

'A Matter of Principal': Female involvement in Politics and Labour at the  
Lakehead, 1903-1918

by

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## ABSTRACT

“A Matter of Principal’: Female Involvement in Politics and Labour at the Lakehead, 1903-1918” is an analysis of the role women played in the social, political, and labouring sphere at the Canadian Lakehead (comprised of the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William, Ontario – present day Thunder Bay) during the early twentieth century. Through an analysis of the involvement of women in the workforce, strikes, and political organizations, it contends that a parallel narrative of female involvement in the Lakehead’s labouring history exists between 1903 and 1918. During this period, women were involved in advocating for, and giving a voice to, both themselves and their sex in a largely male dominated area and era of influence.

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## Introduction

On 4 July 1916, the Toronto *Globe* reported, “The discovery of ‘woman’ has been declared the greatest event in the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup> While not a singularly twentieth century phenomenon, female participation in labour and politics at the turn of the century has come to be defined as an era in which women, for the first time, were given legitimization, agency, and the opportunities necessary to succeed independently in Canadian society.<sup>2</sup> Though political parties and labouring unions during the period are remembered for the contributions made by the overwhelming majority of male members, women played a major role in the organization, administration, and campaigning for rights and privileges for Canadian politics and labour in the early twentieth century. This thesis will look at female involvement in labour, work, and politics in Northwestern Ontario between 1903 and 1918, with a focus on the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William, Ontario (collectively known as the Lakehead).<sup>3</sup> It will

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<sup>1</sup> “Meaning of the Parade,” *Globe* (Toronto), 4 July 1916.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the period, see Janice Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900-1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995); Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour & the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Paula Bourne, ed., *Women’s Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985); and Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> The term “Lakehead” will be used throughout this thesis to refer to a region located at the head of Lake Superior in Northwestern Ontario and defined primarily by the municipal boundaries of the former cities of Port Arthur and Fort William (present-day Thunder Bay). For general overviews of the region, see Michel S. Beaulieu and Chris Southcott, *North of Superior: An Illustrated History of Northwestern Ontario* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 2010); Michel S. Beaulieu ed., *Essays in Northwestern Ontario Working-Class History: Thunder Bay and Its Environs* (Thunder Bay: CNS Press, 2008); Thorold J. Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp, eds., *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2008); Matt Bray and Ernie Epp, eds., *A Vast and Magnificent Land: An Illustrated History of Northern Ontario* (Thunder Bay: Lakehead University; Sudbury: Laurentian University; Ontario Ministry of Northern Affairs, 1984); and Nancy Wightman and Robert Wightman, *The Land*

explore how female activism and public and private displays of unity impacted the policies and success of the attainment of female rights and recognition among instances of strike, social change, and organizations operating and the impact they had on the political, labouring, economic, and social expansion of the region during the twentieth century.

The Lakehead as the geographic center of Canada, as well as a major transshipment point for both natural resources and immigrant populations along the shores of Lake Superior during the early twentieth century, is representative of an area with a distinct cultural, social, and economic history concerning women in labour and politics. Female involvement in labour, as well as the struggle of labouring workers throughout the region, grew to reflect a new social consciousness for workers of the region. Many of the political, social, and labouring changes made in the first 18 years of the twentieth century led to an evolution in the understanding of a working class history in the region and in Canada. In analyzing the experiences of women at the Lakehead in areas of politics and labour in the early twentieth century, I hope to create a parallel narrative to prior scholarship on the labouring and working class of the region, and add to pre-existing work on the role of women, showcasing both the region's uniqueness and its similarities to the rest of Canada. This, coupled with the previous work done on the region with regards to its labour history, allows for a more in-depth look at women at the Lakehead between 1903 and 1918.

The history of Canadian labour has been the subject of numerous studies.

Labour, like many other historical narratives, represents a continuously evolving study

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*Between: Northwestern Ontario Resource Development, 1800 to the 1990s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). For the classic work, see J.P. Bertrand, *Highway to Destiny: An Epic Story of Canadian Development* (New York: Vantage Press, 1959).

that takes influence from the time period in which it was written, and by those who did the writing. The first wave of scholarship attributed to historians such as Terry Copp, Ross McCormack, and David J. Bercuson is defined by its rigid adherence to a singular lens of political ideology.<sup>4</sup> This generation of ‘old’ labour historians, pioneers in their field who concentrated on the ‘objectivity’ and politics of labour, examined the works of major parties, leaders, and organization that defined Canadian labour through a social democratic lens of politics. The old generation eventually gave way to ‘those belonging to the new’ labour history, with “new attention to the social, intellectual and cultural dimensions of working-class experience and in radicalism located outside of social democratic politics.”<sup>5</sup> Consisting of historians including Bryan Palmer, Gregory Kealey, Craig Heron, Peter Warrian, and Ian McKay,<sup>6</sup> these works are influenced by Marxist and socialist-humanist writings and examine aspects of working class life, including race, ethnicity, and class, and brought new perspective to labour history.<sup>7</sup> Unlike their

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<sup>4</sup> For works detailing first wave scholarship, see Desmond Morton and Terry Copp, *Working People: An Illustrated History of Canadian Labour* (Ottawa: Deneau and Greenburg Publishers, 1980); A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); and David J. Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Joan Sangster, “Women and Work: Assessing Canadian Woman’s Labour History at the Millennium,” *Atlantis* 25, no.1 (2000): 51.

<sup>6</sup> For works on ‘new’ labour history, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto: Butterworth, 1983); Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, “The Great War, the State, and Working-Class Canada,” in *The Workers’ Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 11-42; Peter Warrian, “The Challenge of the One Big Union Movement in Canada, 1919-1921” (MA Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1971); and Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> For more on ‘new’ labour historians and a reflection of their writing, see Ian McKay, “For a New Kind of History: A Reconnaissance of 100 years of Canadian Socialism,” *Labour/Le Travail* 46 (Fall 2000): 70-125.



predecessors, second generation labour historians brought “labour history back from superstructure, politics, and the exceptionalism of Western Canada to regions that had been largely neglected by their predecessors: Ontario and the Maritimes.”<sup>8</sup> This dedication to regional study and the broadening of the historical narrative from large political histories to those that lay outside of social democratic politics introduced new avenues of exploration for Canadian labour history.

The existing literature has also established that the involvement of women in politics and labour during the twentieth century resulted from changing social, cultural, and political ideologies experienced at the turn of the century. Capitalist enterprise, globalization, and changing political expression influenced generations of men and women to advocate for and change the way in which they worked and lived throughout Canada. The discovery of a female voice in labour and politics began as a tepid exploration of women within existing history, a product of “adding women and stirring,”<sup>9</sup> to one where women became an integral part of the historical narrative.<sup>10</sup> Previous work has explored labour with broad strokes concerning North American and European politics with a concentration on legislation and the male-dominated influence on regional definition and politics. Although largely masculinized, recent historiographical narrative has begun to recognize the role played by women concerning national and international contributions to the labour movement.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Desmond Morton, “Some Millennial Reflections on the State of Canadian Labour History,” 46 *Labour/Le Travail* (Fall 2000): 25.

<sup>9</sup> Sangster, *Women and Work*, 55.

<sup>10</sup> See Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women’s History* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2011), 95.

<sup>11</sup> For the most recent and thorough study, see Ian McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People’s Enlightenment in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008).

The inclusion of a female voice in the writing of working class history evolved out of social, economic, and political circumstances experienced by Canadians in post-Second World War society. Before this, historical literature on women relied on pre-conceived notions of femininity and the less than thorough scholarship of first wave labour historians.<sup>12</sup> Female narratives were few, even though “one finds women within virtually every institution - the family, politics, the work world, and clubs - which normally comprised society; yet their interests there were often ignored or denied.”<sup>13</sup> This lack of inclusion by historians gave way when, according to historian Joan Sangster, Canada experienced a “renaissance in women’s and labour history,” a period in which

Canadian labour and women's history were revitalized in the 1970s, stimulated by insurgent political movements, the democratization of universities, and the resulting influx of a new generation of youthful students, including more women, into institutions of higher education.<sup>14</sup>

The radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, along with the emergence of the New Left, Quebec’s Quiet Revolution,<sup>15</sup> and civil rights movements occurring across the country, came together and influenced the newest generation of historians to pursue

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<sup>12</sup> Elaine Leslau Silverman, “Writing Canadian Women’s History 1970-82: An Historiographical Analysis,” *Canadian Historical Review* 63, no. 4 (December 1982), 513.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.

<sup>14</sup> Sangster, “Women and Work,” 52.

