probably more comfortable than Mitchell if she paid a similar rate.

The middle-income earners in this category clustered in professional occupations, retail sales, and the needle trades – teacher, nurse, stenographer, saleswoman, and dressmaker/tailor. Their households split between a many-person lodging house and one or two boarders in a private home. The four boarders who were top earners (over \$900) all lived at good addresses with other boarders of similar professional occupations and incomes, indicating a strategy of respectable, even genteel living, with perhaps an eye to lessening isolation through being part of a group environment. Clare Shannon (41, English, milliner, \$900) lived in the house of a widowed confectioner with fellow boarders, including a barrister and an accountant. With an income of \$1,000, Angelica Bossi (40, German, retired) would have been very comfortable. Interestingly enough, she had an adopted daughter living with her, four-year-old Alice Ewen.<sup>50</sup> Bossi is the only woman in the sample to have a child linked to her in any formal manner, besides nieces or nephews. Given her situation and income, Bossi may have felt that living in lodgings was the best choice with regard to enabling her to provide for her daughter, easing the burden of domestic labour as a single parent.

### *Living with kin*

Although "Living with kin" is a much larger group than any of the others and is responsible for over half of all cases, it breaks down into four categories: daughter of head, sister of head, sister-in-law of head, and other

<sup>49</sup> Department of Labour, "Schedule of Monthly Rents of House," 280-81.

<sup>50</sup> According to her obituary, Bossi was indeed ever-single, and Alice was her adopted daughter. See Obituary, Angelica Petronella Bossi, *Victoria Daily Times*, 12 December 1925, 5. Alice's last name appeared as "Ewings" on her birth certificate. See British Columbia Archives, Vital Statistics database, B13812, 1897-09-014769.

cognates (aunt, niece, or cousin of head). Here is a breakdown of the most significant categories: daughters, sisters, and sisters-in-law of head:

TABLE 10  
*“Living with kin,” project sample*

	#	%
Daughter of head <sup>a</sup>	131	57.7
Sister of head	61	26.9
Sister-in-law of head	20	8.8
Cognates <sup>b</sup>	15	6.6
	227	100.0

<sup>a</sup> Includes adopted and step daughters.

<sup>b</sup> Aunt, niece, or cousin of head.

### *Daughters of head*

Household analysis of daughters of head demonstrates both the classic image of single women (dependence on their birth families) and the crucial economic and domestic support role fulfilled by single women for aged parents and other family members. About half the daughters of head (48.1 percent) lived with both parents, while the rest (51.4 percent) lived with a widowed parent. Only thirty-two daughters of head in the sample reported income (24.8 percent). The social and economic status of non-income-earning daughters of head needs to be determined through that of their families (especially their father's occupation and income). But perhaps not surprisingly, the household composition of income-earning daughters-of-heads also reflects a class division in the occupations held by household members as a group.

The daughters-of-heads who reported incomes under \$300 may have found themselves on some sort of spectrum between not earning enough for independent support and contributing some support to their parents. Their occupations included domestic servant, clerk, tailor/dressmaker, and music teacher. Fathers were grocers and clerks or were in the construction trades, mining, or needle trades, while brothers' occupations included clerk, police officer, teamster, and real estate agent. Ella Conlin (32, Irish, tailoress, \$275) lived with her widowed mother, sister Catherine (23, unknown occupation) and brother Thomas, a policeman earning \$750 per year. Under the circumstances, her income likely merely

contributed to a collective comfortable status that she would have been hard-pressed to replicate on her own.

Other low-earning women appear to have played a more vital role in the family economy. Minnie Lakin's (32, English, dressmaker) \$240 income was likely vital to the household, with aged retired parents and a brother making only \$360 as a teamster. Ida Roper (35, Scots, dressmaker, \$240) was also the sole visible source of income for her aged parents (her father was a retired carpenter). Interestingly, she married in 1917 after both her parents had died, hinting at daughterly support in domestic/emotional as well as economic terms.

