

## Introduction

From: Women, Work &  
Markets in Nineteenth  
Century Ontario,  
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For some time feminist scholars have argued that any analysis of society is incomplete if women's participation is ignored. The ideas and assumptions on which theories about society and social change were developed are usually assumed to pertain to the human experience in general, but on closer examination their androcentric bias has become obvious. Traditional academic disciplines not only have had difficulty 'seeing' women, but also have had a distorted view of social mechanisms in general because of their exclusive perspectives. Including women in our analysis of society, then, involves more than simply finding out how women 'fit in,' for a more inclusive approach to history and political economy may radically change our perception of what happened. Understanding the nature of economic development in Ontario is a good case in point: one objective of this book is to show how what we believe to be true about the nature of economic development and the productive relations associated with this process in Ontario is extremely narrow because the usual analysis neglects the central place of the most prevalent mode of production and its labour relations - the household economy.

But the intent of this book is not only to change the accepted version of how the economy developed. It also offers an alternative to the usual ideas about the effect of industrialization on women. Conclusions about the impact of industrialization on women are based on an analysis of economic and productive relations that existed in England and Europe. These conditions were distinct from those in Ontario and, therefore, have produced an analysis not applicable to experiences here. Not only is our understanding of the nature of

economic development incomplete because the labour relations and production of a huge portion of the population have been ignored, but even our understanding of what happened to women in the development process is faulty because it is assumed to follow patterns established elsewhere.

The major objectives of this book are to show that women's productive activities were crucial to Ontario economic development in ways which were distinct from what is usually understood; that the productive relations of the household are critical to analyses of the nature of economic development; and that women's involvement in the industrialization process took a different form from that in older societies which were industrialized first.

### **Economic Development**

Economics is fundamentally a discipline concerned with market behaviour. Its major objective is to discover how decisions are made about what is to be produced for the market and who will get these things. Since women's labour for the most part has been directed toward non-market activities, their labour has been removed from consideration in traditional economic theory.' In some respects this has been an odd development because the origin of the word 'economics,' as each new student of economics is told, is a Greek word pertaining to management of a household and the ordering of private affairs. That women were at the centre of this activity is obvious and is clearly reflected in the first English use of the term, which refers to 'woman' who 'doth employ her Oeconomick Art ... her Household to preserve."

Recently some economists, albeit a small minority, have become interested in women's work, particularly as women have become a larger proportion of the paid labour force. In addition, there have been attempts to apply economic theory to the economics of the household.<sup>3</sup> But the results have not substantially changed the focus and analysis of the discipline, which is still overwhelmingly pre-occupied with market activity, even when the market does not govern the bulk of productive activity and does not involve the labour of most people.

This focus on market activity presents problems for the study of an economy, such as that of pre-industrial Ontario, which was primarily oriented toward subsistence production. The theoretical

approaches that focus on market activity have created methodological tools based on this type of activity; there has been a tendency not to develop adequate ways of looking at non-market activity, except as an adjunct to market activity. Karl Polanyi made the important point that the motivation for economic behaviour changed slowly and painfully during the rise of the market economy, and that the regulation of society by gain and profit from exchange is a relatively recent development: no society organized production like this before the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Yet almost the entire focus of our economic history is based on market developments, to the extent that the most characteristic mode of production remains obscure.

Probably the most significant contribution of Canadian economists to economic theory has been the staple theory of development. This theory has had a significant impact on both the understanding of the mechanism of growth in an economy involved in the production of export staples and development of dependency theory. Essentially, the staple theory explains how the technology and geographical circumstances associated with specific staple commodities affected the patterns of development and how the character of the staple determined the social and political organizations of the region.

In recent years the staple approach has been criticized for the absence of people in its analysis. The criticism is that its focus on external factors as explanations for growth and change neglects the significance of labour and class issues as formative aspects of Canadian development. However, even the studies that have attempted to redress this imbalance tend to treat the issues of labour and class narrowly. They focus only on productive relations associated with paid labour. The real nature of capital accumulation and the most prevalent productive relations in the economy continue to be obscured.

For example, H. Clare Pentland was among the first to attempt to bring labour and class issues to the fore of development issues in Canada. His particular interest was to show how the organization of production in society follows from labour conditions. At the beginning of his most important work he states the problem: 'A fundamental problem of any society is the organization of its labour force for production. If the society is to survive as an entity, ways must be evolved or devised to maintain or increase the labour force, to determine the nature and extent of the division of its labour force

(the techniques to be used), and to establish and enforce the system of incentives. The solutions of these problems fasten their appropriate behaviour patterns upon the various members of each society."

Pentland's first concern was the evolution of a capitalistic labour market in Canada, with the transition from what he called paternalistic labour relations to capitalistic labour relations. Paternalistic, or personal, labour relations were those associated with employers and employees in the period before a genuine labour market existed. His point was that the productive relations were less governed by incentives of the market than by personal relations.

This analysis was an important advance in bringing labour and class to the centre of development issues. But the analysis really only pertains to a small fraction of the total relations of production at any period of the great staple exports. It is not surprising, given the prevailing focus of economists generally on the market (and in Canada on the export staple), that an analysis that finally considered the significance of labour relations would turn to labour associated with the market when labour was considered at all. What now must be considered is the fact that the most significant sector in the pre-industrial period (in terms of the number working and the level of production) was not the staple-exporting sector, but the agricultural sector, and that in this sector waged labour was considerably less important to the production process than was the non-wage labour of family members. It is these productive relations of the family unit that have been ignored. Most economists would acknowledge that the family as a labour unit is crucial to agricultural production, but generally family labour is treated as undifferentiated labour. The members of a family unit are treated as a 'collectivity' of labour whose economic objectives are compatible and whose contributions and rewards are symmetrical.

The particular oversight by scholars trying to understand the nature of capitalist development in Canada has been their failure to investigate the extent to which household labour has contributed to capital accumulation. This failure, of course, leaves the productive relations of this form of capital accumulation obscure. The staple theory follows from a general perception that capitalist development is an economic force whose impetus came from outside the family or household. So while the impact of economic development or industrialization on the family has been of some interest, the formative nature of household activity in shaping the economy has not.

The staple approach has also received criticism from economic historians for its single-mindedness in focusing on exports as the engine of growth. In recent examinations of the early periods of Ontario's wheat-exporting economy, for example, it has been noted that growth continued even when wheat exports were in serious trouble. The two main questions asked are: how could this occur if wheat exports caused growth; and what was it that caused wheat output to increase in the first place? The attempts to answer these questions stress that other forms of market activity must have been significant. That is, internal markets must have been more important in the export staple economy than had been previously believed. This is undoubtedly true and it is an important corrective to recognize that local markets existed. However, what is denied is the idea that farmers could withdraw from the market periodically and rely on subsistence production. This idea is discounted because it is well known that all the things necessary to sustain production simply could not be provided by the household itself, that is, that the entirely self-sufficient farm was a myth. Indeed, it is a very rare economic unit that exists in self-sufficient isolation. Yet, in fixing on the market for explanations of the farming community's ability to cope during periods of declining export-staples, economists have neglected the true significance of the subsistence sector in the process of capital accumulation. And it is here that the productive relations of the family can be critical to understanding what occurred.

If we begin with the most characteristic form of labour, rather than with markets, our analysis of growth might be different. This is not easy to do when we look at labour within the family unit because the concept of the family implies an indivisibility of income and a community of effort that does not readily lend itself to the type of class analysis possible when the object of study is waged labour. Yet the issue of ownership and control of labour is as significant in the family economy as it is in more identifiably capitalist relationships.

In the family economy, ownership of the means of production both in law and in practice was in the hands of the male head of the household. The productive relations in this type of labour unit are frequently referred to by feminist anthropologists and sociologists as patriarchal productive relations. This is apt. If we look at the tremendous control ownership exerts over the product of labour, we can understand the extent to which female labour was 'expropriated' for the process of capital accumulation. To understand the

forces of accumulation in the pre-industrial economy, the division of labour within the family unit should be the starting-point. Obviously this division of labour was not determined without reference to general economic conditions and demographic and cultural factors of the time. But by starting with the family, rather than the market, we may learn about the various strategies families adopted in order to survive in the face of extremely unstable market conditions. In fact, a dual economy existed: subsistence production, which provided the most basic needs of the household, and the market-oriented production, which provided income. Women's labour in this scheme was critical to capital accumulation. To the extent that women's productive efforts sustained the family in its basic consumption needs, male labour was free to engage in production for exchange on the market (through either commodity production or waged labour); to the extent that the total income from market production need not be expended on consumption, accumulation of capital in the family productive unit could occur.

While it is certain that an understanding of the economics of the family would not get far without reference to the market, it is equally clear that an understanding of the market is not possible without reference to the basic unit of production - the family. So far, the dynamics of the family as a productive unit are relatively unknown. In particular, we need to examine how the accumulation of capital affects the relative position of the various labourers within the family unit and how this, in turn, relates to economic change.

### **Women's Labour and the Transition to Industrial Capitalism**

There have been, to date, few attempts to analyse long-term changes in women's labour and the relationship between industrialization and women's work in Canada. Most analyses which discuss women's labour assume that the transformation to an industrial economy in Canada had the same effect on women's work as it did in other countries. However, while there are important similarities among countries that experience industrial development, attempts to find common patterns in the impact of change on women's work have blurred some significant differences resulting from unique historical, economic, and cultural circumstances.

The colonial nature of Canada, which underwent a transition from a resource-exporting and agricultural economy to an industrial one, presents a distinct type of economic development, one that affected women's work in specific ways. I shall demonstrate this for Ontario during the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. This period covers early staple development, the transformation to an industrially based economy, and the increase of waged work for women. After World War I the labour experience of women in Canada more and more resembled that of other industrialized nations.

Because Ontario had a more integrated and complete industrial transformation than any other province, it is ideally suited to a discussion of how the process of change from subsistence and export-staple production to industrial production affected women's work. However, as the labour experiences of women in other parts of the country at comparable stages of development were often similar, they will be used for corroboration and comparison.

In Chapter 2, I begin by discussing current interpretations of the effect of capitalist industrial development on women's labour, in order to show that a paradigm, based chiefly on the British experience, has frequently been assumed to apply wherever industrialization occurs. This paradigm considers three changes to be particularly significant. First, industrialization separated the home and the workplace. In the pre-industrial period the household is seen as a productive unit with the family working together in the production process. As industry moved out of the household, the home was no longer a place of production and the family's function as a productive unit by and large disappeared. Second, this process brought about an increased differentiation in the division of labour by gender. As the physical location of production separated male and female labour, occupational and industrial segregation by gender became more pronounced. Males, through productive activities outside the home, became increasingly responsible for securing the family income, and male involvement with domestic affairs became negligible. At the same time females' productive activities became less significant to the family economy and their dependence on males increased. The third major change associated with industrialization is that a much sharper division was created between the public and private worlds of work. In pre-industrial economies the household is identified as the major focus of economic activity, and

the distinctions between work and life and between the public and private functions of specific individuals within the household are largely insignificant. As production and males leave the household they become identified with the public sphere, where the female sphere becomes increasingly confined to the private world of the household as women's production for the market is restricted.