<sup>15</sup> When looking at women in labour and working class histories, Quebec differs from the rest of Canada. As Joan Sangster states, “in French Canada, two distinct emphases emerged, one exploring the conditions of working class life, the other, labour institutions and radicalism. And of course, Quebec historians, unlike English ones, were centrally concerned with the relationship of the working class to the nation and nationalism.” This ideology differed from English speaking historians who attempted to study all aspects of working-class life and divide themselves from the politics of labour. See Sangster, “Women and Work,” 52 and Joanne Burgess, “Exploring the Limited Identities of Canadian Labour: Recent Trends in English-Canada and Quebec,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 1, no. 2 (Spring/Fall 1990): 149-67.

working class and labouring history with a new lens of study.<sup>16</sup> This emergent consciousness of the lives and experiences of Canada's working class coincided with the recognition of a growing feminist debate and led to a renewed consciousness for a female narrative in national histories. With 'new' historians "No longer limiting themselves to grandiose hagiography or to demeaning triviality, they proposed in good faith that to study women's past was worthy of their best efforts."<sup>17</sup> Female narratives and inclusion were becoming a staple in revised social, political, and labour histories that sought to incorporate the 'new' take on historical narrative outside of social democratic politics, and the inclusion of a working-class voice beyond the anglicised scope of prior historical writings.<sup>18</sup>

The push towards female inclusion through feminist studies and then gender studies combined growing trends towards the study of intellectual, social, and cultural dimensions of identity with that of feminist theory and politics.<sup>19</sup> Pioneering feminist historians belonging to what was labeled the "new, new" labour history, including Joan Sangster, Linda Kealey, Patricia Connelly, Joy Parr, and Sonya Rose,<sup>20</sup> championed "historical writing on Canadian women and work exploring the way in which feminist challenges to the masculinist story of class formation altered the contours of working-

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Silverman, "Writing Canadian Women's History," 513.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 522.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the debate between women's and gender-based history, see Joan Sangster, "Beyond Dichotomies: Reassessing Gender History and Women's History in Canada," *Left History* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1995): 109-121 and Franca Iacovetta and Linda Kealey, "Women's History, Gender History and Debating Dichotomies," *Left History* 4, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1996): 221-237.

<sup>20</sup> See Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*; Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1979); Patricia Connelly, *Last Hired, First Fired: Women and the Canadian Workforce* (Toronto: The Women's Press 1978); and Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice," *Canadian Historical Review* 76, no.3 (September 1995); 354-376.

class history."<sup>21</sup> Analyses of female experience in working class histories and labour have been written about widely since the 1970s on a national and international scale.<sup>22</sup> While recent scholarship has begun to focus on smaller cohorts and community-based analysis, the next step in the recognition of feminist labour histories must move to recognize "regional differences in women's lives occasioned by economic underdevelopment."<sup>23</sup> The exploration of female involvement in working class history cannot be confined to a simplistic framework of class, gender and race. Rather, it must take into account a variety of factors concerning all facets of lived experience and a combination of 'old'; 'new' and 'new new' labour histories in order to create a holistic look at feminist ideology and regional idiosyncratic expression.

Regional expression and the importance of micro, bottom-up research working against macro narratives of top-down feminist working-class histories are important to note when dealing with labour. Female experience in labour differed greatly depending on a variety of factors attributed to self and national influences of economic, social, and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>22</sup> For examples on the Canadian movement, see Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993); Veronica Strong-Boag, "Discovering the Home: the Last 150 Years of Domestic Work in Canada," in *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Paula Bourne (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985), 35-60; Meg Luxton, *More than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1980); Ruth Frager and Carmela Patrias, *Discounted Labour: Women Workers in Canada, 1870-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.); Fernand Ouellet, "La question sociale au Quebec, 1880-1930: la condition feminine et le mouvement des femmes dans l'historiographie," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 21, no. 42 (1988): 319-45; and Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). For an international example, see Patricia Connelly, "Gender Matters: Global Restructuring and Adjustment," *Social Politics* 3, no. 1 (1996): 12-31.

<sup>23</sup> Sangster, *Beyond Dichotomies*, 119.

spatial occurrences.<sup>24</sup> Why, then, would the Lakehead, as a small resource-based region, be an important study of female politics and labour?<sup>25</sup>

The Lakehead and its strong political history, while one small piece in a larger puzzle, has proven itself to be an informative and necessary study in the evolution of Canadian labour and politics. The multicultural natures of its cities, combined with its paradoxical state of being extremely important geographically while also extremely remote, have contributed to its unique status as a stronghold for labour history. From strike supporters to caregivers, organizers, and strikebreakers, the Lakehead's women have been recognized for their subtle contributions to the political and labouring history of the region. Although a definitive narrative of female involvement in politics and labour has not been completed, many regional historians have recognized in their work the contributions made by women of the region on the evolution of a labouring and political narrative.<sup>26</sup> Although women still fell under the patriarchal ideals perpetrated by male members, some political organizations and labour parties present at the Lakehead, and

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<sup>24</sup> Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working Class History," *Labour/Le Travail* 19 (Spring 1987): 24.

<sup>25</sup> The study of the Lakehead as a region rich in political and labour history, while falling under the label of 'important' due to its geographic significance in Northwestern Ontario, is still viewed questioningly with regards to a strong labour narrative, especially that which falls outside the gendered norm. As Michel S. Beaulieu has written: "Despite what I consider the important role of the Lakehead in the history of the nation, I fully realize that there is a very real possibility that critics will consider this study too regional in focus. Such an attitude, typically, is derived, although often in an implicit way, from an underlying belief in a derivative of the basic components of the "Laurentian School" of thought, namely that everything outside of Central Canada (often expressed as a hinterland) is regional." See Michel S. Beaulieu, "A Proletariat Prometheus: Socialism, Ethnicity, and Revolution at the Lakehead, 1900-1935" (PhD thesis, Queen's University, 2007), 11.

<sup>26</sup> See Jean Morrison, "Community and Conflict: A Study of the Working Class and Its Relationship at the Canadian Lakehead, 1903-1913" (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 1974) and Varpu Lindström, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Beaverton, ON: Aspasia Books, 2003).

known both nationally and internationally, did believe in sexual equality, although the point was often deferred when it came to larger debates or questions as female oppression was a single piece in the puzzle of eventual triumph for industrial freedom.<sup>27</sup>

This thesis does not, however, set out to examine the support or denial of female participation in socialist or labour organizations; rather, its main purpose is in exploring a parallel narrative to the national picture of female participation in labour on a regional scale, one that thrives in its subtleties and attempts to recognize a female voice and presence at the Lakehead.

The most cursory examination of the history of labour at the Lakehead reveals that while many of the formative events and individuals in the region parallel pre-established patterns of male-dominated structures, other more regional characteristics, influenced from both national and international sources, go against the 'canonical' series of events that form the mainstream chronology of development in Canada. Due in part to the legacy of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) and its lasting vestige in western provinces, Canadian historiography is often trapped in the ideology of 'western-exceptionalism' and an emphasis on the importance of western Canada. This focus superseded national inquiry and led to limited regional significance for the evolution of Canadian labour elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> However, while female involvement in both labour and politics during the period was significant in the varied ways in which they participated in

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<sup>27</sup> Frager and Patrias, *Discounted Labour*, 151.

<sup>28</sup> A. Ross McCormack, for example, has argued that this was initially a western phenomenon because of that region's "exceptional attributes." He suggests that, as a result, "Canadian Socialism came of age in British Columbia. In the first years of the twentieth century, fledgling socialist organisations emerged across the country, but BC became the dynamic centre of the movement." See A. Ross McCormick, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 18.

the creation and implementation of 'new, new' histories, historians have either disregarded or failed to give adequate coverage to female contributions at the Lakehead and in regions that fell outside populous centers of production and trade.<sup>29</sup> Historians such as Michel S. Beaulieu and Jean Morrison, while touching upon prominent and widely known female figures, have overlooked the rich tradition of female political involvement at the Lakehead.<sup>30</sup> By working against preconceived notions of gendered politics and the roles women played as dictated by past historical research and the availability of resources concerning male-dominated historical understanding regarding labour and politics, a new understanding of female involvement in politics and labour can be seen. With the Lakehead's rich cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity at the turn of the twentieth century, a plethora of ideas and notions regarding labour becomes apparent with a distinct mixture of old and new as well as varying notions on the definition of gender, politics, and labour brought from areas of the world which differed significantly from Canadian society at the time.

While this thesis is supported by numerous secondary sources concerning previous work on the region's histories, its use of primary source material, particularly local newspapers, allows for a broader understanding of people, events, and groups in the region. Local newspapers provide a look at not only important news stories, and

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<sup>29</sup> While work has been done concentrating on female involvement in trade-based industries or factories in large cities such as Toronto or Montreal, smaller regions lack the historical inquiry necessary for a holistic view of female participation in politics and labour. For works on city-based industry, see Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-39* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*; and Bradbury, *Working Families*.

<sup>30</sup> See Michel S. Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead: Ethnicity, Socialism, and Politics, 1900-35* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011) and Jean Morrison, *Labour Pains* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2009).

national coverage, but also allow for an examination of hiring trends, little known events, and language use that would otherwise go unnoticed when looking at events through a macro lens of understanding. The idea some historians have that women's history is fraught with a lack of source material is countered by historian Mary Horodyski in stating,

Research into newspapers published during the period ... provides a wealth of information concerning women's actions. Newspapers are traditional primary sources and ... are easily accessible. It seems obvious then, that on this subject a "no sources" excuse cannot be taken seriously.<sup>31</sup>

Following in Horodyski's footsteps, as well as those of feminist historians belonging to the 'new, new' cohort of labour history, I have utilized newspaper articles to find previously unstudied material on the female experience, and augmented my findings with census materials, government publications from the Department of Labour, and immigration as well as source material from local archival institutions such as the Thunder Bay Museum and the Lakehead University Archives to give new insight into women in the region.

Following on the information found in newspapers of the period concerning instances of female participation in labour and politics, as well as noteworthy events and general overviews, the structure of this thesis will follow the chronology established in the works of labour historians Ian McKay and Michel S. Beaulieu.<sup>32</sup> The first chapter will begin with an introduction to the Lakehead region, providing a brief history of its renaissance and indicators on the region's population, ethnic breakdown, and

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<sup>31</sup> For more on finding a female voice in the narrative of labour history, see Mary Horodyski, "Women and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919," *Manitoba History* 11 (Spring 1986), 28-37.

<sup>32</sup> See McKay, "For a New Kind of History"; Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* vol. 81, no. 3 (September 2000): 617-645; and Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*.



geographic importance prior to 1903. This period will encompass events that represent a turning point not only for labour at the Lakehead, but for female involvement in politics as well, and give a better understanding of the social, economic and labouring makeup of the region. The year 1903 was chosen as a starting point when the region was experiencing many of its historical firsts: the first official strike in which the riot act was read, the first political party established and growing in the region, and the first female-fuelled strike and subsequent public support were all factors in a changing political and working-class identity of the region.<sup>33</sup> Moving between 1903 and 1907, an analysis of strikes, organizations, and events important to the region will be reviewed as indicators to the growing movement towards female participation in labour and their evolution in Lakehead society.

Changing social, economic, and political support as well as growing female involvement in politics and labour extended into the pre-war period between 1907 and 1914; these factors will be examined in the second chapter. With increased industry, a swelling population, and the implementation of public works throughout the area, the Lakehead was well on its way to becoming a booming epicentre of industrial progress. The progress, though, came alongside a legacy of unemployment, poor working conditions, and constant struggle for recognition within industrial Canada.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup>Jean Morrison, "The Organization of Labour at Thunder Bay," in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, eds. Thorold J. Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2008), 120-143, and Jean Morrison, "Ethnicity and Class Consciousness: British, Finnish, and South European Workers at the Canadian Lakehead before World War I," *Lakehead University Review* 9, no.1 (Spring 1976): 55-65.

<sup>34</sup> For more on labour and progress at the Lakehead, see Michel S. Beaulieu and Bruce W. Muirhead, "Harry Bryan – A Man of Fanatical Convictions," in *Essays in Northwestern Ontario Working Class History: Thunder Bay and its Environs*, ed. Michel S. Beaulieu (Thunder Bay: Lakehead University Centre for Northern Studies, 2008), 53-

constant state of flux came to a head when the CPR freight handlers as well as their fellow labourers consisting of mainly ethnic minorities and immigrant workers struck in 1909 with violent and bloody results.<sup>35</sup> Male and female involvement in the dispute as strikers, supporters, auxiliaries, or combatants was well documented and presented a new look at the response to labour in Canada. The immediate pre-war years had a significant impact on the Lakehead, as it not only experienced its own struggles with its resource based and shipping industries, but also major political and working-class disputes that would change the ever-malleable definition of labour at the Lakehead and cause national recognition across Canada and the United States. The freight handlers strike of 1909, the establishment of the Finn Hall in 1910, and the influx of socialist organizations into the region in the previous decade all pointed to a political narrative no longer centred in western Canadian exceptionalism, and embraced central-Canadian significance. Ontario and the Northwestern regions were experiencing national movement away from humble western socialist beginnings, and instead embraced a newly-defined regionally central expression of political discourse. This discourse combined with a flailing pre-war economy and the embracing of socialist movements across the region propelled the Twin Cities as contenders for the epicentre of the Canadian struggle for labour and reform.

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70; Jean Morrison "Labour in Fort William and Port Arthur, 1903-1913," Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society *Papers & Records* 1 (1973): 51-64; and David Karl Ratz, "'Strike Duty': The Canadian Military and Labour at the Lakehead Before the First World War," in *Essays in Northwestern Ontario Working Class History*, 29-52.

<sup>35</sup> For a more detailed look at the causes and influences surrounding the 1909 freight handlers strike, see Jean Morrison, *Labour Pains*, 84-96; Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 29-31; Morrison, "Ethnicity and Violence: The Lakehead Freight Handlers Before World War I," in *Essays in Northwestern Ontario Working Class History*, 9-29; and Thomas F. Beasley, "The 1909 Freight Handlers' Strike: Col. Sam Steele Searches Strikers for Guns," Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society *Papers & Records* 17 (1989): 18-20.

The third chapter focuses on a region at war, and how the First World War influenced the way in which female involvement in all aspects of society changed, reflected, or rejected the national evolution on gendered identity. The embracing of working-class ideology extended into the war years and is explored through the effects the war had on female labour participation as well as the political gains made during the period and female voting rights.<sup>36</sup> While the decade leading to the outbreak of the First World War proved to be “one of its most harrowing periods” for labour in Canada, according to Michel S. Beaulieu, “it was also a period of growth.” While not speaking directly to the plight of women in politics and labour, Beaulieu still reflects the increased notion of a politicised and radicalised group of citizens in Northwestern Ontario, male and female alike.<sup>37</sup> The growing trend towards female involvement in politics and labour, as well as recognition of a female work force through popular strikes and organizations and women’s contributions to political and labour parties, resulted in a

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<sup>36</sup> For more on enfranchisement and women in the Industrial Workers of the World, see Terry Crowley, “Agnes Macphail and Canadian Working Women,” *Labour/ Le Travail* 8 (Fall 1991): 129-48; Gloria Geller, “The Wartimes [sic] Election Act of 1917 and the Canadian Women’s Movement,” *Atlantis* 2, no.1 (Autumn 1976): 88-106; Anne F. Mattina, “‘Yours for Industrial Freedom’: Women of the IWW, 1905-1930,” *Women’s Studies* 43 (2014): 170-201; Ann Schofield, “Rebel Girls and Union Maids: The Woman Question in the Journals of the A.F.L. and I.W.W., 1905-1920,” *Feminist Studies* 9 (Summer 1983): 335-58; Stanley Lemmons, “Socialist Feminism in the 1920’s,” *Labour History* 14 (Winter 1973): 83-91; Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 16-36, 171-195; and Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women’s History* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 49-53. For a selection on female involvement in inter and post-war labour, see Kori Street, “Patriotic not Permanent: Attitudes about Women’s Making Bombs and Being Bankers,” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War*, eds. Sarah Glassford and Emily Shaw (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 148-171; Patricia Connelly, *Last Hired First Fired: Women and the Canadian Workforce* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1978); and Pat Staton, *It was their war too: Canadian Women and First World War* (Toronto: Green Dragon Press, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 42.

growing consciousness of a female role in political, economic, and socialist doctrine at the Lakehead. The war fundamentally changed the way in which labour and politics were viewed across Canada, as never before had an event caused such unity and turmoil since Confederation. The war changed the way in which politics and labour were defined in all aspects of life. Women were entering the workforce in numbers unprecedented in the nation's history, challenging pre-conceived notions of separate sphere ideologies and the woman question. What began as a lower class phenomenon, resulting from economic necessity in the decades leading to the war, became a societal shift for the inclusion of, and acceptance for, the conscious choice for women to enter into the Canadian labour market.

Although peripheral circumstances such as geographic location, age, race, and ethnicity influenced how, or if, women entered into the Canadian workforce, this nexus of identity proved that change was apparent. A slow process of industrialisation leading into the twentieth century became a fast-paced move against the gendered division of labour when women, for the first time, were given legitimization, agency, and the opportunities necessary to succeed within the Canadian labour market. This is not to say that significant gains were not achieved; the right to vote, educational opportunities, and a growing recognition of female capability in an industrialised nation were now recognized more than ever in a nation recovering from its greatest achievement and its greatest loss.<sup>38</sup> This was essentially true for industrialised towns and cities across

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<sup>38</sup> For a Canadian perspective, see Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour & the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) and Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). For the North American context, see Maurine Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,

Canada where women were able to find employment. Communities reliant on resource-based extraction or shipping industries differed in the availability and success women had on entering the workforce during the war years. The Lakehead was an example of this. Gendered spheres of work still created barriers to women's employment in logging, bush camps, and railways regardless of international conflict outside of domestic work. While some women did find opportunity during the war, many remained in gendered employment opportunities.

Women's involvement in politics and labour mirrored that of socialist and political organizations of the time. With a large percentage of English speaking men volunteering to go overseas, it left a significant deficit in the capabilities of remaining leaders and organizers. Many organizations were disbanded or changed to incorporate the war effort into their daily activities. Women's organizations were especially impacted when knitting groups and sewing circles to raise money for labour halls and strike support changed to bandage drives and collection groups for support overseas. Although materially socialism and labour suffered, ideologically the war represented a renewed consciousness, and socialists "felt themselves to be living in a time of drastic, even apocalyptic change."<sup>39</sup> The First World War changed the way in which many people viewed and participated in the struggle for industrial freedom and the public discussion on politics and labour. While labour experienced resurgence in the post-war years with memorable events such as the Winnipeg General Strike, it would take several years for the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), influenced by the October Revolution, and the

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1990) and D. Roediger, "Race and the Working-Class Past in the United States: Multiple Identities and the Future of Labor History," *International Review of Social History* 38 (1993): 127-143.

<sup>39</sup> Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 61.

Communist International, competing against the IWW for membership and socialist ideology to recoup.

In analyzing the period between 1903 and 1918, this thesis will not only provide a new way of looking at women in labour and politics during the twentieth century, but also the role played by labourers and political activists across Northwestern Ontario. This research will be a welcome addition to the expanding narrative of feminist history and the increasing awareness for the contributions made by those deemed marginalized either through sex, language, ethnicity, or race bringing new voices and layers to the multidimensional history of labour and politics in twentieth century Canada.

## Chapter 1 A Matter of Principal (1903-1907)

Along the shore of Lake Superior lies the Lakehead and the gateway to the West. The region, inhabited for thousands of years, evolved at the turn of the twentieth century to represent a community dependent on resource extraction and transnational shipping, built on a legacy of trade and commerce. Industrial progress grew on the hardworking backs of its Indigenous Peoples, as well as first, second, and third generation Canadians from around the world, with men and women involved in all aspects of Northern expansion. The Lakehead, a term used since the earliest European explorers alighted on the shore of Lake Superior, defines the geographic boundaries for the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William, Ontario.<sup>1</sup>

Those living at the Lakehead at the turn of the twentieth century were significantly different than its original peoples. The Lakehead's Indigenous Peoples were present throughout Northwestern Ontario for more than 9,000 years before the arrival of European settlers after 1650.<sup>2</sup> What originally began as a launching point for French and English explorers hoping to maximize their lucrative trade in furs eventually became the town of Fort William, named after the trading post therein. Following the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in 1821, redundancies in fur-trade posts caused a shift in the economic makeup of the region

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<sup>1</sup> The twin cities in the present day form the amalgamated city of Thunder Bay, Ontario, after their merger on 1 January 1970. For more on the region, see Michel S. Beaulieu and Chris Southcott, *North of Superior* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 2010); Thorold J. Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp, eds., *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2008); Nancy Wightman and Robert Wightman, *The Land Between: Northwestern Ontario Resource Development, 1800 to the 1990s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); and Joseph Mauro, *A History of Thunder Bay* (Thunder Bay: Lehto Printers, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Beaulieu and Southcott, *North of Superior*, 13.

and transformed the Lakehead from a hinterland to an industrial centre. Prince Arthur's Landing (Port Arthur) followed closely as a city born out of a booming wheat industry and the transshipment of goods across the Great Lakes system, and buoyed by the population influx of "temporary workers, company employees and speculators" flowing into the region.<sup>3</sup>

The Lakehead, falling within Northwestern Ontario, a region "at the geographic center of Canada ... comprised of the three districts of Thunder Bay, Rainy River and Kenora and the largest region of Ontario, covering 526,000 square kilometers," became one of the most promising areas of economic progress moving into the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> A part of the Canadian Shield and abutting the Great Lakes system, the Lakehead's abundance of natural resources, access to waterfront, and the location choice for three national railways defined the twin cities' rapid industrial growth to accommodate their role as "future metropolises of a growing north."<sup>5</sup> As a major epicentre for the export and shipment of Canadian goods, the Lakehead presented unique labour opportunities for workers and settlers. Varied industries of manufacturing, natural resource extraction, and transport provided work for both skilled and unskilled labourers across the region. Major employers, mining corporations, and various lumber camps

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<sup>3</sup> Although workers emigrated from regions across Canada and the world in search of work, Beaulieu and Southcott indicate that many did not intend on permanent settlement. Natural resource extraction in the form of logging and mining became an attractive option for those coming into the region looking for work, with the authors stating that "They came to make their money and then leave." See Beaulieu and Southcott, *North of Superior*, 41.

<sup>4</sup> The region extends West from Manitouwadge, East from Manitoba, South from Hudson's Bay, and North from the Canadian-American border. Northwestern Ontario represents a region "in area, that is bigger than the majority of countries in the world." See Beaulieu and Southcott, *North of Superior*, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Michel S. Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead: Ethnicity, Socialism, and Politics, 1900-35* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 15.



throughout the district employed thousands of workers in the region in both yearly and seasonal employment.<sup>6</sup> The Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian Northern Railway, and the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway employed a combined 4,000 men in the region by 1912, establishing the railway as the single largest employer at the Lakehead during the region's push to modernity.<sup>7</sup> The rail industry and its transport capabilities in combination with the Great Lakes system allowed the Lakehead to experience rapid industrial and population growth at the turn of the twentieth century. From 1891 to 1901 the Lakehead grew from a population of 1,965 permanent residents to over 7,000.<sup>8</sup> With a population more than tripling in size, the region transformed from a transient trading post into two booming cities in the eighty years following the decline of the Northwestern fur trade.<sup>9</sup>

The shift from a trade-based to a resource-based economy led the Lakehead's evolution from Northern outpost to rapidly expanding industrial centre. The move from trade to industrial commerce and export from a booming wheat industry changed the nature of employment available in the region.<sup>10</sup> Responding to the need for cheap, unskilled labour, "non-British immigrants arrived ... to do the jobs associated with the railways and resource industries which native Canadian and British immigrant workers

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<sup>6</sup> For more on working demographics and populations, see James Stafford, "A Century of Growth at the Lakehead," in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939).

<sup>9</sup> Stafford, "A Century of Growth at the Lakehead," 43, and Chris Southcott, "Ethnicity and Community in Thunder Bay," *Polyphony: The Bulletin of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario* 9, no. 2 (1987): 17-20.

<sup>10</sup> Stafford, "A Century of Growth at the Lakehead," 42.

were not willing to do.”<sup>11</sup> The availability of unskilled and semi-skilled labour industries deemed undesirable by Anglo workers allowed for the immigration of ‘foreign’ labourers intent on finding work in a young and resource rich nation and region. Canadian independence created what historian Ian McKay describes as,

a liberal experiment in which a select number of white men created a constitution and a country based on ideals that reflected British authority and constituted the discrimination, marginalization and neo-liberal order affecting the economic and social reality of a majority of Canadian peoples.<sup>12</sup>

This new ‘liberal experiment’ that came with Confederation made it increasingly difficult for immigrants to find employment in skilled trades, leaving many to enter into unskilled or semi-skilled industries and leading to a shift in the social and economic tiers of labour.<sup>13</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century, historian Jean Morrison defines three distinct tiers of labour in the region. The top, comprised of “railway workers and ... the skilled and semi-skilled workers in construction and other trades,” comprised of English-

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<sup>11</sup> Southcott, “Ethnicity and Community in Thunder Bay,” 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 58.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the availability of labour in Canada, see Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 78-87, 124, and 169; Gabriel Kolko, *Main Currents in Modern American History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 67-100; Carmela Patrias, *Relief Strike: Immigrant Workers and the Great Depression in Crowland, Ontario, 1930-1935* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990); Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca, eds., *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Allan Seager, “Class, Ethnicity, and Politics in Alberta Coalfields, 1905-1945,” in *‘Struggle A Hard Battle’: Essays on Working-Class Immigrants*, ed. Dick Hoerder (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 304-327; and Anthony W. Rasporich, “Twin City Ethnopolitics: Urban Rivalry, Ethnic Radicalism and Assimilation in the Lakehead, 1900-1970,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine* 18, no. 3 (February 1990): 210-30.

speaking workers who were “mostly Canadian, British and some Americans.”<sup>14</sup> These workers represented the aristocracy of labour in the region, and produced many of the local labour leaders and union representatives known historically for their work today.<sup>15</sup> The middle tier was comprised of ‘foreign’ workers from Northern Europe, “primarily Finns but also other Scandinavians who worked on construction jobs, on municipal work projects, and as dock labourers.”<sup>16</sup> The labouring Finns were comprised of both men and women active in the labour movement and in the establishment of socialist and communist organizations prominent within the twin cities. Lastly, the bottom tier was comprised of “southern and central Europeans – Italians, Greeks, and Slavs – who inhabited the coal docks sections of the each city, and were engaged as coal and freight handlers and as common labourers.”<sup>17</sup> This final group, considered the lowest of the labouring class, struck often in the early years of the twentieth century in a bid to obtain better working conditions and counteract low wages that plagued the lower-tier positions available to foreign workers in the region.

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<sup>14</sup> Jean Morrison, “Labour in Fort William and Port Arthur, 1903-1913,” Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society *Papers & Records* I (1973): 21.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the labouring men and union organizers of the region, see Fredrick B. Scollie, “Louis Lawrence Peltier (1853-1939): Railway Labour Leader, Mayor of Fort William 1909-10,” Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society *Papers & Records* XXXII (November 2004): 10-30; Jean Morrison, “Labour in Fort William and Port Arthur, 1903-1913,” Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society *Papers & Records* I (1973): 23-30; and Michel S. Beaulieu and Bruce W. Muirhead, “Harry Bryan – A Man of Fanatical Convictions,” in *Essays in Northwestern Ontario Working Class History: Thunder Bay and its Environs*, ed. Michel S. Beaulieu (Thunder Bay: Lakehead University Centre for Northern Studies, 2008), 53-70.

<sup>16</sup> Morrison, “Labour in Fort William and Port Arthur,” 23.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. For a brief overview, see Michel S. Beaulieu, “The Finnish-Canadian Contribution to Labour and Politics in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Canada-Finland, Celebrating 2017: “A brave, hospitable, and altogether admirable people,”* eds. Markku Henriksson, Michel S. Beaulieu, Carmen Pekkarinen, and Mari-Anna Suurmunne (Helsinki: Suomi-Kanada-seura/Finnish-Canadian Society and Embassy of Canada to Finland, 2017), 36-38.

Male workers represented the husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons of various female labourers, organizers, and activists working alongside their male counterparts to give voice to the 'common people'. The types of industries and their availability and popularity among women are shown when comparing national averages to provincial statistics for occupation in Ontario between 1891 and 1901.<sup>18</sup> While women were still unrecorded or uninvolved in certain industries, it is important to note that women were present in over 80% of occupations listed in the Canadian census between 1891 and 1901. With increasing numbers in almost every field, particularly those of agriculture, personal services, and most importantly labourers, women were becoming more heavily involved in the Canadian workforce. Labour statistics for working class women are not recorded in the Lakehead region until the Fort William census of 1921. Limitations with census material should be noted, therefore, with regards to sex-based censuses beginning in 1891 when factoring in the definition of labour and its application to female workers.<sup>19</sup> Industries such as logging, fishing, and the railway (all traditionally male roles), for example, are considered when tallying female participation, while employment within the home in roles such as caregiver, proprietor, or take home worker (sewing, laundering etc.) are not included in the census categorization for men or women, even though they constituted a majority of work for women during the period.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939), table 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada*, Table 5, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> For more on female labour in Canada during the early twentieth century, see Paula Bourne, ed., *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985); Janice Acton, et. al, *Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974); and Patricia Connelly, *Last Hired, First Fired: Women and the Canadian Workforce* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1978).

With the Lakehead defined by its natural resource extraction, especially mining and logging, as well as its growing population, an analysis of provincial statistics associated with women in resource and related industries with growing metropolises in the North can give a better indication of female labour participation in the area (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in Canada: 1891-1901

<b>Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in Canada (over the age of 10)</b>								
<b>Occupation</b>	1891				1901			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture*	723,031	51	12,194	6	707,924	46	8,936	4
Fishing and Trapping	29,841	2	204	0.10	27,160	2	24	0.01
Logging	12,756	0.9	-	-	16,055	1	-	-
Mining	15,410	1	-	-	28,341	2	4	<0.01
Manufacturing	175,861	12	62,111	31	229,027	15	70,508	30
Construction	86,605	6	89	0.04	89,100	6	65	0.03
Transportation	60,326	4	984	0.5	81,161	5	1,322	1
Railway	15,210	1	-	-	27,750	2	29	0.01
Road	20,102	1	-	-	27,248	2	23	0.01
Trade and Finance	81,130	6	6,934	3	91,795	6	7,757	3
Service	87,533	6	116,364	57	100,623	7	135,582	57
Professional	34,442	2	25,092	12	39,521	3	34,679	15
Personal	35,108	2	90,478	45	47,788	3	100,306	42
Clerical	21,029	1	3,092	2	46,220	3	12,569	5
Labourers	115,546	8	1,052	1	126,726	8	1,141	0.5
Other	3,336	0.2	198	0.10	751	0.05	41	0.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,412,386</b>		<b>203,222</b>		<b>1,544,883</b>		<b>237,949</b>	
<b>Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in ONTARIO (over the age of 10)</b>								
<b>Occupation</b>	1891				1901			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture*	332,037	52	5,512	6	302,533	47	3,898	4
Fishing and Trapping	2,475	0.39	6	0.01	2,038	0.32	8	0.01
Logging	4,165	1	-	-	6,201	1	-	-
Mining	1,852	0.29	-	-	3,902	1	1	<0.01
Manufacturing	88,736	14	32,241	34	145,249**	23	33,763**	31
Construction	40,145	6	49	0.05				
Transportation	25,270	4	523	1	78,029***	12	5,026***	5
Railway	8,968	1	-	-				
Road	8,592	1	-	-				
Trade and Finance	39,247	6	3,649	4				
Service	40,015	6	51,130	53	36,719****	6	58,271****	54
Professional	16,621	3	9,016	9				
Personal	15,420	2	41,664	44	13,850	2	47,221	43
Clerical	10,121	2	2,015	2	19,689	3	7,604	7
Labourers	50,589	8	439	0.46	50,917	9	30	0.03
Other	1,314	0.21	48	0.05	280	0.04	24	0.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>635,966</b>		<b>95,612</b>		<b>645,557</b>		<b>108,625</b>	

\* Includes all farmer's sons over the age of 14, whether or not reported with gainful occupation

\*\* Separate data is not available for "Manufacturing" and "Construction" in 1901 Census

\*\*\* Separate data is not available for "Transportation" and "Trade and Finance" in 1901 Census

\*\*\*\* Separate data is not available for "Professionals" in 1901 Census

Source: Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939)

As shown above, workingwomen in Ontario only accounted for 11% of the national female population in 1891, and 12% by 1901; when compared to the provincial population these numbers increase to 12% and 13%, respectively, and still represent a significant portion of the recorded workforce.<sup>21</sup> Increasing female labour participation rates were also being observed by statisticians when compiling occupational trends in noting “the more rapid rate of increases of females in gainful occupations than of males,” when comparing census data over the decade above.<sup>22</sup> This increase is represented by the number of females to every 1,000 males in gainful occupations, increasing nationally from 144 to 154 between 1891 and 1901, and provincially from 147 to 178 in the same period.<sup>23</sup> Women were increasingly becoming involved in paid, and, more importantly, recorded labour across the country and Ontario at the turn of the century. While regulations regarding types and availability of work were dependent on region (large cities such as Toronto and Ottawa would have had more opportunity for varied work than the Lakehead), women more than ever were entering the workforce in statistically recorded or unrecorded roles.

Although men were originally attracted to the Lakehead both by employment opportunities and government incentives, women and families were soon to follow. Industries such as domestic work, communications, and the burgeoning hotel business provided attractive work for female labourers in the region.<sup>24</sup> In 1891, the male-female

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<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939), Table 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Table 3.

<sup>24</sup> With the growth of the Lakehead, as well as its status as a stop-over for the newly developed east-west train routes, increased opportunities outside the resource and manufacturing centers were being presented to women. For example, by 1891, Fort William had 7 hotels and taverns, and Port Arthur had 44, giving new opportunities for

ratio of the Lakehead was significant, with 145 men for every 100 women, signalling a trend of single male immigrants and migrants coming to the region in search of work.<sup>25</sup> This decreased rapidly over time with the 1901 census reporting 128 men per 100 women, and finally by 1921 male-female parity relative to the Canadian national average was achieved in the region.<sup>26</sup> Male-female discrepancy has been cited as a side effect of a predominantly male immigrant population during the period, with women and families following once their husbands (or brothers or fathers) had settled.<sup>27</sup>

The wave of immigration between 1898 and 1914, a result of the government's loosening of restrictions and company monopolies, allowed them to offer land for farming and settlement brought with it both men and women.<sup>28</sup> With growing cities across the country experiencing population booms due to Canada's move toward industrialisation, the need for increased resources of all kinds, and the modernization of

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female work in varied industries outside of the resource sector. Although most work maintained its connections to female exclusivity in fields such as domestic help, new industry in Canada gave increased options for some workingwomen. For a regional look at the growth of industry, see A. Ernest Epp, "The Achievement of Community" in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, 181. For a national look at the growth of industry, see Bourne, ed., *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work* and Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour & the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 15-44, 151-192.

<sup>25</sup> Stafford, "A Century of Growth at the Lakehead," 43.

<sup>26</sup> By 1921, there were 108 men for every 100 women and the number continued its steady decline. For more, see Stafford, "A Century of Growth at the Lakehead" and Southcott, "Ethnicity and Community in Thunder Bay."

<sup>27</sup> Stafford, "A Century of Growth," 43.

<sup>28</sup> Clifford Sifton, the Liberal Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905, promoted the expansion of arable land in the country and promoted immigration in order to increase farm yields and settle areas in the Western provinces. Although many continued on to the prairies to farm, large numbers of migrants also chose their home based on familiarity, access to resources, and most of all a lack of funds to propel them forward leaving them to settle in the area. For more on immigration to Canada, and the Lakehead, see Southcott, "Ethnicity and Community in Thunder Bay," 17-20.



the workforce.<sup>29</sup> People from all races, ethnicities and genders came to the Lakehead to seek new homes and work, bringing with them their own unique cultural, social, and, especially, political values (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Ethnic Breakdown of the Lakehead, 1901

<b>Ethnic Breakdown of the Lakehead 1901</b>			
	Port Arthur	Fort William	Total
British*	2603	2298	4901 (68%)
French	417	341	758 (10.5%)
Italian	127	70	197 (2.7%)
German	56	171	227 (3.1%)
Scandinavian**	37	53	90 (1.2%)
Netherlands	10	2	12 (0.2%)
Native (Indigenous Canadians)	130	3	133 (1.8%)
Jewish	13	3	16 (0.2%)
Negro	6	0	16 (0.1%)
Russian***	116	240	356 (4.9%)
Other****	492	33	525 (7.3%)
<b>Total</b>			<b>7211</b>

\*Includes English, Irish, Manx, Scottish and Welsh

\*\*Includes Danes, Icelandic's, Norwegians and Swedes

\*\*\* Includes Finnish

\*\*\*\*Includes Austro-Hungarians

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada (1901)

This influx of new immigrants at the turn of the century influenced the way in which labour and politics came to embody the growing nature of the North and an expanding working class narrative at the Lakehead.

The Lakehead and its working class history draw parallels to the study of Canadian labour throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in its push towards modernity and growing population. Often told from a male-dominated narrative of singular achievement, with male exclusivity impeding a broader understanding of

<sup>29</sup> For a general discussion of immigration policy during this period, see Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 216-249.

female contributions, this study of the Lakehead brings new light to a female voice in labour and politics.<sup>30</sup> What was once a historical narrative fixated on the ideals of male, British tradesmen involved in skilled trades and artisanal guilds has evolved to reflect the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional view of Canadian society today and in the past, as a nation of 'distinct communities' with people of all ages, sexes, and classes bound together in the successes, and achievements of Northern expansion.<sup>31</sup>

The issue of sex and the woman question were often a neglected and undervalued aspect of labour and politics in early-twentieth-century Canada. The Lakehead, like much of Canadian society at the time, still fell under pre-conceived Victorian ideologies of femininity and class-based sexism that relegated women to the role of caretaker or maternal influence over home and family life. This was especially true in a region where unskilled trade and resource extraction born out of a heavily male-dominated population narrative left little room for female participation outside the home.<sup>32</sup> The pre-World War I period after 1900 embodied a time when growing labour movements began to influence and change the way women were represented both in the public and private sphere as well as their foray into political discourse. Rapid industrial growth across Canada and the expansion of local labour movements created distinct questions unique to women and their struggle for equity and eventual equality in industrial Canada.<sup>33</sup> The Lakehead, as both the geographic centre of Canada and a

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<sup>30</sup> Standard texts on the region concerning labour include: Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead* and Jean Morrison, *Labour Pains: Thunder Bay's Working Class in Canada's Wheat Boom Era* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 77.

<sup>32</sup> See Figure 1 for statistics on female participation in resource-based employment.

<sup>33</sup> Ruth Frager and Carmela Patrias, *Discounted Labour: Women Workers in Canada, 1870-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 7.

crossroads for those traveling east to west, created a natural base for meetings and stopovers for those traveling along the national railway.<sup>34</sup> This unique position allowed for increased opportunity for labour groups in the gathering of information and influence over organizations across the country.<sup>35</sup> This, in turn, allowed for not only male, but also female representatives to come to the Lakehead and influence the way in which women participated in politics and labour.

In order to better understand the growth of a female narrative in the region beyond statistical analysis, an examination of local labour and work showcasing female influence in a regional, national, and international context will next be discussed. The exploration of activities as well as major leaders, demonstrations, strikes, and formations gives a better understanding of how and why women were actively involved in all areas of social evolution at the Lakehead. With the majority of women across Canada acting in a supportive role as caregivers to the masculinized activities of their husbands, fathers, or brothers, the Lakehead provides an example of localised expression of female involvement in politics and labour. With the growth of the Lakehead and especially its expanding immigrant population, specifically those from countries in which female enfranchisement at the time had been attained, immigrant men and women brought new ideas to the formation of the Lakehead's unique

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<sup>34</sup> The Lakehead became an epicenter for east to west transport when the city was chosen as a central rail line for pan-Canadian travel. This in turn allowed the Lakehead to tout itself as not only a major shipment point for wheat, and other goods along Lake Superior, but also aided in the attraction of investment from industry to continue the growth of a burgeoning "Chicago of the North". For more, see Thorold J. Tronrud, "Building the Industrial City," in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, 99-119.

<sup>35</sup> The important role of immigrant communities within the socialist movement is not a new concept. Norman Penner, for instance, recognized in 1977 the role they played in spreading the revolutionary spirit from Europe to North America. See Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

expression of the Canadian labour movement. This particularly applied to the growing number of Finnish immigrants to the region. Finnish immigrant populations at the Lakehead and outlying areas jumped from 356 in 1901, to over 2,200 by 1911 and represented men and women familiar with female rights in politics and labour, since women attaining equal voting rights in Finland in 1907.<sup>36</sup>

The Lakehead and the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William experienced rapid growth through immigration and change in the twentieth century. Expanding industries, the push to modernity, and the geographic change from rural to urban were all landmark incidents pushing citizens to believe in their cities as booming epicentres of a 'new Ontario.'<sup>37</sup> With a radically changing social and geographic makeup, it only made sense for Northwestern Ontario to adopt a legacy of political expression concerning labour in the region. With the expansion of industry and work available to new immigrants, undoubtedly labour disputes and organizations existed well before the twentieth century. According to local historians, however, true political expression solidified in the eyes of citizens and workers in 1903. "The year 1903," according to Jean Morrison, "would herald many firsts for labour: the first strike organized and settled locally, a publicly acclaimed first Labour Day Parade, and the first labour council, a Central Labour Union, affiliated to the American Federation of Labour."<sup>38</sup> The year also marked the formation of the future Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), born out of the

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<sup>36</sup> For more, see Samira Saramo "A socialist movement which does not attract women cannot live': The Strength of Finnish Socialist Women in Port Arthur, 1903-1933," in *Labouring Finns: Transnational Politics in Finland, Canada, and the United States*, eds. Michel S. Beaulieu, Ronald N. Harpelle, and Jaimi Penney (Turku, Finland: Institute of Migration, 2011), 145-156.

<sup>37</sup> Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Jean Morrison, "Community and Conflict: A Study of the Working Class and its Relationship at the Canadian Lakehead, 1903-1913" (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 1974), 4.

Canadian Socialist League (CSL), with some believing that these groups would incite a wave of organization among the working classes beginning in Western Canada and making its way East across a developing nation built on the labour of its citizens.<sup>39</sup>

With differing views coming from a variety of backgrounds, labouring groups did not represent a hegemonic force for political and industrial change across Canada, or even in a region as small as the Lakehead. With each group exposed to different historical, political, and national expressions, it is easy to understand how and why the Lakehead as a region seemingly primed for labour expansion ultimately fell short of the hegemony necessary for long-term solidarity. Ethnic, racial, and cultural divides all played a role in the limited expansion of labour radicalism in the region. Although issues surrounding equality and the emancipation of workers were a common theme, the way in which individual groups perceived it, especially through the nexus of class- and sex-based difference. Women, especially, were one such category, with all “workers ... called before the bar of history to answer for the specific biases (gender, race, and sexual orientation)” and with women exposed to politics and labour in different and varied ways.<sup>40</sup> The role-played by women at the Lakehead in the promotion, organization, and support of labour, strikes, and both regional and national organizations, representing a wave of activism beginning in the nineteenth century and finding its narrative in the twentieth.

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<sup>39</sup> For a more detailed look at the Socialist Party of Canada and its national expansion, see Peter E. Newell, *The Impossibilists: A Brief Profile of the Socialist Party of Canada* (Twickenham: Athena Press, 2008); Peter Campbell, “‘Making Socialists’: Bill Pritchard, the Socialist Party of Canada, and the Third International,” *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 45-63; and Gerald Friesen, “‘Yours in Revolt’: The Socialist Party of Canada and the Western Labour Movement,” *Labour/Le Travail* 1 (1976): 139-157.

<sup>40</sup> McKay, *Rebels, Reds and Radicals*, 37.

By 1903 women were becoming more involved in political parties throughout Canada. Alongside mainly male-dominated and highly masculinized areas of protest such as labour disputes and strikes, female led and populated organizations played a significant role in the fight for equality. One such organization, The West Algoma Woman's Council (WAWC), was an example of regional female political expression during the period. The Council, which eventually transformed into The West Algoma Equal Suffrage Association during the First World War, was formed in 1894 as a means to organize the women of the twin cities on social and political issues and served as a regional chapter for the larger National Council of Women of Canada.<sup>41</sup> The WAWC served as an active voice for female rights throughout the region, with some of their work including the measurement and encouragement of literacy in the twin cities, and the addition of female-centered educational opportunities by introducing domestic sciences as a credited course in local area schools.<sup>42</sup> The Council's stated mandate was bringing "together women from all societies and gather them around our common centre of interest and full discussion. It is therefore a meeting that women from both towns endeavour to attend,"<sup>43</sup> and aimed at the creation of "an important link East and West, and must endeavour to strengthen that link, and do our part towards building a great community of noble women."<sup>44</sup> The theme of solidarity, discussion, and the

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<sup>41</sup> Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society (hereafter TBHMS), West Algoma Council of Women fonds, Series E11/3/2, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the projects (of which there were dozens) and the active public work of the women's council, see TBHMS, "Active work of Women's Council," Series E 11/3/1.

<sup>43</sup> "Woman's Council: Annual Meeting of the Council held Yesterday in Port Arthur," *Fort William Daily Times Journal*, 31 January 1903.

<sup>44</sup> TBHMS, "Inaugural Speech by Mrs. F. Gibbs, President of the West Algoma Council of Women," File: History of the West Algoma Local Council of Women 1894-1950, Series E 11/4/3.

drawing together of women were common among regional groups and national organizations like the WAWC, but whom did 'all women' define?

The definition of women and their role in both labour and politics was scrutinized based on the nexus of identity. Class, race, and ethnicity played a major role in the Lakehead's struggle to create a continuing hegemonic group of men or women in social expression.<sup>45</sup> The records of the WAWC, for example, although affiliated with more than nine organizations in the twin cities, both female and non-female led, show that many were predominantly Anglo-British organizations with no listed 'foreign groups'. The majority of affiliated groups were connected to religious organization's such as the Presbyterian Methodist Society, and the Roman Catholic Women's Work Club, with religious organizations constituting five of the nine affiliated groups.<sup>46</sup> While this is not to say that they did not count among their ranks foreign or immigrant peoples, they were not predominantly featured in their public connections, or representative of presidents, treasurers, or members of the council in the official minutes.<sup>47</sup> With the period between 1898 and 1914 representing a second wave of industrialisation where "In many small towns, patterns of women's employment depended a great deal on the types of local industries, particularly on the presence or absence of the kinds of industries that

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<sup>45</sup> Chris Southcott, "Immigration, Integration and Inclusion in Thunder Bay," in *Immigration, Integration and Inclusion in Ontario Cities*, eds. Caroline Andrew, John Biles, Meyer Burstein, Vicki Esses and Erin Tolley (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 319. For an overview of the role of ethnicity in regional politics, see Anthony W. Rasporich, "Twin City Ethnopolitics: Urban Rivalry, Ethnic Radicalism and Assimilation in the Lakehead, 1900-1970," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 18, no. 3 (February 1990): 210-30.

<sup>46</sup> TBHMS, "Affiliated Societies: Governors, and Personelle, and Programmes," Series E 11/4/3, and TBHMS, Correspondence books and files, Series E 11/3/1-8.

<sup>47</sup> For more on the organizations affiliations, see TBHMS, "Affiliated Societies: Governors, and Personelle, and Programmes," Series E 11/4/3.

typically provided jobs for women, female employment was growing at the Lakehead.<sup>48</sup>

This meant that the workingwomen were often underrepresented in organisations such as the WAWC during the period mentioned above and were often foreign or immigrant born, without an active voice in the organizations meant to speak for all women.<sup>49</sup>

Patterns of employment often created rifts concerning ethnicity and class with a preference for Christian Protestant values in the workforce and where “ethnic divisions sometimes deepened the gulf between middle-class reformers and female workers.”<sup>50</sup>

The lack of an active voice by foreign women in female-run organizations in the region, combined with the fact that many in organizations such as the WAWC were of British or Anglo descent, meant that as much as they wished to help in the creation of legislation or the implementation of services for ‘all’ women in the public and private sphere, they often gave a voice to the perceived struggles of all women, rather than listened to those for whom they were supposed to be representing.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The automation of factory work, felt across Canada, aided in the segregation and gendered division of work. Women in major industrial centres were preferred over men, according to Frager and Patrias, as they provided a cheap army of labour that never drank and would never strike over poor working conditions. This is an obvious generalisation, but one that dominated the female labour narrative throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries – and which arguably still occurs today. See Frager and Patrias, *Discounted Labour*.

<sup>49</sup> The WAWC was comprised of “noble women” intent on “mitigating the sorrows of humanity” through their charitable work during the period. Of the names listed in various ledgers and membership booklets, none fall outside Anglicized family names. Although this is speculative, as women could have married into Anglo families, changed their family name upon arrival to Canada, or other factors, it is important to note the lack of ethnically diverse names, and speculatively members in the council.

<sup>50</sup> Frager and Patrias, *Discounted Labour*, 103.

<sup>51</sup> For more on female voices and ethnic divides in labour, see Margaret Kechnie and Marge Reitsma-Street, eds., *Changing Lives: Women in Northern Ontario* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1996).



The Lakehead was an example of this pattern. With immigrants representing 30% of the population of both Port Arthur and Fort William by 1901,<sup>52</sup> alongside a burgeoning white-Anglo elite, types of work and the definition of work were interpreted differently by various groups and people.<sup>53</sup> Local elites such as Louis Peltier and his wife Mary Peltier “were in the vanguard of social progress”, Louis, as a local labour leader and eventual Mayor, and Mary, a women’s rights activist and member of both the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the first president of the Women’s Suffrage Union, representing those in the mainstream of Lakehead society.<sup>54</sup> While popular movements and ideals of social progress were often limited to upper class expression, it is important to note that people of all classes and ethnicities participated in the language of labour and its definition at the Lakehead in the many and varied ways outside of traditional ‘white’ expressions in the participation of men and women in labour disputes and strikes. Additionally, the discussions on the contributions of women at the Lakehead and in general have almost exclusively been focussed on those of Finnish women.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This number would rise again by 1911, with a 60-40 split of British and non-British citizens in the twin cities. For more, see Southcott, “Ethnicity and Community in Thunder Bay,” 19.

<sup>53</sup> The idea of women as servants to the home and contributors to the family wage was a predominantly working and middle class ideology, one in which both working and middle class women could attain upon marriage. This ideology did not account for the necessity of lower class women who were either without a spouse, or who were the primary or singular wage earner for their family.

<sup>54</sup> Scollie, “Louis Lawrence Peltier (1853-1939),” 10-30.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Kechnie and Reitsma-Street, eds., *Changing Lives*; Varpu Lindström, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada*, (Beaverton: Aspasia Books, 2003); and Saramo, “‘A socialist movement which does not attract women cannot live’: The Strength of Finnish Socialist Women in Port Arthur, 1903–1933.” Even in more popular forms, such as film, the role of women at the Lakehead has largely surrounded the Finnish women’s experience. See, for example, the films *Letters From Karelia*, directed by Kelly Saxberg (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2004) and *Under the Red Star*, directed by Kelly Saxberg (Thunder Bay: ShebaFilms, 2011).

Sanna Kannasto was one such woman; as a Finnish Canadian labour activist, she was integral in the establishment of the Finnish Organization of Canada (FOC) and worked as a campaigner for both the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. Her legacy as a social activist alongside other Finnish men and women is well known, and remembered today as having a large contribution to the labouring narrative of the region.<sup>56</sup> However, an increased awareness for the contributions made by all women regardless of sex, language, ethnicity, or race brings new voices and layers to the multidimensional history of labour and politics at the Lakehead in the twentieth century.

With the establishment of organizations, strikes, and social change, the new ideas began to influence both men and women in the struggle for recognition in the Canadian workforce.<sup>57</sup> With local papers publishing on strikes and their outcomes, local labour disputes (either as front page news, or alongside the weekly women's column), newly established political parties, and a growing Christian socialist movement in the city, men and women of all classes and ethnicities were becoming involved in labour and politics.<sup>58</sup> Many drew upon prior knowledge from their home countries, or from parents immigrating into the cities, as well as learned knowledge from newly established newspapers and literature distributed throughout the city. These foreign workers were labeled "ready-made socialists," according to Nelson Wiseman and Benjamin Isitt, with the "early Canadian socialist rainbow featuring many colours: Chartists, Christian Socialists, Co-operators, and, by the nineteenth century's end, communists, anarchists,

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<sup>56</sup> For more on Sanna Kannasto (née Kallio), see Lindström, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada*, 149–152 and Samira Saramo, "An 'Iron Woman' at Heart, Flexible in Life: A Look at the Letters of Sanna Kannasto," *Journal of Finnish Studies* 12, no.1 (2008): 48-61.

<sup>57</sup> Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 22.

<sup>58</sup> "Christian Socialism," *Fort William Daily Times Journal* (henceforth *FWDTJ*), 3 May 1903.

and other adherents of European radical movements.”<sup>59</sup> The varied and multi-dimensional language of labour, and growing influences of left-leaning political organizations in the region, led to not only a better understanding of the plight of workers, but the acknowledgment of strikes as a legitimate form of protest. Foreign workers and their place at the Lakehead would be challenged many times throughout the twentieth century, and their role as marginalized ‘others’ alongside women would form a key aspect of the local narrative on labour history.

Female involvement in labour and politics at the Lakehead is profitably examined through an analysis of significant labour and political disputes in the region, answering questions of how and why women became involved in the public sphere. Labour disputes and the fight by unions and left wing organizations over pay, working hours, and safety were many and varied throughout the region, and affected not only the labouring men but women as well. The freight handlers’ strike of 1903 by Canadian Northern Railway employees was an example of this. Although short-lived and without much gain in either policy or politics, it did elicit acclaim as the first reading of the riot act in the region.<sup>60</sup> The strike consisted of mainly Greek and Italian immigrants advocating for higher wages, year-round employment, safer working conditions, and the promise of an eight-hour day. Although these demands fell on deaf ears, it was significant that many of the complaints arising from the workers revolved around not only pay, but also the stability of year-round employment and the uncertainty of working hours.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Nelson Weisman and Benjamin Isitt, “Early Socialism in Canada: International and Regional Impulses,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 4 (2013): 512.

<sup>60</sup> Morrison, *Labour Pains*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

The strike was eventually settled, with many of the men returning to work with small gains, many of which were lost in subsequent years. While a speculative point concerning the 1903 strike, women who were left at home with young children either living in the city or abroad supported their husbands' demands for better working conditions. One example of the support and isolation felt during their husbands' activities can be seen in the home life of Mary Peltier. Life at home for Peltier was described as extremely difficult, with "Mary (wife) and two children left alone for weeks at a time due to National meetings and negotiations"<sup>62</sup> attended by Louis Peltier. Serving as an example, Mary, like many women with spouses or family members involved in labour throughout the region, experienced these hardships in different and varied ways. Although Peltier's experience would have differed greatly as a labouring elite from other working class women of the day, the act of caring for a family, fearing future financial uncertainty, and maintaining their own employment and/or political activism presented a common string of secondary issues when faced with their relative dependency on male wages and employment.<sup>63</sup> While female activism and labour were often deemed as secondary to a male-dominated narrative, women experiencing increased opportunities in labour were beginning to become involved in their own expression of labouring rights and working conditions in the region.

Although the first 'official' strike at the Lakehead was attributed to the freight handlers in 1903, another dispute was well underway by that time. Female workers employed by Bell Telephone were also involved in a fight for better working conditions and job security. While historians Michel Beaulieu and Jean Morrison note the dispute's

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<sup>62</sup> Scollie, "Louis Lawrence Peltier (1853-1939)," 34.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

connection to organizer and activist Harry Bryan, a historical narrative often overlooked or undervalued was the contribution of female labour. The 1903 Bell telephone referendum centred around the revealing of Bell Telephone's collusion with local industries and businesses to take municipal ownership away from the city of Port Arthur and instead introduce the corporate entity as the sole provider of phone services in the newly emergent city.<sup>64</sup> With a predominantly female workforce employed by Bell, changes from municipal to private ownership would have affected female workers and their ability to advocate for themselves and their working conditions if company ownership switched from local government to a national corporation. It was not until Bryan, a political activist and self-proclaimed union organizer, alongside newly elected councilman Louis Peltier (running under the labour ticket), challenged the company and revealed its double-dealings that public ownership commenced and is still present today.

With municipal ownership of the telephone system, the Bell telephone scandal did not "reflect a working-class victory," according to Beaulieu.<sup>65</sup> Although recourse occurred when dealing with municipal ownership, political victories for labour candidates and strikers did not occur as a result, with workers receiving little to no changes in their current positions. While the Bell telephone scandal marked an important point in the region's labour history and worked to secure municipal ownership in the region, it was not until 1907, when the municipal telephone girls' strike against the import of foreign labour and poor working conditions resulting in a call for arbitration by the Department

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

of Labour, that female labour was recognized as the main source of the Lakehead's telephone industry and a wholly female strike occurred in the region.<sup>66</sup>

For close to a year prior to the telephone strike, complaints of poor service and long wait times had plagued the city's municipal telephone system.<sup>67</sup> Three weeks prior to the strike, Fort William's Mayor, James Murphy, finally brought the issue to a head during a meeting of the Board of Water, Light and Telephone Commissioners, stating that,

They should face the situation and endeavour to secure improvements or go out of business. The whole system was rotten, there could be little doubt of that, and unless an improvement was effected people would throw the phones out of their homes.<sup>68</sup>

Issues of incivility on the part of operators, lack of service available to private homes, the temporary use of party lines that went from a short term inconvenience to a long term occurrence, and the overall poor condition of the system were presented to the Superintendent of Water and Light, J. McRae.<sup>69</sup> Although he publicly stated that he was unaware of how bad the system had become and that "he thought the fault was mainly in the operating room," he still continued to lay blame on the local female labourers and their inability to perform their work.<sup>70</sup> McRae proposed the formation of a Chief Operator position in order to "supervise the work of the switchboard and relieve the operators of

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<sup>66</sup> "Citizens Meeting in Favor of Arbitration: Commission will be requested to Settle Strike by This Means – Last Night's Meeting was Largely Attended," *FWDTJ*, 30 August 1907.

<sup>67</sup> This problem was not unique to the city of Port Arthur. Owing to the 'newness' of the technology and the inability for workers to keep up with demand, many cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Edmonton were also facing issues dealing with the implementation of private telephones and public switchboards in their communities. For more, see "Spiked Guns of Telephone Fight: Former Mayor Dyke Writes to Edmonton Let's Dispose of Controversy," *FWDTJ*, 29 August 1907.

<sup>68</sup> "Phone System Warmly Criticised," *FWDTJ*, 1 August 1907.

<sup>69</sup> "Some Reasons why Poor Telephone Service is Given" *FWDTJ*, 1 August 1907.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

the confusion and annoyances” of day-to-day operation.<sup>71</sup> The implementation of a Chief Operator position had been brought up during a prior meeting almost a year earlier, noted Aldermen Peltier during the meeting, leading him to publicly question why such a position still did not exist, with McRae refusing to respond during the meeting. This questioning, and the resulting actions taken by McRae, eventually formulated the key point of issue for the municipal telephone strike of 1907.

With increased pressures and the public scolding of the Water, Light and Telephone Commissioners, along with the shortfalls addressed by the mayor and attributed to Superintendent McRae, the solution of hiring an experienced operator, Ora Hudson, from Illinois, as Chief Telephone Operator for the city on 19 August 1907 was met with disastrous results. Refusing to work under “a newcomer, and especially one from a foreign country,” all fourteen female municipal staff members walked out on strike, with local linemen promising to strike in solidarity the day that Hudson began her new position.<sup>72</sup> With fourteen full time workers, two of whom had been with the municipal system since its inception in 1902 (and at Bell telephone before that), the girls argued that in principal one among them should have taken the Chief Operator position, rather than importing someone “not one bit a better operator than any of the local girls.”<sup>73</sup> While the hiring of Hudson constituted the main reason for striking, further complaints regarding the “attempt to blame them [the female operators] of the poor service,” as well as the suggestion that “the only reason she [Hudson] was appointed is

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Although records do not indicate the linemen’s promised solidarity in either the newspapers or Ministry of Labour reports, it is interesting to note both their support and subsequent withdrawal from strikers’ solidarity with the female workers.

“Refused to Work under Imported Operator,” *FWDTJ*, 19 August 1907.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., and “Telephone Girls Stand for Principal,” *FWDTJ*, 23 August 1907.

that she is a friend of the telephone superintendent who comes from the same city," were reported as well, resulted in the immediate action taken by the women upon Hudson's arrival.<sup>74</sup>

Initial solidarity saw all fourteen women employed in the municipal system walk out on 19 August at twelve noon after completing their morning work. This did not last, however, as three women, all of whom had been with the company for less than six months, returned to work the following day.<sup>75</sup> In addition, the promised solidarity by male linemen never came to fruition, further hindering the effect a multi-discipline strike would have garnered. The strike itself lasted eleven days until it was brought before city council, with Alderman Peltier advocating for peaceful arbitration to resolve the dispute. The decision was made after Mayor Murphy questioned the lack of notice given by the women before striking and the opinion expressed by council that "the girls could be made [to] comeback to work for thirty days, or be sent to jail."<sup>76</sup> Due to the fact that many of the women either returned to work or were replaced almost immediately, McRae, in writing to then Deputy Minister of Labour W. L. Mackenzie King with regards to arbitration, stated that "there is no strike or trade dispute among the employees," and that "I had no trouble filling places made vacant by their dismissal which action I was compelled to take under the circumstances."<sup>77</sup> This has led to the dismissal of the strike's legitimacy and importance, as it was deemed not significant enough to enter into substantive official Department of Labour records.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Library and Archives Canada (henceforth LAC), The Department of Labour, RG27, Vol. 295, Strike 2980, letter from A. McNaughton to The Department of Labour: Trade Disputes, 19 August 1907.

<sup>76</sup> "Gets Business, Should Keep Quiet," *FWDTJ*, 23 August 1907.

<sup>77</sup> LAC, The Department of Labour, RG27, Vol. 295, Strike 2980, letter from J. McRae to Deputy Minister of Labour W. L. Mackenzie King, 26, August 1907.



Of the fourteen women working in the municipal office, all six of those over the age of twenty-one and one of eight under the age of twenty-one were officially dismissed by the commissioner, with only seven eventually returning to work.<sup>78</sup> The letters sent by McRae to the Department of Labour outlined the situation and revealed that the women who had walked out were “gradually replaced by inexperienced girls,” with later newspaper articles chronicling the debate on the women’s rehiring and eventually abandoning the cause with the lack of coverage given to the situation all together after October of that same year.<sup>79</sup>

The municipal strike by the telephone girls brought up issues surrounding the import of foreign labour and discussion with regards to male and, by association, female labour in the city. Active organizations as well as local citizens advocated against foreign import of labour, an ongoing issue for labour throughout Canada by the Anglo-elite during the period, as many saw the import of skilled labour as weakening the economy and perpetuating ethnic and racial biases of the day.<sup>80</sup> The import of Hudson

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<sup>78</sup> LAC, The Department of Labour, RG27, Vol. 295, Strike 2980, Information request from A. McNaughton to the Department of Labour: Trade Disputes, 27 August 1907.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> For more on the subject of immigrant labour, see Marcel van der Linden, “Introduction,” in *Class and Other Identities: Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History*, eds. Marcel van der Linden and Lex Heerma van Voss (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 18. The classic discussion of the relationship between class and ethnicity in Canada is John Porter’s *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965). He focuses on inequality as it pertains to levels of occupation and other aspects of the Canadian labour market. For more on the treatment of the issues of “ethnicity” in Canadian history, see J. Dahlie and T. Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power and Politics* (Toronto: Methuen Publishing, 1981); Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995), 20-60; and Robert Harney, “Ethnicity and Neighbourhoods,” in *Gathering Place: People and Neighbourhoods in Toronto* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985), 1-23. The Canadian Historical Association has also produced two short works on the subject. See Franca Iacovetta, *The Writing of English-Canadian History* (Ottawa:

was no exception; Alderman Louis Peltier went as far as to suggest the invoking of the Alien's Labour Act of 1897 when the question of her citizenship came up during a town hall meeting.<sup>81</sup> Although there is no record of the Labour Act being enforced during the strike, headlines for 27 August 1907 proclaimed "Miss Ora Hudson Will be Deported," and within the article it is stated that both she and the aforementioned superintendent to whom the claim of friendship had been made in order to secure her position had both handed in their resignation "in order to avoid legal proceedings."<sup>82</sup> The strike officially ended with the call for arbitration, and the eventual dismissal that a strike had even occurred by both McRae and the Department of Labour on 30 August 1907.

The strike, although strong originally, was eventually weakened when several of the women returned to work in the following days with the promise of being "well looked after ... [with] one of the restaurants taking their meals up every night."<sup>83</sup> Arbitration, the involvement of the Department of Labour, and the continuing fight for female rights in the workforce all contributed to the strike's importance to the region, as well as its lack of recognition. With McRae's dismissal of the strike in his report to the Department of Labour, as well as the failed arbitration and rehiring of the more senior women, the "matter of principal" in hiring internally for the position of Chief Operator and its

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Canadian Historical Association, 1997), and John Zucchi, *A History of Ethnic Enclaves in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> The act was initiated by the Laurier government to discourage the "importation or immigration of any alien or foreigner into Canada under contract or agreement ... to perform labour or services of any kind in Canada." The act was passed on the request of the trade union movement in the late nineteenth century and was one of the few occasions a request of this nature was granted. For more, see Acts of the Parliament of the Dominion of Canada, *Alien Labour Act 1897* (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlin, