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Parr, Joy. *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880–1950*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990. Pp. xiii, 314. Illustrations. \$45.00, (cloth); \$19.95, (paper)

Elizabeth Bloomfield

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This finely-crafted study of the significance of gender and class in the everyday work experience of two Ontario communities is important in several ways: for the scope of the questions it addresses, the sources and methods that were used, its structure and style in presenting the research findings and its conclusions and new syntheses. The book makes significant contributions to women's history, working-class history, industrial history and the techniques of social history in Canada.

Joy Parr's methodology is impressive, a fine model for the best future graduate theses in social history. The *Gender of Breadwinners* reports an attempt "to locate and understand the relationships among industry, domesticity, and community . . . over the seventy years following the rise of factory industry. It is a reconsideration of elements of neo-classical and Marxian analysis of this transformation, from the perspective of feminist theory, particularly the post-structural critiques of the categoricism within which the study of class and gender in industrial society have been framed."

Paris and Hanover, Ontario, were chosen as industrial communities in central Canada of roughly similar size but contrasting economic bases and cultural traditions. Paris was a women's town, dominated by the knitting mills of Penmans Limited. Hanover's industrial workforce was overwhelmingly male in various furniture factories, of which the

oldest and largest was the Knechtel Furniture Company. For both places, "the hoards of mundane paper were sufficiently ample." Extant source materials included a weekly newspaper; a fairly complete set of business records including details of payroll and personnel for the largest employer; municipal assessment rolls with adequately detailed householder data; a trade journal for the community's main industry; and federal and provincial government documents records containing evidence of state intervention in the local economy.

Most remarkable are the depth of the author's knowledge of each community and her sensitivity to the particularities of daily life. She lived for eight months in each place between 1982 and 1985, years during which the principal enterprise in each town closed. Four months were spent in the Penmans mills and four in the Knechtel factory, in order to understand all the work processes and to analyze the business records. After having gained some local support for her project, Parr recorded interviews with a good many retired workers on their personal and family history, work experience, married life, housing, community life and union activity. She remarks on the greater difficulties of "reading between the silences" when conversing with retired male workers in a community within the mainstream culture. The women of Paris, aware that their situation and community were exceptional and problematic, come through in the interviews more clearly. Some sixty interviews, that were judged worth transcribing for their informational and technical quality, are cited. Parr also noted the vital contribution of local historians and voluntary keepers of the primary records in smaller communities.

All these sources are used competently and convincingly, though the centre of

gravity of the primary sources is clearly in the period from 1920 to 1940 for Hanover and 1930 to 1950 for Paris. Discussion of the earlier decades depends largely on newspaper accounts. Research techniques do not obtrude on the thematic narrative, which is written in a densely-textured style, rich in interesting images often drawn from the textile and wood industries. Hanover's backyards, for example, are described graphically as part of the informal economy by which men supplemented their wages to fulfil their deeply-felt obligations to meet all their family's needs. Mock weddings and other distinctive customs are explained as ways in which Paris women acted out the anomalies of their status as principal breadwinners in their town.

The two community case studies are presented in the main body of the book, each consisting of five chapters in separate but roughly parallel sequences. Each part begins with a brief overview of the industrial history of the community, stressing ethnic composition and processes of labour recruitment. Most of Penmans' female employees in the twentieth century shared the experience of assisted migration as skilled workers from the East Midlands of England. Hanover's furniture workers came from German Anabaptist settler families who combined agriculture and craft traditions, as they had for generations in Europe. Gender and policy, both in the management of the enterprise and in issues of national policy protection for that industry group, are analyzed in the second chapter of each part. Penmans is described as a paternalistic employer in a heavily protected industry, illustrating a "mutuality between gendered identities and class interests."

Daniel Knechtel, in contrast, was a model for his workers of Christian manliness in work, thrift and public service. The craft ethos of the Hanover furniture industry was underlined by the failure of the efforts of Knechtel's son to introduce managerial Taylorism in the strike of 1923.

In the third chapter of each sequence, Parr explains the technicalities and gendering of work processes in Penmans knitting mills and Knechtel's furniture factory. She shows that "sexual division in the labour force is the sum of the sex labelling of specific tasks," and that "the same jobs have been assigned to different genders at different times in the same place and in different places at the same time." The relationships between wage work, the domestic division of labour and family and community attitudes and values are discussed in the fourth chapter of each study. Paris mill families headed by women were accommodated rather than accepted, with a "denying and dismissive tolerance of their domestic values and family forms." In Hanover, "there was no doubt . . . that wage work was both men's to do and part of the measure of a man's worth"; men's privileged position in community life rested also on their married status as well as their essential maleness and entitlement to paid work. The final chapter of each study considers labour unionism. Paris was seared by the experience of "womanly militance and neighbourly wrath" in the 1949 strike against Penmans. Failure of the strike "intensified local distrust of class-based actions as a way to bring social change," and reinforced the earlier "gender- and community-based solidarities." The greater success of Hanover men in the strike of 1937 is explained less by class consciousness than by their consensus of brotherhood grounded in "common standards of dignity and self-worth in their common gender."

In her conclusion, Parr argues that "we are burdened in trying to understand what work means within a way of life by a history of analytical dualisms—capitalist and non-capitalist production, waged and non-waged labour, public and private life, masculine and feminine roles." She finds that class, gender and ethnic identities and solidarities were uniquely intertwined and constantly changing in each community and that they cannot be fully understood or explained either in terms of mainstream ideologies of the day or of categories of social theory of our times: "[n]ever did class and gender, either singly or in conjunction, map the whole of social existence; both personally and collectively, understandings and obligations were also framed in religious faith, ethnicity and nationality." She advocates "putting questions that tolerate specificity and diversity as answers" as "a way to begin to craft explanations that more fully comprehend both the access to power and the grounds upon which this access, successfully and unsuccessfully, has been challenged."

In *The Gender of Breadwinners*, Paris and Hanover are used as settings for detailed and sensitive explorations of the inter-relationships of work, gender, class and community. With the author, the reader may wonder how typical these places are of other small industrial communities. Could there be other places "more authentic and less anomalous," "where class and gender relations were more systematic and predictable, where meanings were more straightforward and settled"? Or would any town or village, examined under the social historian's microscope, be revealed to have equivalent idiosyncrasies?

Parr herself provides little context of time and place for Paris and Hanover.

For urban historians, her brief comparison of the two communities tends to oversimplify their situations. For example, the two places are described as "still rural villages" in 1880, that grew in population "from roughly 1,000 to 4,000" between 1880 and 1950. In fact Paris, with a population of 3,173 in the 1881 census, ranked 38th among all Ontario urban centres, being somewhat larger than such county towns as Whitby or Brampton. Hanover, in contrast, was not incorporated as a village until 1899. With a population of perhaps 850 in 1880, it might have ranked 150th in southern Ontario. While Hanover's population grew at a faster rate in most decades thereafter, Paris with 5,249 people in 1951 was still one and a half times the size of Hanover at the end of the study period. Perhaps this minor criticism simply points out a challenge to some Canadian urban historians to provide a better comparative understanding of communities in the urban system.

Elizabeth Bloomfield
Guelph, Ontario

Reid, Richard M., ed. *The Upper Ottawa Valley to 1855*, The Publications of the Champlain Society, ONTARIO SERIES XIV. Don Mills: Carleton University Press, 1990. Pp. cxxxi, 354. Black and White photographs, maps. \$21.95, (paper).

The Upper Ottawa Valley to 1855 is part of the long-standing Champlain Society project to publish documents relating to unique events, institutions and regions in Canadian history. This particular volume is done in cooperation with the Ontario Heritage Foundation, and the paper edition forms part of the Carleton Library Series.