This model does not fit women's experience in a colonial, subsistence-oriented, and staple-exporting economy. In Ontario, industrialization did not initiate the separation of women from production for the market and did not intensify the public/private split and the division of labour by gender; these factors had been common features of productive relations in the pre-industrial period. Rather, economic growth brought women's productive efforts increasingly into the market's sphere. This was by no means a simple progression embracing all sectors of the economy and affecting all groups of women similarly, for even by the end of the period most women's labour was not directed toward the market. But the trend toward greater market participation was evident as women's labour began to be integrated into the public sphere of production in a way that had not been possible when subsistence and staple production were dominant.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the division of labour by gender in an economy where the most significant market activity was directed toward the production of staples for the export market. This form of commodity production was separate and distinct from the production that took place within the household and was, for the most part, performed by males. Production within the household was largely for the family's use and performed mostly by women. The fact that women's economic activities were primarily of a subsistence nature while men's work was more market-oriented does not imply that the labour of females was insignificant during periods of intense staple production. Because of the extremely volatile nature of export markets, the general scarcity of labour, and the underdeveloped and poorly integrated nature of the domestic market, the activity of women in the subsistence sector was integral to staple development and critical for capital accumulation. However, while male and female labour in the family economy was interdependent, their productive relationships were not equal. Ownership of the means of production and control of labour were as significant in the family economy as in more identifiably capitalistic relationships. In the

last section of Chapter 3, I examine how ownership of the means of production, both in law and in practice, was firmly in the hands of the male head of the household, and consider the implications of this for control over female labour.

One major objective of this book is to show how in Ontario the growth of local markets, which was related to improved transportation and population growth, brought women's productive efforts more directly into the market's sphere. Initially the kind of work women performed did not change significantly, but as the outlets for surplus household production expanded, women's work in the household became increasingly market-oriented. In Chapter 4 I examine the factors that affected women's production for the market in the farm household, showing how their market activities became more important to the family with respect both to family consumption and to the accumulation of capital on the farm. In particular, I discuss how the volatile nature of the wheat staple-exporting economy made families vulnerable to the extremes of international staple markets. This forced them to rationalize production in specific ways so that they would both have access to incomes generated by this market and yet be protected from its extremes. As the economy grew, the protection offered by subsistence production became less central to the family economy. The result was that women's productive efforts could then become more oriented toward the market.

Chapter 5 examines this process in the development of the dairy industry. Dairy production has been selected for a detailed study for several reasons: women were the main producers of dairy products in the pre-industrial period; it was an industry which became increasingly significant to the Ontario economy; and, because of its economic importance, both to families and to the economy in general, detailed information about changes in the production process is available. Initially, dairy production was for household consumption, but as markets improved, women's dairying became an important source of income for farm families. While women remained in the industry as it expanded in its pre-industrial stage, they did not manage to develop large-scale capitalist enterprises as the industry moved from household craft production to more capital-intensive factory production. Instead, women's work in dairying tended to remain labour-intensive and confined to what could be performed within the household.

Patriarchal productive relations were significant in limiting the scope of farm women's market-oriented activities as the work they traditionally performed became the main business of the farm. However, while women's ability to produce for the market within the farm household was slowly being restricted, their ability to participate in market-oriented activities increased in other ways. In urban areas women's waged labour slowly and steadily increased. At the same time, market-oriented labour in the home, although different from that performed by farm\_ women, continued to be a significant income source for many working-class families. In Chapter 6 I examine the effect of economic growth and industrial development on women's paid labour. While jobs women performed outside the home were generally similar to the types of work women performed in other countries experiencing industrialization, the absence of large labour surpluses in Ontario meant that the growth in waged labour was less confined to domestic work than was typical of the pattern for women elsewhere. In the first part of Chapter 6 I discuss the demographic changes associated with economic growth and show how dramatic these changes were for women. In the remainder of the chapter I point to the areas where women's work for pay was expanding and examine the factors that affected the nature of this work.

The intent throughout is to do several things. One is to explain how the process of economic development and its effect on women in a staple-exporting economy was distinct from that usually associated with industrialization. Most important, I want to show that it is wrong to assume that in Ontario the economic development associated with industrial capitalism restricted women's economic sphere. The effect of development on women varies considerably according to the historical conditions under which development occurs. The variability and unevenness of Ontario's development means women's relationship to the process cannot be seen as linear; that is, there was not a simple movement transferring household production to waged labour.

The second objective is to challenge the elaborate economic arguments that have ignored the gender of the participants in the panorama of economic change. This gender-blindness has obscured the productive nature of a whole sector of the economy and presents distorted ideas about the nature of the economy and the forces of change. Women's labour was *directly* related to the process of cap-

ital accumulation in the pre-industrial period. Most analyses acknowledging the significance of female labour recognize the indirect contribution it has made to capitalist development through social reproduction. Although this is certainly significant, the importance of female labour is not confined to this sphere.

The limits of this book are considerable. It certainly is not meant to be a definitive study of women's labour in the nineteenth century, for there are many areas not taken up. For example, there are no detailed accounts of methods of child care, cooking, and cleaning. Neither are there examinations of the management of social and sexual relations, or of all the various kinds of work women did for pay. These are all aspects of women's labour that are critical to a full understanding of their economic and social relations. Rather, the focus here is more limited and deals with the variety of factors pertaining to women's relationship to market activities and capital accumulation.

I use the term 'Ontario' throughout, even though this region was known as Upper Canada for much of the period under discussion.

## 2 Capitalist Development, Industrialization, and Women's Work

### Early Perspectives on Industrialization

Over time, the understanding of the effect of industrialization on women's work, based primarily on the British experience, has undergone considerable change. It has shifted from a perspective which saw the process as one that would bring women's work from the margins to the centre of productive activity, to one which sees industrialization as essentially restricting the nature of women's work.

The tendency in the nineteenth century was to see the impact of industrialization on women as a dramatic one which greatly changed the nature of the household and the nature of women's work.<sup>1</sup> During industrialization, in particular the transformation from cottage industrial production to factory production in Britain, the most noticeable change in female employment was the extent to which women were leaving the home to work. At the time this appeared to be a general feature of the industrializing process that would undermine the position of male labour and the family as industrialization progressed. In the words of one observer, the factory process was having disastrous consequences because of the 'gradual displacement of male by substitution of female labour in a large proportion of the industrial occupation of the country ... This evil ... is spreading rapidly and extensively ... desolating like a torrent, the peace, the economy, and the virtue of the mighty masses of the manufacturing districts. Domestic life and domestic discipline must soon be at an end.'<sup>2</sup> Marx and Engels also stressed the tendency for male labour to be displaced by female labour as industria-

lization progressed: 'the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class.'<sup>3</sup>

In hindsight this perspective appears to have greatly exaggerated the true state of things. But however melodramatic the prediction appears now, it was not based on an unfounded perception of what seemed to be occurring at the time. The critical industry in Britain's industrialization process was the textile industry, and the changes occurring in it appeared to contemporary observers to offer insights into the likely effects of industrialization as industry after industry was drawn into the factory. There is substantial evidence to show that in the early stages of factory work, workers in the textile industries were primarily women and children.<sup>4</sup>

The expansion of women's work outside the home in the first industries to become industrialized quite naturally led contemporary observers to assume that a revolution was taking place in work for women. This was almost universally assumed to be bad for the entire family - not because women were working, for women had certainly worked in the family economy, but because this work was taking women away from the home, where they had combined paid employment with domestic responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Even Engels, who understood the necessity of women's work outside the home as a step toward their emancipation, was horrified by the drastic changes in the social order and in particular by the way women's paid work was destroying traditional relationships between husbands and wives. He recognized that women's work outside the home was important because it would permit them to spend less time on domestic work and more on production on a large, social scale. 'And only now has that become possible through modern large-scale industry, which does not merely permit of the employment of female labour over a wide range, but positively demands it, while it also tends toward ending private domestic labour by changing it more and more into a public industry.'<sup>6</sup> However, this change was harmful to the family: 'In many cases the family is not wholly dissolved by the employment of the wife, but turned upside down. The wife supports the family, the husband sits at home, tends the children, sweeps the room and cooks.' Engels saw this as an 'insane state of things' which 'unsexes the man and takes from the woman all womanliness.'<sup>8</sup> Women's work outside the home affected their

domestic functions since unmarried women did not acquire domestic skills and married women had no time to perform them. It also had moral consequences that were 'not calculated for the favourable development of the female character';<sup>9</sup> it adversely affected women's health; and it increased child mortality. Engels's position, of course, was not that the condition of women in the pre-industrial family economy represented an ideal that should be perpetuated, but that it was also oppressive in being based on the superior position of the male in the economic system.

We must admit that so total a reversal of the position of the sexes can have come to pass only because the sexes have been placed in a false position from the beginning. If the reign of the wife over the husband, as inevitably brought about by the factory system, is inhuman, the pristine rule of the husband over the wife must have been inhuman too. If the wife can now base her supremacy upon the fact that she supplies the great part, nay, the whole of the common possession, the necessary inference is that this community of possession is no true and rational one, since one member of the family boasts offensively of contributing the greater share.<sup>10</sup>

In short, the industrialization process was seen by contemporaries as drastically changing women's work as a whole by removing their paid work from the home to the factory and by radically reducing their ability to perform traditional household duties. To those who expected factory work to increase dramatically, it appeared that the tendency for women to become wage-earners could only accelerate.

### **Twentieth-Century Perspectives on Industrial Capitalism: A Paradigm**

By the beginning of the twentieth century it had become clear that women were being drawn into waged work to a much smaller extent than had been anticipated. For example, a British pamphlet on women's work at the turn of the century noted that 'In the past half century there has been no real invasion of industry generally by women, but rather a withdrawal from it.'" Among feminists there was a growing recognition that modern industrial capitalism had reduced the working sphere of women. Not only were women being

confined in small numbers to narrow areas of paid labour, but also their ability to contribute to the family income through labour in the home had been severely restricted. Olive Schreiner was among the first to emphasize this effect of industrialization, saying that it 'tended to rob woman not merely in part, but almost wholly, of the more valuable of her ancient domain of productive and social labour.'<sup>12</sup>

Throughout this century there has been considerable disagreement about whether the changes brought by capitalist industry resulted in a deterioration or an improvement in women's position, but the restrictive effect on the nature of women's labour has been widely accepted.<sup>13</sup> This emphasis on the narrowing of women's labour sphere has become basic to current analyses of the transition from pre-industrial economies to industrial capitalism. In fact, a general paradigm of the effect of industrialization on women's labour has developed, based on the British and Western European experience. While there is not, of course, total agreement about the details, and while various aspects of the paradigm have been questioned and modified over time, its principal outlines are generally clear. What is more, they are frequently accepted as typical characteristics of the development of capitalist industry wherever it occurs.