In the \$300-to-\$599 category, the daughters-of-head included clerks, tailors/dressmakers, and a music teacher. Their families consisted of a widowed mother or both parents (usually retired) with adult siblings. Family members were clerks or hotel proprietors or were in the construction trades, mining, or needle trades. Above them, in the \$600-to-\$899 group, all the "daughters of head" lived at home with either widowed or both parents, with one or more adult siblings and more than one income earner in the household. Generally, they present a middle-class profile with regard to types of occupations in the household and incomes reported. They were teachers, nurses, and bookkeepers, and in the case of Florence Goward (38, English), an occupation of "Private Labour" was noted with an income of \$600. Their families included law students, teachers, librarians, bookkeepers, retail and financial clerks, and small business owners.

The highest-earning women demonstrate a range of roles and opportunities from offering support to their families to having a prosperous family economy support their comfortable lifestyles and vocational ambitions. The high income of Agnes Deans Cameron (37, Scots, high school principal, \$1,200), the first female high school principal in British Columbia, allowed her to provide the primary economic support for her mother and ever-single sister Jessie (39, Scots, unknown), with a single boarder adding additional household income. Selina Frances Smith (39, African-American, music teacher, \$900) made a very good income as a private piano instructor to the elite families of Victoria. Her family also ran one of the pioneer manufacturing concerns in the city, an industrial bakery begun by her father Moses Roe Smith in the 1860s. Smith lived in the family home known as "Seaview" on toney seaside Dallas Street with her widowed mother (who took an active

part in the business) and her younger, single brother Hamilton (who reported \$2000 in earnings).<sup>51</sup>

### *Sisters and sisters-in-law*

The other categories of living with kin (sisters, sisters-in-law, and cognates) also demonstrate relationships ranging through dependence, mutuality, and support. Many sisters-of-heads lived in a cluster with single or widowed siblings (in thirteen cases all sisters), suggesting a retention of the family unit after the death of parents or, depending on the date of immigration, group or chain migration as a family unit. Another large group lived with their siblings' own families (spouse and children). This could have reflected an arrangement of respectable and affordable housing and/or a role of caregiver in the household, particularly with young children.

About the same percentage of sisters of head reported an occupation or income as daughters (24.6 percent). Sisters of head on the lower-earnings scale can generally be grouped into two categories: those needing the support of their siblings (or sisters' husbands) and those supporting siblings economically or domestically. (There is, of course, no reason why both could not be true in some cases.) Neither Laura Bowden (44, English, \$240) nor Mary Watson (31, Scots, \$225), both domestic servants, made a high enough income to live independently in comfort; both resided in their brothers' homes with their brothers' young families. Others could perhaps be seen to have experienced a situation of shared responsibilities rather than dependence. Catherine Fox (38, English, teacher, \$155) and Emily Woods (42, Irish, art teacher, \$200) lived with single sisters, close in age, who owned property.

Other women also likely contributed to their adult siblings' households in intangible ways. Seraphina Montero (38, African-Canadian, unknown) lived with her brothers and married sister (and the sister's family). Her brothers both held railway jobs that were traditionally open to Black men: Joseph was a CPR porter and Francis was a teamster and expressman. Her brother-in-law George Carter was a baggage

<sup>51</sup> Smith, who had been educated at Victoria's private girls' school Angela College and then conservatories in Toronto and Leipzig, clearly had the wealth and status to gain access to the education and social contacts needed to become a prominent music instructor whose recitals attracted the cream of Victoria society. Selina Frances Smith Fonds, British Columbia Archives, MS-1992.

man.<sup>52</sup> Only George's earnings (\$400) were given, but it is likely that a combination of the male earnings sustained a nominal standard of living for this household, complemented by the vital domestic labour of the female members.

It is likely that some of these sisters of head were classic examples of single women's emigration: sisters coming out to take a domestic role in the frontier households of bachelor brothers (which was precisely the case with Alice and Edith Ravenhill, who came to Vancouver Island from England before the Great War to help their brother get established on a farm).<sup>53</sup> Others may have come out as surrogate caregivers. Johanne Behnson (54, German, unknown) lived with her widowed brother and his children. Behnson immigrated from Germany in 1894, the same year that her brother's wife died: it is likely she came out explicitly to help care for the four children, then ranging from newborn to age fifteen.<sup>54</sup>

Again, women with incomes on the middling and high end of the scale continued the theme of responsibility as well as an expanded potential to pursue vocations and even comfortable ever-single lives. Emily Rhodes (47, English, "retired lady," \$500) had previously lived with her mother (she can be found in her mother's household in 1891) and apparently joined her sisters' household on her mother's death.<sup>55</sup> Maria McDonald (39, Scots, not given, \$1,080) had been living with her sister and her sister's children since at least 1891; her sister was already a widow in 1891, with two small children.<sup>56</sup> It is likely that McDonald's salary, possibly as a dressmaker (she was noted as such in 1891 but not in 1901), provided essential economic support for the household, along with the income from several boarders. This support likely continued after the sister's death in 1902 (the 1902 directory has Miss McDonald as head at the same address).<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See notations in the BC GenWeb 1901 Census of Canada database, [http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/1901vic\\_cen/divo9/d09p04.htm](http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/1901vic_cen/divo9/d09p04.htm) (accessed July 2, 2007). In 1901, Joseph, the head, had "crazy" listed under "infirmities."

<sup>53</sup> Alice Ravenhill, *Memoirs of an Educational Pioneer* (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1951), 170-71.

<sup>54</sup> A death certificate for "Lizzie Behnson" in 1894 is likely a match for Elizabeth Behnson, her sister-in-law, which also matches the year of birth for the youngest child.

<sup>55</sup> viHistory Project, 1891 Census of Vancouver Island database (Victoria), <http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1891/census1891.php?page=main>, (accessed April 12, 2006). Rhodes, Emily.

<sup>56</sup> viHistory Project, 1891 Census of Vancouver Island database (Victoria), <http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1891/census1891.php?page=main>, (accessed April 12, 2006). McDonald, Maria.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Fraser, died 28 February 1902, San Diego, CA, USA, forty-eight years of age. See City of Victoria Archives, Ross Bay Cemetery Records, 1872-1980, <http://web.city.victoria.bc.ca/archives/rosssearch.asp>, (accessed April 12, 2006). Ross Bay Cemetery plot P114EF.



The household of Ellen O’Sullivan (33, Irish, nurse, \$720) should probably be considered a classic case of sibling clustering. She lived with her brother (who made \$1,200 as a revenue officer) and five younger sisters (a dressmaker, a saleswoman, and two stenographers, making \$300 to \$480 each), with only the youngest sister (age nineteen) not reporting an occupation (and, interestingly, the only one to eventually marry). The high collective income of the household and the professional occupations of the employed sisters likely allowed them all to pursue lifelong employment – and to remain ever-single – in a comfortable familial setting.

Most of the women listed as “Sisters-in-law of head” were more likely to be in a dependent living situation, supported by their sisters’ husbands, although their domestic labour may have been a crucial part of the family economy. Only six of the twenty sisters-in-law of head (30.0 percent) reported an occupation. But interestingly, most of these made middling to high incomes. These included a dressmaker, two nurses, a teacher, and a stenographer, and they were paid \$500 to \$1,000 per year. These women may have seen these households primarily as a respectable living arrangement (as well as the emotional connection of living with kin). The exception was Catherine Cossar (36, Scots, general servant, \$300), who lived with her sister and her husband (a hack driver making \$900 per year) and their two children, and who would have much less ability to be self-supporting. All may have contributed something to the family income, though only one or two households of these income-earning women appear to have needed the income to survive.

Lang Lin Ying (51, China, unknown) immigrated to Canada in 1892 at the age of forty-two, joining her brother-in-law Quan Leong and his wife Ng Moi, who came in 1858 and 1866, respectively (it is unclear whether the wife is her sister). The gap in years between their immigration dates is interesting. Had Lang been caring for parents or relatives in China (although traditionally daughters-in-law were expected to take up that duty)? Why would she – or Quan – go to the expense of paying her passage to Canada? Was she in fact another wife of Quan’s, finally able to come overseas? Or was she a member of one of the marriage resistance sisterhoods?<sup>58</sup> Although no earnings are given for anyone in the household, Quan’s status as a merchant implies relative affluence.

<sup>58</sup> For more on marriage resistance sisterhoods, spinster clusters, and other forms of marriage resistance in China, see Janice E. Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

*Living with employer (private home,  
workplace, or institution)*

Women living in an institution (as employee) or in an employer's home only appear in earnings categories of \$600 or less, with two notable exceptions. Nearly all were employed in domestic or personal service of some kind. Those in the under-\$300 earnings group included domestic or general servants, housekeepers, nurses, and a cook. The more specialized and higher-status work indicated by "housekeeper," "governess," "missionary," and "matron" was generally reflected in the wages earned, clustering between \$300 and \$600 (although some housekeepers made as little as \$120). The two women who lived in institutions in which they were employed included a missionary at the Chinese Rescue Home and a matron who lived and worked at a private boys' school. Their lower wages would be compensated by no or few living expenses, although the trade-off in restricted living space, heightened surveillance of leisure time and activities by employers, and tendency to be "on-call" beyond a regular working day resulted in a less than ideal situation and contributed to the numbers of women who left domestic service for the expanding clerical and retail sectors.

One woman's life, traceable through successive censuses, demonstrates one scenario for women who experienced lifelong employment in service. Helena Maria Timms (84, African-Caribbean, general servant) remained with one prosperous family through its various permutations – first with a widow and her daughter in 1881; then, in 1891, in the daughter's home with husband, child, and mother; and then, in 1901, she is still with the daughter's household. At this point she was eighty-four, so the nature of her "service" seems likely to have been minimized from earlier years. It would seem that sometime after the 1901 census, she retired to the Aged and Infirm Women's Home, a choice made by other women in domestic service who likely had few means, no homes of their own, and no apparent kin in Victoria. With advanced age, such women would seek retirement from the demands of service.<sup>59</sup>

The two high-earning exceptions were both women whose occupations were not domestic service, although one could certainly be classed as "personal service." Dolly Grooms (30, Scots, actress, \$1,440), whose listing was "unclear," should also be considered to be living with

<sup>59</sup> Obituary, Helena Maria Timms, *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 September 1905, 8. For more information on the Aged and Infirm Women's Home, see I.A. Gould, *History of the Aged and Infirm Women's Home* (Victoria: Charles F. Banfield, 1928), 13. City of Victoria Archives, PR 201, box 29, file 8.

her employer as she was an actress living with other performers in the Savoy Theatre complex (though it is likely she was only sojourning in Victoria with a theatre group). As an employee in Stella Carroll's high-end parlour house brothel, Maud Murphy (32, Irish, \$800) also combined her work and her living space in one. As a brothel employee, Murphy would have needed to maintain a high-consumption lifestyle, including a sumptuous wardrobe that may be seen as a work-related expense. She had no independent living space apart from her work, and the conditions of her work would be similar to those of many domestic servants – being on demand and under employer supervision the majority of the time. Unlike dressmaking (the occupation she claimed in the census), her real work was highly vulnerable and her ability to maintain employment in a high-end establishment was inevitably tied to age and health. But for these few years, her income and lifestyle would have been higher than those of most women in the sample.

*Institutional living: Member of religious community and inmate of care institution*

Both religious communities and care institutions can be seen as sites for key strategies of survival for single women. Neither members of religious communities nor women living in care institutions gave incomes, but their presence in these institutions indicates that their economic and personal needs were taken care of.

It is difficult to know the status of Marie Blaine (30, German, unknown) in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) Refuge Home as an "inmate" or the condition that led her to this institution.<sup>60</sup> Ah Yut (38, China, unknown) was the oldest of five women, four Chinese and one Japanese, who lived at the Chinese Rescue Home, a shelter and school established in 1888 by Methodist missionaries to "rescue" Asian girls from prostitution and slavery as well as to inculcate Christianity and European domesticity as routes to new lives as Christian wives and mothers.<sup>61</sup> The fact that Ah was thirty-eight suggests that this

<sup>60</sup> Montreal's WCTU Sheltering Home, in operation from at least 1887 to 1910, offered shelter to "the homeless, pregnant women, prostitutes, the physically or mentally ill, as well as women who were entering or exiting the legal system. An individual's length of stay at the shelter could last from one night to several weeks and, in some cases, even years." See Register, WCTU Sheltering Home, 1887-1897, "Keys to History" text accompanying image, McCord Museum M2003.17.1, <http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/M2003.17.1&section=196>, (accessed July 2, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> Karen Van Dieren, "The Response of the WMS to the Immigration of Asian Women 1888-1942," in Latham and Pazdro, *Not Just Pin Money*, 81.

mandate was not successful in her case, whether by her own intent or other circumstances.

The advantages of community life were found by the twenty-five nuns in the project sample, nearly all of whom were members of the Sisters of St. Ann, who played a vital role in education and medical services in Victoria.<sup>62</sup> As a lifelong personal commitment as well as a survival strategy, the convent offered many opportunities for women: professional training and employment in teaching, the arts, and nursing; the opportunity for community service; religious vocation; and the benefits of communal living and support.

## SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

What this analysis of household composition reveals is that a simple examination of occupation and income does not tell the whole story of single women's strategies of survival. The household, in particular, was a crucial site for economic and social support, especially for underemployed or non-employed women. What the household-level analysis of the project sample reveals is that, rather than fitting into a simple dichotomy of total dependence *on* family or total independence *from* family and others, single women pursued multiple strategies of survival that may be characterized as a model of *interdependence* – a model that offers a valuable framework within which to study single women in the past.

Tracing single women's households through the lowest earnings category can tell us much about how women with inadequate wages both survived and, by implication, managed to remain single. The mid-range of incomes also demonstrates some of the class distinctions that start to emerge across the \$300-to-\$599 and \$600-to-\$899 income categories. And, as we can see, the highest-earning women do not have the highest incidence of truly independent living arrangements. Obligations to support others, rather than economic dependence, seem to have shaped many of the living arrangements of this group. Thus, income was an important element but not the sole determiner of single women's living arrangements. Obligation, both economic and familial,

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<sup>62</sup> For more on the Sisters of St. Ann, see Jacqueline Gresko, "Gender and Mission: The Founding Generations of the Sisters of St. Ann and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in British Columbia 1858-1914" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1999); and Margaret Milne Martens and Graeme Chalmers, "Educating the Eye, Hand, and Heart at St. Ann's Academy: A Case Study of Art Education for Girls in Nineteenth-Century Victoria," *BC Studies* 144 (2004-05): 31-59.

and the requirements of “respectable” living all acted to structure single women’s households and their strategies of survival.

This survey of the occupational and household strategies of single women reveals both interesting similarities and key differences between married and single women. It seems clear that we need to revise drastically the idea of the single woman as “alone,” as existing entirely apart from the social roles of married women. To be ever-single and never-mothers clearly did not mean always-alone, nor did it preclude an obligation (or privilege) to give care to family, friends, and even adoptive children. Yet there were two very significant differences – the first, and foremost, was that ever-single women did not have a husband and, thus, did not have that legal, emotional, physical, and economic focus and allegiance that was the prescribed cornerstone of a married woman’s life. (What distinct, even profound differences in self-identity, action, and outlook that may have made await another study.) And the fact that so many single women – here, approximately one-half – acquired some kind of employment income puts them in clear contrast to married women, of whom fewer than 5 percent were gainfully employed in British Columbia before 1941.<sup>63</sup>

Although the sample revealed a few idiosyncratic occupations, the majority of mature single women worked in what we need to see as *single women’s work*: domestic service, teaching, nursing, retail sales, clerical work, and the needle trades. We can also see that the sex trade needs to be considered as a crucial site for single women’s survival and success – indeed, as the place where both single female workers and entrepreneurs could make the most money. In addition, we should consider choice of occupation in terms of its potential to sustain an ever-single life: higher wages and job stability were attractive to this group of women, who were most likely to need independent means of support or, equally, to women using such occupations to enable them to choose to remain single.

The effect of choice prompts other questions that suggest interesting directions for research. What did these women think of their single “state”? Did they see themselves as “unclaimed jewels” or as “failed women”?<sup>64</sup> Or were they too busy getting on with living to concern themselves overmuch with labels? Were they single by choice, cir-

<sup>63</sup> Melanie Buddle, “The Business of Women: Female Entrepreneurship in British Columbia,” *Journal of the West* 43, 2 (2004): 47, Table 1.5.

<sup>64</sup> “Unclaimed jewel” is a term for an ever-single woman used frequently by women born around the turn of the century. See Fiona Beaty, “A Surprise from an ‘Unclaimed Jewel,’” *Globe and Mail*, 28 November 2000, A32.

cumstance, or (much more likely) a combination of both? To assume that women remained single because they could not get husbands is to misunderstand the multiple and varying choices and constraints that women faced in differing contexts in Canadian history.<sup>65</sup> The highly imbalanced gender ratio of British Columbia alone should make us question why, with such an abundance of bachelors, so many women remained single.

As we have seen, obligation to give care and/or economic support to their families and other kin was a crucial element in many single women's lives. The widespread obligation of the young working single woman to send money home, as examined by Betsey Beattie for migrant Maritime workers before 1930,<sup>66</sup> is echoed here in the obligations of the mature single woman to support widowed mothers and other unmarried siblings. As indicated in the stories of several women from the sample who married late in life, after their parents died, some remained single not because they did not want to marry or because they could not "get a man" but because they made a choice to give care.

Choice may, in fact, be a key governing difference here. Ever-single women in Victoria included wealthy and popular women with many marriage prospects, like Kathleen O'Reilly, who preferred to stay with her family rather than to marry.<sup>67</sup> Some women had vocational desires not easily accommodated within the patriarchal framework of marriage – like the teacher and later journalist Agnes Deans Cameron or the artist Emily Carr. Others, like the many nuns in the sample, had another kind of vocation – to serve God and the community.

And some may not have chosen heterosexual marriage regardless of the circumstances. The many pairs and groups of women seen here prompt questions of homosocial bonds, of affective connections between heterosexual women, of non-normative sexualities, and of partnerships (sexual and non-sexual) hidden behind boarders and even kin relationships. Space must be made not only for the lesbian but also for the bisexual or, indeed, asexual woman – those who cannot, and never will be, placed clearly in one end of a (falsely) dichotomous sexual binary.

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<sup>65</sup> For an excellent discussion of key variables affecting nuptiality and singleness, see Burke, "Marriage in 1901 Canada."

<sup>66</sup> See Beattie, *Obligation and Opportunity*.

<sup>67</sup> In discussing with her father why she wanted to decline the proposal of a promising suitor, Kathleen declared: "I did not want to be married, I love being here with you all [...] I don't believe any one has ever had a happier house & life than I have." Letter, Kathleen O'Reilly to Peter O'Reilly, 27 August 1892, BC Archives MS 02894, box 36, file 34.

Making single women central to our analyses opens up many fascinating areas of research. If women's history is indeed to cover all women and not to emphasize only the "marrying woman," then marital status must be a vital category of analysis. Answers to questions like "How did women provide the 'ordinary needs of life' for themselves (and often others) outside the marriage bond?" will reveal much about how far Canadian society was prepared to allow women to function in diverse social and economic roles.