The changes in women's labour associated with capitalist industrialization occurred primarily because the home was separated from the workplace. As industry moved out of the household, the home was no longer a place of production and the family's function as a productive unit disappeared.<sup>14</sup> This significantly narrowed women's ability to contribute to the family economy. When production occurred within the household, women's labour was an integral part of how the family earned its living. While the distinctions between male and female work in the pre-industrial family economy are acknowledged, and are understood to be a function of women's responsibility for children and housework, the relatively more integrated nature of the family's work is stressed.<sup>15</sup> Men and women did much the same type of work, even if the actual tasks they performed were different. In agriculture, women were as much a part of the productive process as men. While male labour was more likely to involve field work and women's labour was more likely to be centred around the immediate environs of the dwelling-place, the family's livelihood was dependent on the labour of both. In cottage and craft



production the whole family would be engaged in the work process - the income of the family was critically dependent on the complementary nature of the tasks performed by males and females in the production of commodities. There are different opinions about whether women's labour in the pre-industrial household was valued by the family as being equal to that of males. Some stress that the complementary nature of the labour meant that women's labour was not subservient to men's.<sup>16</sup> But for the most part women's labour is considered to have been subservient to male labour, even when this labour was critical to how the family earned its income.<sup>17</sup>

The separation of production from the household greatly increased the differentiation in the division of labour by gender.<sup>18</sup> As the physical location of production separated male and female labour, both occupational and industrial segregation by gender became more pronounced. Through their productive activities outside the home, males became increasingly responsible for securing the family income.<sup>19</sup> Since waged labour forced males to be absent for long periods of time, male involvement in domestic affairs became negligible. The correlative of this situation was that housework and child care became more and more the primary responsibility of women. While women had certainly been more involved with these tasks than men in the pre-industrial household, the ability to combine domestic tasks with the general productive work of the family meant that domestic activities did not consume the whole of women's labour. In fact, it is frequently maintained that child care and housework were considerably subordinate to female labour in the family enterprise in the pre-industrial period.<sup>20</sup> With the removal of the main source of the family's income from the home, the married woman's ability to combine income-producing labour with domestic labour was seriously curtailed. Initially this affected married middle-class women and the wives of wealthy farmers, changing their lives from intimate involvement in the family enterprise to essentially lives of leisure.<sup>21</sup> Eventually this retreat of women into the domestic sphere became characteristic of working-class women too. The difficulties of combining domestic work with waged labour when waged labour involved excessively long hours and when there were few substitutes for women's domestic labour meant that, increasingly, only those families on the margins of economic existence would continue to rely on the labour of the married woman outside the home.

The rise of the housewife, then, as the 'dominant mature feminine role' is perceived to have emerged with the development of industrial capitalism.<sup>22</sup> Whether this was a positive or a negative development is a subject of considerable debate. To some, the loss of income-earning activity increased the married woman's dependence and adversely affected women's status in society.<sup>23</sup> To others, the change in the basis of marriage from an economic partnership to one of economic dependence for the wife had a more positive impact because it improved the standard of living for the average family, in particular because the mother and wife had more time to devote to the well-being of her family and its domestic circumstances.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, there is general agreement that the labour sphere of the married woman was considerably restricted as her duties became more centred on child care and housework. She became dependent on her husband economically and became more isolated as her work assumed a less collective nature.

The increased rigidity in the division of labour by gender also affected the labour of women who worked outside the home. Waged work for women may have increased through the industrial transformation process, but rather than expanding the occupational diversity for women, as was initially anticipated, women's paid work was increasingly restricted to a small range of jobs.<sup>25</sup> In the manufacturing sector, women's paid employment was confined almost exclusively to those industries which were industrialized first. As industrialization spread, women did not move into new areas of work. Rather, 'the rise of the factory girl was an exceptional and atypical development in the industrializing economy.'<sup>26</sup> As crafts and trades were taken outside the household and developed along capitalistic lines, women's ability to participate decreased. Daughters and wives were excluded from production as waged-labour became more significant to the larger-scale organization of these industries, and as industries in which women had once been dominant required greater amounts of capital. Structural changes in the economy reduced the significance of agriculture as an employer of labour altogether, so women's agricultural occupations, which had employed the greatest proportion of females in the pre-industrial period, declined rapidly.<sup>27</sup> The decline in female employment, as cottage industries were transformed by industrialization, was partially offset by the feminine nature of the early factory work-force, but the expansion of factory jobs did not fully

replace the loss of female employment in cottage production. Ivy Pinchbeck maintains, for example, that the proportion of males in the textile industry was greater under factory production than it had been under the domestic system, where the estimates are as high as eight women and children to every man employed.<sup>28</sup>

The striking feature of industrialization's impact on women's paid labour throughout the nineteenth century was the increased concentration of women in one area of employment which clearly was expanding for them - domestic service.<sup>29</sup> Early studies of women's labour during industrialization tended to ignore the effect of the development process on this type of work, assuming either that it remained relatively unchanged until late in the nineteenth century or that the rise of factory labour for women meant that single women became less dependent on domestic service for employment.<sup>30</sup> Recently there has been much more attention paid to the rise of domestic service as a typical pattern, cross-culturally, for female employment during the industrializing process. In Britain this type of work absorbed an increasing proportion of the total labour force in the second half of the nineteenth century, rising from 13 per cent of the total labour force in 1851 to 16 per cent by 1891, while at the same time it became both more feminized and more characterized as temporary employment.<sup>31</sup> Women tended increasingly to find work in domestic employment as the demand for this type of work expanded while opportunities in other areas of employment were decreasing."

In addition to domestic service, other types of work that continued to be significant for women were the more marginal types of employment associated with intermittent, casual jobs. These tended to be the kinds of work that demanded less rigid and specific time commitments than did factory labour, jobs which married women could more easily harmonize with their domestic responsibilities to their families. Much of this work had been typical of women's work in the past, including home work in the slop and sweated trades and the more casual paid domestic work performed as washerwomen, boarding-house keepers, charrs, and day maids.<sup>33</sup> While the extent of this labour is not known, primarily because its more marginal nature meant that it escaped the rigid job classifications of the census, information about the period up to the mid-nineteenth century indicates that in some areas this labour was an important source of income for married women.

The separation of the home from the workplace clearly had significant implications for the increased rigidity in the division of labour by gender. But as significant as its effect on reducing occupational diversity for women was its effect on reducing women's overall ability to participate directly in how the family earned its income. That is, not only were the types of income-earning jobs women could perform being restricted, but so too was the number of income-earning opportunities, relative to the size of the female population.<sup>34</sup>

The participation of women in the income-earning areas of economic activity is now widely accepted as having reached its peak in the pre-industrial period, and as having declined during the initial phases of industrialization only to recover the previous high degree of participation over the very long run. In fact, it is now posited that there has been, historically, a high correlation between the household mode of production and female work-force participation, a correlation further evidenced by the analysis of women's labour experience in Third World countries today as capitalist industry transforms certain sectors of the economy.<sup>35</sup> In Britain, women's participation experience is described as a U-shaped curve, with the low point in activity occurring in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> The recovery to pre-industrial levels is seen as occurring only in the second half of the twentieth century, when married women's participation in wage-earning occupations increased rapidly.

This general paradigm of social development and its effect on female labour through the capitalist industrialization process can be summarized as positing three major changes. First, industrialization separated the home and the workplace. In the pre-industrial period the household was the productive unit, with the family working together in the production process. As industry moved out of the household, the home was no longer a place of production and the family's function as a production unit disappeared. Second, this process brought about an increased differentiation in the division of labour by gender. As the physical location of production separated male and female labour, occupational and industrial segregation by gender became more pronounced. The rise of waged labour meant that males became increasingly responsible for securing the family income. At the same time, the division of labour in the family, in which women had always been more responsible for child care and

housework than males, became more pronounced as women's opportunities to combine income-earning labour with household activities decreased. Married women's labour in the home became characterized by maintenance activities for the family: reproduction, child-care activities, and housework became their primary work roles. While unmarried women's work was likely to be associated with market activity, it was occupationally and industrially segregated from the work of males and for the most part was temporary. The third major change associated with capitalist industrialization - a change integral to the separation of the household from income-producing activities, married women's retreat into the home, and the restricted nature of women's paid work - was the progressive polarization of the public and private spheres of life, with men increasingly associated with public life and women relegated to the private sphere." In the pre-industrial household, work was integrated with other types of household activities, so the distinction between the public and private functions of specific individuals within the household was largely insignificant. But, as income-earning activities were withdrawn from the household, a sharper distinction was made between the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of economic life. As women were confined to the household, their world and work became increasingly privatized and isolated, and the new ideology that women's rightful place was in the home gained currency.<sup>38</sup>

### **A Universal Model?**

It is important to note that while it is frequently assumed that capitalist industrialization affects women's labour in broadly similar ways wherever it occurs, this assumption is not valid.<sup>39</sup> Rather, the paradigm of the effect of the capitalist industrial transformation on women's labour, as explained above, is based on a specific type of pre-industrial economy. The extent of women's participation in the income-producing activities of the pre-industrial economy was related to a variety of factors which were historically based, including the specific mode of production, the demographic circumstances of the society, and the complex interaction of all the factors affecting the nature of the division of labour by gender within the patriarchal household.

In this respect, the paradigm of the effect of capitalist development and industrialization, based on the English experience, does

not fit the pattern of development in Ontario, where the historical circumstances of development were very different from those in England. In England the transition to industrial capitalism occurred in an economy where internal markets had long been developed.<sup>40</sup> The small geographical area and the relatively large population meant that there was considerable interdependence among household units. In the eighteenth century, English rural households were involved in both agricultural production for the market and cottage industrial production. In fact, one distinctive feature of this transformation process was the pre-industrial phase (sometimes characterized as a stage of 'protoindustrialization,' or 'industrialization before the factory system,' or the 'protean stage of development'), which was characterized by the 'emergence, expansion and final decline' of rural industries.<sup>41</sup> In villages, towns, and cities, crafts and shops as well as manufacturing industries were organized around the household unit. In this pre-industrial economy women contributed to the material wealth of the household in significant ways. They provided domestic work and production for home consumption; they produced goods for sales; they worked for wages; and they assisted men in their crafts and trades. In the household-based economy their market-oriented activities were considerable, so that the shift in market activities away from the household resulted in a general reduction in women's market-oriented labour.

Among feminist scholars there recently has been more emphasis placed on the complexity of the industrializing process for women as a result of the variability and unevenness of capitalist development. There is a recognition that industrialization in England did not affect women in a uniform way. Rather, different conditions in different sectors of the economy meant women's wage-earning patterns and family relations changed in ways that were not as linear as was once believed.<sup>42</sup> The point is that the variations on the impact of industrialization and economic change are not important only within a specific economy but also are considerable over space and time.

### **The Canadian Experience**

The following chapters show that the colonial, export-oriented market economy of pre-industrial Ontario relied on a distinct form of production within the family and a method of organizing labour

that placed different emphasis on the division of labour by gender from that in pre-industrial Britain. The underdeveloped nature of the economy, the limited supply of labour, and the primary orientation of market activity toward the export market tended to produce a much sharper division of labour in the household economy between production for the market and that for household consumption. In the early stages of development, female labour was centred on production for the household while male labour was focused on production for the market. In this respect one cannot point to a *withdrawal* of females from market production as the economy was transformed to industrial capitalism. Rather, economic growth brought women's production efforts increasingly into the market's sphere, both through production for the market within the household and through waged labour. Similarly, it is not possible to see the transformation in Ontario as resulting in a major split in the public and private spheres of life, and a sharper differentiation in the division of labour by gender. The private nature of production, the isolation of female labour, and a rigid division of labour by gender were common features of the pre-industrial period.

The changes in women's labour which occurred as local markets developed and the economy industrialized were complex and uneven. Even by the end of the period under consideration most female labour was not directed toward the market. But ultimately there was neither an overall decline in the proportion of women active in production for the market nor a restriction in the number of occupations available to women. Specifically, the pattern of women's market-oriented activity did not assume the U-shape of the English experience. It may be more appropriately characterized as a pattern of slow and steady increase in participation, but one which affected women in different sectors in different ways.

It is important to note that when I refer to an increase in women's participation I am referring to their labour associated with the market (i.e., the type of labour discussed when the U-shaped pattern of women's work is described in Britain). This change associated with economic development and industrialization relates to the overall level of women's participation in income-earning activities in general, including production within the household and wage-earning activities. Frequently there is confusion about exactly what aspects of women's labour are affected because of the rather vague reference to a decline in women's 'productive' labour. Sometimes

this seems to refer specifically to the contribution women make to the family production of goods and services for exchange, but in other instances the term is used more generally to refer to production for use by the family as well. When used in the latter sense, 'productive' activity is seen in a very conventional way, that is, what is produced either for the market or what is produced for the family, but is tangible, and is later provided through the market. This perspective sees women's labour as being 'productive' when it produces clothing for the family, but not when it produces the family meals. All women's indirect contributions toward how the family earns its living, then, are not included as 'productive' labour. As women increasingly spend a greater proportion of their labour time on child care and housework, their labour tends to be described as being less productive and they are seen as being economically inactive. This division of women's labour into productive and unproductive spheres is not particularly helpful in trying to determine the extent of change in women's labour, and it leads to confusion about whether the decline in women's economic participation refers mainly to changes in the nature of women's labour in providing directly for the family through work in the household, or whether it refers to their direct participation in how the family earns an income.

Recent examinations of housework stress that women's unpaid labour in the home has economic significance, even if this activity is solely confined to reproductive activities centred on the household and the care of children. In fact, the very nature of capitalism is seen to be dependent on the existence of this form of labour, and to perpetuate it.<sup>43</sup> Also, cross-cultural and cross-generational studies of housework indicate that there are not marked differences in the total labour time women spend on housework. That is, even though the nature of the labour performed within the home may change, women generally do not greatly reduce the amount of time they work in the home.<sup>44</sup> The main point to be made, then, is that shifts in the production of tangible goods to intangible services do not amount to a reduction in productivity *per se*.

For the most part those discussing the effect of industrial capitalism on women's labour in Canada tend to be cautious in providing an analysis of long-term changes. No doubt this has been because the history of women's labour has been a seriously underdeveloped subject, and, until recently, relatively little has been

known about the relationship of women's work to the economy. In the past ten years there have been several good accounts of changes in women's labour in the twentieth century and some useful studies of women's work in specific occupations or areas of the country for earlier periods. But generally those studies which address the larger issues of change from one century to another adopt the latent assumption that it followed the pattern established in Europe. Robert Johnson does this, for example, in his study of the origins of industrial home work in Canada.<sup>45</sup> He moves easily and directly from a discussion of the system of cottage production and putting-out in the textile industries in Europe to the mechanization of production in factories in Canada as though it were all part of one continuous process. Similarly, Susannah Wilson, in what is a good general analysis of women's work, does not distinguish between the industrializing experience in Canada and in Britain. She too seems to assume that women withdrew from paid labour as industrialization progressed. She sees women's labour as being restricted and increasingly privatized as 'more and more, the husband's realm became the public, the wife's the private and domestic.'<sup>46</sup> Her supporting evidence is a long quotation from Ann Oakley which describes the effect of industrialization on women as giving rise to their role as housewife, evidence clearly based on the British experience.

Margaret Benston also sees the Canadian experience as paralleling that of Britain. She explains, for example, that in England in the second half of the nineteenth century the ideal of the modern housewife had emerged, and 'women were to stop working - at least for wages. They were to withdraw from the factories and shops into their homes, there to raise children and devote their time to producing goods and services for their families.' While she notes that social conditions in North America were different, she maintains that the results were essentially the same.<sup>47</sup> Her implication is clearly that women in some sense retreated into the home, even though they were often able to earn an income through their activities within the household.<sup>48</sup> The pervasiveness of the view that the transformation from the pre-industrial to the industrial economy in Canada was a mirror of the British experience is evident in the popular treatment of women's work. For example, in her survey of women's own perception of housework in Canada today, Penny Kome uses British

data to illustrate the historical rise of the housewife and maintains that 'the pre-Industrial woman avoided financial dependence, social isolation, boredom, and other problems that plague today's homemaker.'<sup>49</sup>

Leo Johnson, in one of the few generalized accounts of women's labour in the nineteenth century, provides an interesting discussion of the aspects of property relations which relegated women's labour to a subordinate position in the pre-industrial economy. But he assumes, without any reference to specific evidence, that women's labour was withdrawn from the production process as markets expanded. In discussing economic change from 1850 to 1880, he says of farm women that 'rather than occupying an economic role which was clearly parallel to that of her husband, the farm woman's labour was reduced to activities more akin to those of a servant in a wealthier household. With little of lasting value to show for her work, her subservient status was greatly reinforced.'so He sees the work of wives of the capitalist and the artisan classes as being similarly restricted. Bourgeois women's lives began more and more to resemble those of their aristocratic predecessors and the wives of skilled workers, those workers who could afford to maintain their families through their wage, aped the style of their husbands' employers' wives.

Most writers on women's labour in Canada recognize the increased labour force activity of women in the twentieth century, and the effect of the rise of new occupations and the corresponding need for cheap labour in bringing women into the labour force. Nevertheless, they assume that women's work was increasingly privatized through industrialization. For example, Patricia Connelly, in a generally excellent study of women's labour force experience in the twentieth century, maintains that 'with the advent of industrial capitalism a split occurred between the public sphere of commodity production and the private sphere of domestic labour. Men became the commodity producers and women the domestic labourers.' She goes on to say that 'it was at this point that women were structurally defined out of the labour force and became available labour, indeed, became an institutionalized inactive reserve army of labour.' The analysis of Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong is similar: 'Changes in the Canadian economic structure coincide with the increasing segregation of work, with the creation of the housewife.'<sup>52</sup> The

latent assumption in all these cases is that the nature of women's work and the productive relations in the pre-industrial stage in Canada were not critically different from those in Britain.

In pointing out how Canadian writers on women's labour tend to assume that the transition to industrialization has had similar impact on women, I am not being critical of their entire perspective. In all the authors cited, the references to industrialization are rather incidental to their main point. I am using these examples because there is no comprehensive account of the development of capitalist industrialization and its impact on women in Canada, and because I want to show that in the absence of a generalized account it is widely assumed to have followed the pattern established in earlier experiences.

In the next chapter I focus on the distinctive nature of the pre-industrial economy in Canada as a prelude to understanding the different effect of market expansion and industrial transformation on women's labour in Ontario. Economic conditions in the pre-industrial staple-exporting economy were radically different from those in pre-industrial Britain. As a result, women's labour in the family economy took a distinct form. Specifically, the characteristics of the staple-exporting economy produced a division of labour within the family that relegated female labour primarily to the private sphere. Women's association with commodity production in Ontario developed only as economic growth and industrial development increased. In subsequent chapters I will examine the complex nature of the factors that determined the extent to which women's labour would be market-oriented.

### 3 Division of Labour in a Staple-Exporting Economy

Without exception, the important economic histories of pre-industrial Canada focus on the labour of men while women's labour remains virtually invisible. This preoccupation with male labour is symptomatic of the way historians have tended to ignore women in history.[ It is also a result of a widespread undervaluation of female labour that derives from the preoccupation with market activity that dominates economic study.<sup>2</sup>

Canadian economic historians have been most interested in how the exploitation of resources for export to European markets has affected the character of the economy. Canada's attraction for Europe did not arise out of a need for land or the desire to settle and develop an agricultural society, but rather because of what it could provide to England and France in the way of fish and fur. This stress on the significance of export staples to Canadian development is known as the staple thesis. While there is considerable controversy about the period of time for which this thesis has validity, its usefulness in explaining the unique features of Canada's early years has been widely accepted.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years the staple approach has been criticized for its exclusive focus on external factors as explanations for growth and change. To some critics this 'dehumanized' approach to Canadian development tends to undervalue the significance of labour and class issues as formative aspects of that development.<sup>4</sup> For the most part the studies which have attempted to redress this imbalance in Canadian economic history have focused on labour in the staple-exporting sector or on waged labour in the early stages of industrial capitalism. That is, they are directed toward the labour relations

immediately associated with market activity. These studies of waged labour are significant advances in understanding the complexity of the problems of development and in opening up for investigation the myriad facets of social relationships integrally linked to the process of change. Nevertheless, exclusive focus on labour directly associated with market activity neglects the major portion of the total labour involved in the production of commodities and the reproduction of labour. To fully understand the nature of the economy, productive relations, and economic change in the early periods of Canada's development, it is essential that the nature and significance of the work of individuals in non-wage sectors and the relationship between non-market and market activity be understood as well.

The staple thesis has also received criticism from economic historians for its single-minded focus on exports as the engine for growth. For some, such as Louise Dechene and Jean Hamelin, the fact that only a small proportion of labour was directly involved in the staple-exporting sector is a significant indication that other forms of economic activity has been dominant even from the earliest periods.<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Buckley also questions the validity of a staple-led growth on a national scale after 1820 by pointing to the enormous growth of the labour force in Quebec in the nineteenth century even though the staple trade in this province had been seriously eroded.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Douglas McCalla points to continuous growth in Ontario during periods when wheat exports were in serious trouble.<sup>7</sup> The point of all these criticisms is that the economy was considerably more diverse than most formulations of the staple thesis have indicated.

Attempts to broaden the perspective on the formative issues in Canadian growth have focused either on hitherto neglected forms of market activity or on the ability of non-staple-exporting regions to appropriate the linkages from the staple products of other regions.<sup>8</sup> Research efforts in both directions are not incompatible and even those who look to the significance of the development of internal markets, such as McCalla, do not deny the importance of the export sector in shaping the direction of the economy.<sup>9</sup> John McCallum's 'modified staple approach' does a great deal to explain how non-staple-exporting sectors of the economy are influenced by staple production, and the increased interest in the development of local markets deepens our understanding of the nature of growth.<sup>10</sup> Yet

both these analyses explain economic development solely in terms of market-oriented activity. I attempt to add another dimension to the explanation of development in a staple-exporting economy by examining the nature of labour in the non-market areas of production and by trying to understand the relationship between market and non-market production.

### General Characteristics of Staple Production

Staple production depends primarily upon two complementary conditions. One is the availability of a natural resource and the other is a high foreign demand for this resource. The extent to which any undeveloped land is affected by staple production depends upon the quantity and accessibility of the resource and the level of demand for that resource in foreign markets. In 'empty' lands the presence of abundant resources alone is insufficient to stimulate development, unless there are population or political pressures which make the cultivation of new areas attractive. In Canada the pattern of settlement and development of the economy was directly related to the production of staples.

Staples are products having a high natural resource content which are produced for export. The way in which the autonomous demand for various staples has affected the pattern of economic growth and social formations in Canada was 'discovered' by Harold Innis and W.A. Mackintosh, although their perspectives on the significance and impact of staple production had different emphases.<sup>11</sup> For Mackintosh the prosperity of a colony would depend almost entirely on its ability to export staples. His emphasis was on the way the export-led sector would progressively involve a colonial economy in the development of an infrastructure leading to an integrated, mature industrial economy.<sup>12</sup> Innis's interpretation also incorporated the significance of the staple for the development of an infrastructure, particularly in relation to communication networks, but his analysis of the effect of staple development was more complex than Mackintosh's. Innis was interested not only in the growth aspects of staple production but also in the impact of specific kinds of staple production on development and change in social structure. Equally important to Innis's analysis was the dependent nature of any economy dominated by staple exports. He was particularly concerned about the various ways in which growth

could be skewed in favour of one or another region and how it could be periodically inhibited by factors external to the economy. For Innis the very nature of staple development contained contradictions that would prevent the development of a fully integrated, autonomous economy.<sup>13</sup>

This emphasis on the dependent and volatile character of an economy based on staple production is an important starting-point for a study of the nature of productive relations and the organization of labour, because the form that the social organization of production took was shaped, in significant ways, by the instability of the economy.

Any economy in which the export sector dominates market activity is particularly vulnerable to external forces. The source of the vulnerability comes essentially from the inability to use the staple in any way other than for sale on foreign markets.<sup>14</sup> The extent of the vulnerability depends on a variety of factors, many of which are directly related to the nature of the demand for and supply of the staple itself. For some staples, like fish, the demand was relatively stable in the early years since exports were mainly to Roman Catholic countries in Europe where taste was not an issue in determining relative price levels.<sup>15</sup> But, for a staple like fur, changes in fashion could drastically change prices and could either greatly spur or inhibit production. In addition to taste, the demand for a particular staple could also be affected by a rise in competition, changes in tariffs or other trade regulations, or any change in the political or economic circumstances of the trading partner.

While the most dramatic influences on staple production were likely to be from external forces, the domestic economy was not immune from the effects of economic growth on production of the staple itself. The depletion of some resources in areas where they were once easily accessible is the most obvious reason necessitating a shift in production away from certain export staples. In some cases this was the result of overharvesting in response to strong foreign demand (as in the depletion of the white pine forests in Ontario), but in other cases it had to do with the pressures of increased growth and colonization itself. Fur-trading, in particular, was incompatible with population growth because the fur-bearing animals were eliminated as settlements grew.<sup>16</sup> But changes in the nature of the supply of a staple were more important for the direction of economic growth in the long term, while changes in demand conditions were felt more immediately.

These vagaries of demand and supply conditions are significant problems for any economy tied to staple development, but the unique features of Canada's situation made its economy particularly subject to external forces. As a new country it had to rely heavily on the migration of capital and labour to exploit natural resources.<sup>17</sup> The extraordinary distances from the original sources of supply meant that methods of production and labour organization had to be developed to conserve these factors of production. The smallness of the population, the immense size of the territory, and the great distances from markets dictated the exploitation of resources which were either extremely scarce elsewhere or which advanced the mercantile interests of the parent nation.

The problems of size and distance also mitigated against diversity in production. Domestic markets remained underdeveloped for a long time, largely because of the problems of bringing surpluses to markets. The export orientation in the early periods did little to develop an integrated domestic economy. Also, not unimportant in limiting domestic trade were the mercantile interests of both England and France, which restricted certain industries in the colonies. The mercantile objective was to extract from colonies materials to be used in manufacturing in the parent country. The manufactured articles, in turn, were to be exported to the colony. The French, for example, preserved the manufacturing of fur hats for themselves and the British restricted Canada's boat-building industry through requirements that all trade be conducted on British ships.<sup>18</sup> In the early periods these kinds of policies had an impact on production for local use, but even when specific restrictions no longer applied, imports from the manufacturing centres which had already experienced an industrial revolution were strong competition that not only prevented the development of a Canadian manufacturing export sector, but also inhibited the growth of a strong industry directed toward domestic consumption. The export of agricultural products and lumber also developed slowly because alternative sources of supply were closer to markets and therefore cheaper than Canadian exports.<sup>19</sup>

The vulnerability of a staple-exporting economy is highly correlated to its stage of development, with more violent swings occurring in the early periods.<sup>20</sup> But any economy whose export-led sector is the mainspring for growth will be subject to external conditions over which it has little control and which will inhibit its ability to develop a coherent, integrated economy. For Innis, the unstable



nature of a staple-exporting economy was tied to structural rigidities associated with this type of production.<sup>21</sup> Innis identified rigidities of the staple trade as rooted in monopolistic pricing, high fixed overhead costs, unused capacity, and a relatively high burden of debt. These rigidities had varying effects depending on the particular nature of the dominant staple. But in general the rigidities were associated with the high cost of resource extraction due to great distances from markets and the lack of integration and development in the domestic economy. Most important for Canada were the large capital costs involved in developing transportation routes to serve the export sector. These costs were long-term in nature and had to be carried regardless of fluctuations in the market. The problem of fixed overhead costs was further accentuated by the problem of unused capacity. The highly specialized nature of staple production did not generate diversified use of communication networks. These networks were originated to serve the export sector and tended to have a rather lagged effect on integrating the domestic economy. The overall result was that the considerable investment necessary for extending the export sector was slow to stimulate integration of the domestic economy. The important point with regard to the volatile nature of an economy based on staple production is that the domestic economy was not in any position to regulate its fate. The 'openness' of the economy made it vulnerable to fluctuations in international markets.

In Canada, the fluctuations were extreme and necessitated specific strategies on the part of capital and labour so that staple production and social reproduction would continue.<sup>22</sup> For the owners of capital it was particularly important both that labour costs be prevented from rising too rapidly and that there be some measure of protection from the high overhead costs of communication. In this last respect the technical innovations in transportation and ultimately the activity of government in large-scale investment projects were critical. As more capital was needed to improve and extend communication networks, the inadequacy of the private sector to carry out these projects became obvious.<sup>23</sup> Expansion of the territory of the resource-extracting sector and the interests of the commercial sector in improved transportation forced government participation so that development could proceed.

Coping with the problem of high labour costs was a persistent problem for employers in Canada, since the chronic shortage of

labour had the tendency to bid wages up. In the early periods, contract labour solved some of the problems of severe labour shortages,<sup>24</sup> but this method of providing labour also presented problems. Most serious was the fact that in the exporting sectors work tended to be seasonal and necessitated the expense of carrying labour during periods when there was little work to do. As Pentland has pointed out in *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860*, the development of adequate supplies of labour has been a distinctive feature of Canadian economic history. The problem of labour organization was resolved to a considerable extent by the dual nature of the Canadian economy dating from the beginning of settlement. The volatile aspects of market-oriented activity meant that the capitalist sector alone would have great difficulty sustaining the requirements of its own labour force. The maintenance and reproduction of labour needed a more stable base from which to proceed, both from the perspective of capital and from that of labour.

### Dual Nature of the Economy: Market and Non-market Production

The basic point of the staple theory is to explain how the technology and geographical circumstances associated with specific staple commodities affected patterns of development and how the character of the staple affected productive relations and social organization. The specific nature of productive relations varied considerably according to the nature of the staple produced and conditions of time and space. Some forms of staple production, such as timber production in the Ottawa Valley from the mid-nineteenth century, were organized as capitalist ventures. Others, such as wheat production in Ontario, were carried out by independent commodity producers.<sup>25</sup>

In the pre-industrial period, export-oriented staple production was primarily responsible for the pace, character, and direction of market development. However, market growth was not a constant or even a characteristic feature of economic life for substantial periods of Canada's history, and much of the economic activity of the country was not directly related to the staple trade. The tendency of economic historians to focus on market relations has obscured the significance of non-market production and the labour organization characteristic of this type of economic activity.<sup>26</sup>

Allan Greer has made the very important point that, in fact, the bulk of productive activity in the pre-industrial period operated outside a market system. Greer argues that the nature of this activity has been ignored because 'these people and their productive efforts made little or no contribution to the accumulation of capital.'<sup>27</sup> While I concur with Greer's understanding of the predominance of non-market activity, I think he underestimates its significance to economic development in general, possibly because his major study of subsistence rural production focused on areas where the economy remained relatively static during the periods he studied.<sup>28</sup> Greer's perspective considers capital accumulation only in the narrow sense of that accumulated directly through capitalist activity. I argue, rather, that the contribution of non-market production was integrally related to staple production and other forms of market-oriented activity. The labour involved in non-market activity was critical to the accumulation of capital both in those activities characterized by capitalist productive relations and in those characterized by independent commodity production.

### *Capitalist Production*

The process of capital accumulation in countries on the periphery of capitalist development is highly dependent on the existence of subsistence production in agriculture. The existence of subsistence production serves a variety of functions, but its primary importance for the capitalist sector is in supplying and maintaining a labour force at prices which permit capital accumulation in this sector.<sup>29</sup> This was particularly important in a staple-exporting economy where labour shortages tended to drive up wage rates. In Canada the capitalist staple-extracting sector relied on the subsistence sector for its labour supply, but even more important, the subsistence sector, by its very existence, was able to supply this labour relatively cheaply. The key to the availability of labour at prices which encouraged capital accumulation was a division of labour by gender such that women's primary economic activities were associated with non-wage, non-market work in subsistence production.

But first, the interconnections between subsistence production and capitalist organized production need to be explained. These will be examined from two perspectives: that related to the requirements of capital accumulation, given the nature of the economy; and

that related to the strategy necessary for family units to cope with the economic constraints and conditions they faced.

The focuses of labour and capital in the development and settlement process were distinctly different. Mercantile capital was attracted to the economy because of high returns expected from staple exports. In the pre-industrial period the capital movement related to the domestic economy was primarily that which was brought by settlers. Foreign capitalists were relatively uninterested in domestic production in the colonies.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, the attraction of labour to Canada, particularly to central Canada, had less to do with the availability of employment in the staple trades than the interest in land. While initial transfers of labour, mostly male, were associated with staple trades, either directly for work in staple production or indirectly for military employment, agrarian settlement was usually the objective of families. As a result, a potential conflict emerged between the capitalist sector's demand for labour and the possibility of alternative employment for labour on the land. Nevertheless, the logic of staple development forestalled the economic integration necessary for the growth of independent agrarian units, at least for substantial periods of time. In spite of these competing demands for labour, a symbiotic relationship developed between the capitalist demand for labour and labour requirements in independent production.

The relationship between subsistence production and capitalist production varied depending on the dominant staple, but a broad pattern is distinguishable. Since staple production and the capital development related to it were often seasonal or temporary, there was not a high demand for a permanent labour force in this sector. Generally, there was a core of labour hired on a permanent basis, but for the most part labour was employed intermittently.<sup>31</sup> From the perspective of employers in the capitalized sector, the ideal labour force was readily available, but when necessary was capable of finding alternative support during slack seasons or years. In this way the responsibility for maintaining the labour force would not have to be borne totally by the employer. To this end the sexual division of labour, the underdeveloped domestic economy, and the need for domestic units to have money to pay for imported goods were factors that contributed to meeting the labour needs of capital.

The division of labour between males and females in pre-industrial Canada was rigid and distinct. Undoubtedly it was predi-

cated on the notion that the basic responsibility of women was to feed, clothe, and care for family members and to supplement male labour in the male spheres of production when necessary. This perspective on the proper work for women was basically unchanged from that of European societies.<sup>32</sup> While labour shortages in Canada might have led to some different forms of the division of labour between the sexes,<sup>33</sup> the reinforcement of traditional customs as a result of successive waves of immigration, and the logic of peasant production which favoured high birth rates, kept women tied to the subsistence non-market activities associated with the household.

In recent years the significance of female labour in the subsistence sector has been recognized as being crucial to capital accumulation. This recognition follows from a more general analysis which has tried to explain the importance of domestic labour to capitalist industrial development.<sup>34</sup> In Ontario the significance of female non-waged labour in the pre-industrial period can be examined in relation to capital accumulation in both the capitalized areas of the economy and the commodity production of the family economy.

Carmen Deere and James Sacouman have argued that in economies where labourers' families have access to subsistence production, employers need not concern themselves with providing a wage that would maintain the worker and this family.<sup>35</sup> The fact that wages paid to labourers can be reduced by having a portion of the family's needs provided by non-wage labour means that a greater part of the labour time of the worker can be appropriated by the employer.<sup>36</sup> In an economy where the nature of market-oriented activity meant that temporary employment was more characteristic than permanent waged labour, such as in pre-industrial Ontario, the subsistence agricultural labour of families was particularly important.<sup>37</sup> Women's labour, then, in subsistence production served the process of capital accumulation in the capitalist sector in critical ways. By providing unpaid labour on the land, women 'freed' men for varying periods of time for waged labour. Yet because a certain level of subsistence was provided by female agricultural labour, the capitalist sector could avoid paying wages equal to the cost of maintaining the worker and his family. This permitted accumulation in the capitalist sector to proceed at a rate higher than would have occurred had the price of labour power been greater.

The rationale for the division of labour within the family between market and non-market activities reflected the structure of the economy and was a strategy to cope with the imperatives of the dominant market activity. While this division of labour in agriculture was not simply a response to the desire to maintain low wages on the part of the capitalist sector, it nevertheless reflects the strategy necessitated by the specific conditions of staple production.

The most notable condition was the unstable nature of the economy, a factor which shaped the parameters of economic activity for the family. Because of the uncertainty of income obtainable from market activity (as either wage labourers or direct producers), families were forced to pursue strategies which would both permit them access to the market and protect them to some degree from the uncertainty of market behaviour. Subsistence agricultural production gave a measure of security by providing a substantial portion of the family's needs. That this has historically been significant in Canadian economic development was pointed out in the Rowell-Sirois Commission report: 'However prices might fall and cash income from other sources might melt away, the farm household always produced enough to prevent abject poverty ... the sharp and frequent trade fluctuations of the [pre-Confederation] period did not cause profound dislocations.'<sup>38</sup> As Greer points out, the safety-first imperative of the rural economy required that dependence on the market be avoided.<sup>39</sup>

However, agricultural pursuits alone frequently were inadequate to meet a family's income needs, particularly in the early pioneering periods of any region in pre-industrial Ontario when markets were seriously underdeveloped. While agricultural units tended to operate on a subsistence basis, they were not entirely self-sufficient. Vernon Fowke has argued that the perception of pre-industrial agriculturalists as self-sufficient, a view which has become an integral part of Canadian folklore, is essentially wrong. He shows how the pioneer economy of the nineteenth century forced farmers 'initially and continuously into reliance on an exchange and monetary economy.'<sup>40</sup> Even from the beginnings of settlement, when fur was the dominant export staple, substantial amounts of goods were consumed which could not be produced on individual farm units or within the colony. Food, clothing, and

implements were provided in varying degrees by foreign markets.<sup>41</sup> Although trading within the community, often by means of barter, direct labour exchanges, or various forms of payment in kind, provided many items which could not be produced by the household itself, the limited nature of colonial manufacturing meant that substantial amounts of goods for consumption and production could not be obtained except through foreign markets. For these transactions, cash was needed, and to the extent that agricultural markets could not provide the necessary income, some members of the family might be forced to engage in work for wages. Pointing out that the pre-industrial family economy was not entirely self-sufficient does not negate the essentially subsistence character of the economy. Although trade and waged work existed to some extent, production for the market did not dominate economic activity.

### *Independent Commodity Production*

The significance of subsistence activity with regard to capitalist production in a staple-exporting economy is clear: its function is to provide a cheap labour force for the dominant sector. However, the significance of subsistence production becomes somewhat more complex when it is understood that the semi-proletarianization of labour was not the only dimension of labour in staple production. In some forms of staple production, waged labour was insignificant, with the work being carried on by individual producers who owned the means of production. This method of production is frequently referred to as independent or petty commodity production. While there are some difficulties with using these terms, primarily because of the inappropriateness of the term 'commodity production' when capitalist relations of production are not present, they are generally accepted as terms for market-oriented production carried on by individual household units where waged labour is not the primary source of labour power.<sup>43</sup> In the sense that the term 'commodity production' implies expropriation of the fruits of labour for purposes of accumulation by the owner of the means of production, it will be an appropriate term here.

Generally, labour involved in independent commodity production is seen as undifferentiated labour; the members of a family unit are

treated as a 'collectivity' of labour whose economic objectives are compatible and whose contributions and rewards are symmetrical. A.V. Chayanov's study of peasant economy was path-breaking because it showed that the objective of this type of family economy were not identical with those of an economy where wage labour was common.<sup>44</sup> However, in his study, because wages were not paid in the family economy, he treated family labour as essentially undifferentiated. This treatment is not untypical and is used even in studies concerned specifically with women. Generally the family is seen as a unit rewarded collectively for its work. For example, Ann Oakley, in a discussion of pre-industrial family industry, says its two basic characteristics were 'the unity of capital and labour: the family both owned the stock and tools and contributed the labour (receiving the monetary return for labour as a "family" wage).'<sup>45</sup>

The stress is usually on the interdependence between the labour of men and women, with the implication that the interdependence is reciprocal. In this sense a certain equality of labour is taken for granted. I take issue with this view of the family economy in the next section, where the nature of productive relations in the family will be discussed. But here it is necessary to point out that in the sense that ownership of the means of production was distinctly in the hands of the male head of the family, women's subsistence production served essentially the same function for the accumulation of capital in the family unit that engaged in commodity production as it did in the capitalist sector. That is, to the extent that women's productive efforts were able to feed and cloth the family, male labour was free to engage in production for exchange on the market; to the extent that the total income from market production need not be expended on consumption, accumulation of capital in the family productive unit could occur.

This is not to imply that female labour was confined solely to subsistence production. In some forms of commodity production women's labour at specific periods was crucial to the market-oriented production process. This was particularly evident in the work of Indian women in the fur trade and women's labour in shore work in the fishing industry. However, my point is that the non-market-oriented activity was critical to the accumulation of capital and that this work was more central to women's economic activity than was their market-oriented activity.

## **Patriarchal Relations of Production**

### *Paternalism*

Labour relations in an economy dominated by staple production, when they are discussed at all, are usually accepted as developing from those characterized as 'personal' or 'paternalistic' to those commonly recognized as the 'classical (abundant) labour market of industrial capitalism.'<sup>46</sup> Paternalistic labour relations refer specifically to relations between employers and employees, controlled less by market exchange than by personal relationships and bonds of mutual obligation. Because of the shortage of labour on the one hand and the unavailability of alternative forms of paid employment on the other, both the worker and the employer were obliged to respond to incentives other than those that would dominate a true labour market. The central obligation on the part of the paternalistic employer was to provide the 'fixed costs' of subsistence and reproduction in exchange for a reliable supply of labour.<sup>47</sup>

The issue is not whether paternalistic relations of production existed, but the extent to which these were the most prevalent forms of labour organization in the economy. For the permanent labour force of the fur trade and very early industrial enterprises, which Pentland focuses on, the description is probably fairly accurate.<sup>48</sup> But for the labour force employed on an intermittent basis (which Pentland acknowledges was typical of pre-industrial societies) in the fur trade and other forms of staple production there was considerably less obligation on the part of the employer to supply the worker with his annual overhead, particularly if that cost included the worker's family as well.

In the period of the great staple exports, the concept of paternalistic labour relations pertains to only a small fraction of the total relations of production. The greatest proportion of production involving the largest number of working people was centred on the family: the productive relations of this unit, although certainly related to paternalism, were distinct. Paternalism clearly involved unequal power arising from the relationship to the means of production and the conditions affecting the supply of labour. The paternalistic employer acted toward dependants 'as a father does to his wife, his children and his servants.'<sup>49</sup> It was a case of transferring traditional forms of control and organization to market relations.

But the more fundamental relations of production, the patriarchal relations of production within the household, were distinct because of the added dimensions of family ties and sexual subordination.

Patriarchal productive relations can be defined as the organization of labour in which males, as husbands, fathers, and even sons and brothers, have power over the productive activities of their children, wives, and sometimes their sisters and mothers. This power was not confined simply to non-waged labour in the home but, since family labour was the most prevalent form of labour in the pre-industrial period, it will be the focus of my discussion of patriarchal productive relations.

### *Patriarchy*

In the agricultural sector, the non-waged labour of family members was the most important source of labour power. The significance of family labour to agricultural production is well known, but the social relations of this type of production are rarely considered.<sup>50</sup> The concept of a family economy implies an indivisibility of income and a community of effort that does not easily lend itself to the type of class analysis possible when the object of study is waged labour. Yet the issue of ownership and control of labour is as significant in the family economy as it is in more identifiably capitalist relationships.

In most analyses of productive relations the issue of ownership is understood to be critical to establishing power and control. The very principles of organization of labour within a society are based on who does and who does not own the means of production: ownership implies not simply possession but all the social institutions developed to recognize property rights. How property relations are recognized by society is most directly evident in the laws which protect property relations. But the issue of ownership extends beyond the strictly legal aspects of control, for all of the social standards, customs, and the entire complex of human relations are influenced by this fundamental relationship. The significance of who owns property at any stage in the development process has been summed up by Oscar Lange: 'It is the ownership of the means of production which decides the ways in which they are used and which thereby determines the forms taken by co-operation and the division of labour. Moreover the ownership of the means of production deter-

mines the issue of who owns the products, and hence decides how they are distributed."

The usual analysis of class relations deals with those clearly identified through market activity. That is, class interests are evident when owners are employers and workers receive wages. When there is no waged labour present, such as in simple or independent commodity production, the ownership is usually treated as being vested in the group which performs the labour - the family. When ownership by the family is understood to be communal, the issue of systematic domination and exploitation in the production process cannot be admitted as a possibility. Whatever accumulation of capital occurs is not seen as an expropriation of anyone's surplus labour if it is assumed that the group shares in ownership.

However, the family in nineteenth-century Ontario was not an egalitarian unit and neither custom nor law considered that the family *per se* owned the means of production. Only under exceptional circumstances did women own the means of production. For the most part property was owned by the male head of the family. Wives and children were the proletariat of the family farm, the workers whose labour was rewarded according to the good fortune or goodwill of the owner. The significance of male control over female labour has been obscured because of the conjugal relationship, their mutual dependence, and their shared standard of living, yet female labour was not in a position of equality with male labour in the family economy where the ownership and control of property were in the hands of the male alone.

The important point to be made here is that the question of power through property relations in general is not unique to capitalist relations, but is crucial to understanding productive relations within the family economy as well.<sup>2</sup> Male control over labour was established through the power of ownership. In the family economy the issue of power was complicated by the personal relationships of the family and the fact that the male head of the family was clearly part of the labouring unit. But his position was distinct from the others; all surplus produced by the non-waged workers who did not share in ownership was, in effect, expropriated by the owner.<sup>3</sup> Whatever accumulation of capital occurred was legally his. Non-waged family workers had certain rights with respect to their membership in the family: children and wives could claim support from their fathers or husbands, but the general understanding was

that this support was their right, less by virtue of their contribution than by virtue of their economic helplessness. They had no legal rights to what they produced through their labour even though the contribution of family members was critical to the success or failure of the economy of the family unit.

The implications of patriarchal productive relations were distinct for different forms of labour within the family unit. While male and female children and wives were all labourers subject to the authority of the male owner of the means of production, there were significant differences in the duration and extent of patriarchal dominance. Until the father died or gave his property away he exerted considerable control over his children's labour. But male and female children were treated differently, particularly with regard to their ultimate relationship to property. For women, both as children and as wives, patriarchal control took a different form than it did for men in that it did not cease with the passing of time, but was likely to continue throughout their lifetimes.

### *The Law*

Male domination in property issues was stipulated in law in nineteenth-century Ontario. The rights of women to own property and even to claim ownership of the product of their own labour were severely restricted. Single women over twenty-one years of age and widows were, by law, given the same rights as males over property. But inheritance practices and social and legal restrictions with regard to occupation and appropriate behaviour meant that most property was controlled by males. For single women the period of time during which they were likely to be legally free from the control of either a husband or a father was non-existent or comparatively short. (See Appendix, Table 15.) For most women the property protection for single women was irrelevant.

The labour a single woman provided on the property of a male relative generally was understood to have been freely provided and did not provide the woman with either a claim on the property or a claim to a wage. Paul Craven's study of court cases in nineteenth-century Ontario indicates that the law upheld the assumption that any work a woman performed for a member of her family was part of her natural duty. In one striking case, where a woman unsuccessfully sued her brother for wages for the work she had per-

formed for several years on his farm, the judge was explicit in this regard:

Nothing was more natural than an unmarried young woman should live with and keep house for her brother, especially while he was also unmarried, and that without the idea of hiring or wages entering into the mind of either. It would be we fear a mischievous doctrine to lay down that in every case in which a niece, or cousin, or sister in law is proved to be living in a farmer's house, treated in every way as one of the family, and assisting in the work of doing all or most of the house-work, she could, in the absence of any evidence whatsoever as to hiring or wages, be held entitled to the direction of a judge that the law in such a case implied a promise to pay <sup>54</sup>

Until 1859 married women in English Canada had no right to property in their own name. This legal disability was based on English common law where, in the words of the English jurist Sir William Blackstone, 'the husband and wife are one and that one is the husband.'<sup>55</sup> Upon marriage women were considered the responsibility of their husbands and in this respect the law recognized it as the wife's legal right to be supported by the husband.<sup>56</sup> But the price of protection was the loss of independence of action, and of ownership and legal control over the products of a woman's labour. Even the primary products of her labour, her children, were legally under her husband's control. Until about the mid-nineteenth century, she could not claim them as her own under any circumstances and even when her husband died she would not automatically be recognized as the legal parent. Her husband could, if he wanted, appoint someone other than their mother as their legal guardian. In fact, anything a woman might produce, sell, or earn through her labour was legally the property of her husband and she could not use or dispose of it without his approval.

By mid-century, legislation was enacted to expand women's rights with regard to both their children and their property. In 1855 an act was passed giving women in Ontario the possibility of obtaining custody of their children under twelve years of age in cases where the judge 'saw fit.'<sup>57</sup> It followed similar custody legislation passed in England in 1839. In some cases, the courts rendered progressive interpretations of the law and women were not only awarded custody of their children, but also provision for their maintenance.

However, in the majority of cases, courts upheld the idea that the common law rights of fathers over their children was not abrogated by enactment of the new legislation. According to legal historian Constance Backhouse, improved custody rights for women had less to do with women's rights, per se, than with the growing recognition of the need to protect children and to award custody in their interests.<sup>58</sup>

In response to considerable pressure from women, the Ontario government in 1859 passed An Act to Secure to Married Women Certain Separate Property Rights.<sup>59</sup> This act gave women rights to property they had owned before marriage which had not been covered by a marriage contract or settlement. However, a wife's earnings still belonged to her husband and while the law legally entitled her to make a will, her heirs could only be her husband or her children <sup>60</sup> Once again, while the intent of the law seemed fairly clear, the tendency of the courts was to continue to uphold a husband's control over his wife's property, including her ability to make contracts and to convey her land.<sup>61</sup> The Married Women's Act of 1872 extended women's property rights somewhat. With this act, married women were permitted to own and administer separate property and to enter into contracts as though they were unmarried.<sup>62</sup> However, they were not given increased control over family property; rather, women's power existed only with regard to property that was distinctly in their name alone. With the Married Women's Property Act, a woman's earnings were considered her separate property. However, this provision was limited to earnings specifically arising out of the woman's employment in a trade or occupation where her husband had no proprietary interest. So while a married woman would be permitted to retain the earnings she might receive from production on her own land, from waged work, or from any special literary or artistic talent she might possess, she would not be legally entitled to the income from her labour on the family enterprise because the family property was still legally the husband's. The change in the law regarding women's property did not change the control a man could exercise over his wife's labour. His consent was still needed if she wanted to work for wages or engage in some sort of business on her own.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century the law was gradually improved so that its intent in providing greater property protection was clear. By the end of the century, women's

separate property rights were considerably more secure than they had been at mid-century.

### *Inheritance*

While family practices may have mitigated the practical effects of the law for some women in their daily lives, the significance of male legal superiority became especially clear when the husband or father died. An examination of the wills in one county - Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry, Ontario - for two periods, from 1800 to 1811 and from 1850 to 1858, gives a clear indication of the tenuous claim women had on all forms of property.<sup>64</sup> The wills indicate not only the infrequency with which property was transferred to women, but also the understanding of the will-maker that the family property was entirely his. This particular county was chosen because records of wills are available from the early period of settlement and a comparison can therefore be made between inheritance practices when land was relatively plentiful and when it became more scarce. For the purposes of this study it would have been preferable to use data from a county more oriented toward wheat production, but since such counties were settled later, the changes in inheritance practices over a fairly long period of time (i.e., from mid-century when data are available to the end of the century) also reflected changes in legislation regarding women's property rights. While the changes in inheritance are significant in indicating the relative strength of patriarchal control as the economy became more industrialized and laws changed, at this point I want to focus on patriarchal control of all forms of property before legislative changes occurred.<sup>65</sup>

Although Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry County did not generate the wealth typical of wheat-exporting counties farther west, the economy in the early period relied heavily on timber exports and later was strongly influenced by the staple-exporting trade of other sections of the province.<sup>66</sup> To establish the validity of using information from this county as an indication of the general nature of female inheritance in the first half of the nineteenth century, I have also examined the wills of a wheat staple-exporting county, Wellington, for comparison (see Appendix, Tables 7-10). Since the inheritance pattern in Wellington County indicates that men there were

no more generous in their distribution of property to the women in their families, it is fairly reasonable to assume that the infrequency with which property was transferred to women in Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry was not atypical.

### *Wives' Inheritance*

In 1801 the Surrogate Court for the Eastern District of Ontario received a petition from Mary Links for permission to administer the estate of her husband, Matthew, who had died intestate. The inventory of his property indicates that not only were all the farm stock and implements considered to be his possessions, but all of the household items as well. Since these items are usually the tools of women's labour, their express ownership by the husband is noteworthy. Included in the inventory were the following: '1 col-lender, half a dosen of knives and forks, 1 dosen of spunes, 1 candle stick and snuffer, 2 chairs, 3 tin canasters, 1 coking glass, 1 frying pan, 1 dresser, 3 tin tumblers.'<sup>67</sup> This inventory was not an isolated instance. In most cases men did not leave wills, so the court, usually after petition from a relative, would assign someone to be an administrator of the estate and would order an inventory of property to be taken. The inventories overwhelmingly indicate that household utensils, furniture, and linens were the property of the husband.

Widows were legally able to own property, but inheritance practices were such that males exerted considerable control over their wives after their deaths. Only in rare circumstances in the first half of the nineteenth century was a woman given total control over her husband's property when he died. In the wills of males in Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry County, Ontario, for the two periods studied, women inherited their husband's property outright in only 6 to 8 per cent of the cases (Table 1). Women appear to have been given complete control of the property to dispose of without restriction only when there were no children of the husband living. But generally even if there were no children, directions were explicit about what should be done with the property after the wife's death.

Frequently the wife was given the use of the property for her lifetime, with instructions for further inheritance clearly laid out. In the early nineteenth century this was a much more common practice than later. In Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry about one-third



TABLE 1

Bequests to wives in wills by males,<sup>1</sup> Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry, Ontario, 1800-11 and 1850-58 (%)

	1800-11	1850-58
Wife inherits outright	8	6
Wife granted usufruct	30	16
Children inherit major portion	46	55
(a) son to support mother	14	19
(b) wife inherits portion	32	35
No mention of wife	16	23
Wife disinherits upon remarriage	30	35

<sup>1</sup> There was one woman who died with a will in the 1800-11 period and three with wills in the 1850-58 period.

Sample size: 1800-11 = 37; 1850-58 = 31.

Source: Public Archives of Ontario, Wills Collection csl-1251; Gs I-1253.

of the wills from 1800 to 1811 stipulated that the wife should have the estate for her lifetime. By mid-century the proportion had dropped to one-sixth.

Even when wives were left the right to the estate for life, there were many restrictions laid out. Some men were quite specific about what the wife could do with the land, including instructions about whether or not she could cut timber. But the most restrictive practice was the tendency for husbands to tie their wife's use of the property to what they felt was the appropriate way for her to live the rest of her life. It was fairly common practice for men to deprive their wives of the right to inheritance if they should remarry. For example, one farmer left his wife the management of the income from the farm for as long as she remained his widow:

In case my wife should remarry then in that case my executors herein after named and whom I also appropriate as Trustees for my children shall then take the sole management of the said farms and stock and rent or let the same or shares as they see fit and apply the said income to the benefit of my children whom they shall take the management of and see them educated and placed in such situation as said income will admit of and to give my widow a cow and four sheep with a bed and bedding and for her to have no more to say of my affairs. But if she remain my widow and so continues after the children are all educated and of age she shall

still have during her natural life the one half of the income of the said farm on which we at present reside <sup>6</sup>

Roughly a third of the wills made by men in Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry during the first half of the nineteenth century specifically limited wives' inheritance to the period they remained widows. This practice appears to have been widespread throughout Ontario, although in counties farther west the proportion of wills which explicitly forbid remarriage by mid-century was somewhat smaller.

While the threat of disinheritance undoubtedly gave women few options for the future, they did have some choice over whether they would adhere to their husbands' wishes that they not remarry. But some husbands even went so far as to stipulate that their wives would lose all property rights if they cohabited.<sup>70</sup> Over the issue of the guardianship of children, the husband's will was paramount. Women had no legal right to the guardianship of their children, either while the husband lived or when he died, and when he died he was entitled to designate anyone he chose as guardian.<sup>71</sup> Usually the mother was named as guardian, but it was not at all uncommon for the oldest son or some other male relative to be put in control of the younger children, should the wife remarry. George Crites's instructions in his will of 1804 is typical of caveats found in many wills. 'If my widow should marry I hereby obligate my said son George to bring up and maintain the rest of my children that are not able to do for themselves and use the best endeavour to see them instructed in reading and writing.'<sup>72</sup> Considering that his wife, upon remarriage, was to be disallowed the produce of the land and stock, the furniture, and the third part of the land which her husband had left her for life, her ability to care for these children would have been severely limited. The point remains that even if she had wished to, or if a new husband were prepared to assume responsibility for their maintenance, she would not have been permitted legally to assume this responsibility.

The issue of dower rights is particularly interesting with regard to a widow's claim to her husband's property. In theory a woman was to receive one-third of her husband's real and personal property upon his death, unless he designated in his will that her portion be larger. In practice this was less strict than the law would indicate.

Dower clearly did not mean that a woman would inherit one-third of the estate outright. As mentioned earlier, it was usual for a man to stipulate who would receive his property after his wife died, even if she was to have control of it during her lifetime. The exceptions to this practice are so rare that they are remarkable in themselves. For example, although Donald Fraser left his land to his grandson, his wife was given use of the household furniture, stock, and farming implements for her life. Her husband, in addition, permitted her to dispose of this property after her death 'as she may think proper amongst her children with the consent of the majority of the executors.'<sup>73</sup> Alexander McGruner did not leave his estate to his wife for her life but trusted her judgment to a degree which was extraordinary for his time and circumstances. McGruner willed that his land be divided among his male children and that 'the dividing of the same to my said children be according to the judgment and discretion of my wife as she may think and see most suitable when said children come of age.' He also permitted his wife to take what she would need when the lands were divided 'and arrangements should take place so that as my widow she may not be dependent in her advanced age.'<sup>74</sup>

It was rare for a husband to be concerned about his wife's dependency as she aged. Generally the husband ensured that his wife would be dependent upon her children through the conditions of his will. In a substantial number of the wills a son was specifically ordered to support his mother. One man, in a will which was not at all uncommon, left instructions for the care of his wife. 'The two sons were to share all of his property 'except the lower front room in the home which I have for the use of my wife Catherine as long as she is my widow and likewise she is to have a decent maintenance of the place suitable to her condition. But if she will marry she shall have what property she brought to my home and no more, neither will she have any title to hire, rent, or let the room to any other person or persons but for her own use only, then to be the property of my sons aforesaid.'<sup>75</sup> Generally the wills did not describe in detail how the wife would be maintained. Rather, sons were simply instructed to maintain their mother for life or as long as she remained a widow. In some cases it was specified that the support be 'in a kind, comfortable, and respectable manner' or suitable to her sex and station in life.

Clearly the conditions of dower could be satisfied without specifically settling how much a widow would receive. And whatever protection dower gave a woman, it did not extend beyond her widowhood. The vague stipulation that the wife should be provided for by the heirs of the estate increased from 14 per cent of the wills in the beginning of the century to almost one-fifth by mid-century. This practice could be a reflection of the general tendency for estates to be settled on one son as land became more scarce and farm sizes decreased.

The effect of making women so dependent on their sons could create real hardship and loss of position. Frances Stewart described her widowhood as a period of extreme dependency where she was never 'allowed ... to think or act but as ... guided or directed.'<sup>78</sup> While widows may have appeared to have exchanged dependency on their husbands for dependency on their sons, the loss of position in the family could drastically change their real circumstances. Susannah Moodie claimed that in some families, especially those newly in the middle class, a widow was little more than a drudge: 'the mother, if left in poor circumstances, almost invariably holds a subordinate position in her wealthy son's or daughter's family. She superintends the servants, and nurses the younger children; and her time is occupied by a number of minute domestic labours, that allow her very little rest in her old age. I have seen the grandmother in a wealthy family ironing the fine linen or broiling over the cook-stove, while her daughter held her place in the drawing room.'<sup>79</sup> In these circumstances the women rarely had any alternative but to submit to the conditions in their children's households.<sup>80</sup>

The most common inheritance practice and one reflected in about a third of the wills studied was for the wife to inherit for her lifetime a portion of the estate, with the bulk to go to the children. If the farmer was relatively wealthy her inheritance would include land, but if the farm was small the usual practice was for one son to inherit the land, with the mother receiving the produce from a specific portion of it. John Munro was a wealthy farmer who willed that his wife be supported from the income from the property and be given the use of the house until her son married. When the son married he was to repair another house on the property for his mother's use, but if she decided to live with any of her children she was to continue to receive the same allowance from the estate 'in

order to compensate them for her support.' While John Munro envisaged this income from the estate as ultimately belonging to whoever cared for his wife, he urged his children to give their mother enough so that 'she may have what will be sufficient to keep her comfortable during her lifetime.' John Munro obviously felt somewhat guilty about his treatment of his wife and explained why she was not given control over his will: 'I should have appointed her executrix, but being sensible of her disposition I conceived it dangerous to the interest of the family.'<sup>81</sup>

Occasionally the will stipulated that the wife's share was to be in lieu of dower. In a few cases there appears to have been a conscious effort to see that the wife's one-third interest was actually what she received. But for the most part the wife's rightful and legal claim seems not to have been an issue. The fact that very few women made wills and none, during the periods examined, contested the wills of their husbands indicates the lack of control women had over property.<sup>82</sup> Women's main security in property rights was their husbands' sense of duty to provide for them after they died.

### *Daughters' Inheritance*

Patriarchal control placed sons and daughters on significantly different footings as labourers in the family economy. The labour of sons was more likely to result in a substantial share of the father's assets than the labour of daughters. In an economy where labour was scarce and land relatively plentiful, the ability of the father to retain the labour of his children often was crucial to the success or failure of the family enterprise.<sup>83</sup> The father was frequently able to assure his labour supply through the promise of land transference to his sons. When there were sons and daughters in the family, the daughters seldom shared equally in the distribution of the family property when the father died (Table 2). This could be a reflection of the greater value placed on the labour of male children and the desire to retain these services as long as possible, or it could reflect the social and legal restrictions which would have meant that any part of the estate left to a daughter would ultimately have been controlled by her husband. Most likely both these factors influenced a father's decision to exclude his daughters from a substantial share of his estate. The sexual division of labour whereby females tended to work most often at tasks associated with family subsistence and

TABLE 2

Bequests to daughters in wills by males,<sup>1</sup> Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry, Ontario, 1800-11 and 1850-58 (%)

	1800-11	1850-58
Daughters not mentioned	38	25
Daughters left all	3	3.5
Daughters inherit equally	8	14
Daughters given lesser portion of land	22	3.5
Daughters paid small sum; given chattels, personal property, furniture; or to be maintained by brother	30	54

<sup>1</sup> There was one woman who died with a will in the 1800-11 period and three with wills in the 1850-58 period.

Sample size: 1800-11 = 37; 1850-58 = 31

Source: Public Archives of Ontario, Wills Collection, Gs1-1251; Gs1-1253

household maintenance would undoubtedly have made the daughter's labour appear less valuable to the farmer than the labour of sons, who would be more associated with labour directed toward the market.

The division of property among sons took a variety of forms. Sometimes it was given to the oldest son outright, but more frequently it was divided among the sons in a way so that each would have some property.<sup>84</sup> While the more or less equal division of land among sons was fairly common in the early part of the nineteenth century, the effect of this sort of property transfer over time, coupled with land scarcity in certain areas, meant that smaller and smaller parcels of land were being transferred. In order to pass on enough land to ensure an adequate 'man/land' ratio, repeated subdivisions of land had to be avoided.<sup>85</sup>

To this end a type of land transfer known as the 'English-Canadian' system of inheritance developed.<sup>86</sup> In this system the bulk of the estate would be passed on to a single son, usually the oldest, and he in turn was obliged to settle certain amounts on other children in the family. Sometimes though, the younger sons were given lesser amounts of land and the principal inheritor was obliged only to provide the daughters with some amount specified in the will. Generally the daughters did not fare well regardless of the system of inheritance." In 1803, Adam Johnston of Cornwall, Ontario, left his sons equal shares of his 400-acre estate. His

daughters Nancy, Margaret, Janet, Jane, and Mary-Ann were to be given 'one shilling if demanded.'<sup>88</sup> While this appears to have been a particularly spiteful way to single out daughters in a will, this may not have been the intention. In a large proportion of the wills daughters were not mentioned at all.<sup>89</sup> But sometimes their omission is explained by the father as a consequence of their having already received what he thought appropriate.<sup>90</sup> The usual practice was for a father to settle some form of property or money on a daughter as her dowry when she married. Sons who inherited the bulk of the estate were frequently instructed to maintain their sisters until they were married, at which time they were to be given a cow or some sheep, sometimes with a little money as well.

The majority of wills either did not mention daughters or specified a legacy which was a small sum of money, some personal property, a portion of the family furniture when the mother died, or a cow, pig, or sheep.<sup>91</sup> In the early part of the century almost a third of the wills left some portion of the land to daughters. Generally this consisted of a small part of the total estate, with the major part going to the male heirs. But by mid-century, no doubt because of the scarcity of land in the district, the practice of leaving any land at all to daughters was drastically reduced. While over one-fifth of the wills in the early period left daughters a small parcel of land from the estate, by mid-century this was reduced to less than 5 per cent.

The striking feature of the wills is the extent to which it is assumed that daughters would be totally dependent on a male, either a brother or a husband, for support. The few exceptions to this practice are interesting for what they indicate about women's work. Duncan McDonald, for example, wanted to ensure that his wife and daughters would have some source of income for themselves. In his will, although he left everything to his son with the usual caveat that he provide the women with 'sufficient fuel, provisions and other necessaries usual with their sex and station,' the son was further instructed to see that each daughter receive one cow and one fatted hog each year to dispose of as she wished. He also specified that 'the females [are] to have all poultry and the produce as their sole property.'<sup>92</sup>

A female had little recourse in law if she felt that her inheritance was an unfair reflection of her contribution to the family economy. Craven's study gives the example of one woman who had lived and cared for her father for years under the assumption that she would

inherit from him when he died. Her suit for recompense for her labour was not found in her favour because, as the judge commented, 'this young woman could not be living any where else more properly than with her aged and infirm parent; and if she did acts of service, instead of living idly, it is no more than she ought to have done in return for her clothes and board, to say nothing of the claims of natural affection which usually lead children to render such services.'<sup>93</sup>

### *Ownership*

The concentration of ownership of the means of production in the household by males meant that women's labour throughout their lives would be subject, either directly or indirectly, to male power and authority. No part of their productive activity could escape the potential power of male domination. In this respect the issue of ownership of property in the family economy is considerably more all encompassing than the power over labour exercised by capitalist ownership. The capitalist employer exercised control over the labour purchased, but the subsistence production of the wage worker in the family economy was distinct, separate, and beyond the employer's control. In the family economy the means of production and the means of subsistence were inseparable: women had no productive sphere beyond the power of male authority. Although the effects of patriarchal productive relations were often obscured by the close personal relationships and the interdependence of family members in the family economy, and while the degree of oppressive male dominance undoubtedly varied from household to household, the general effect of male ownership was to exercise control over female labour. The extent to which women's lives were hampered by lack of control over capital, land, and their own labour is an issue discussed in later chapters. In this section the intention has been to establish women's alienation from the system of ownership. As daughters, wives, mothers, and widows they were dependent on the will of fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers.

In the transference of property the tenuous claim women had on the means of production was most obvious. Susannah Moodie's comment that 'death is looked upon by many Canadians more as a matter of business, and change of property into other hands, than as a real domestic calamity'<sup>94</sup> is something of a mystery to historians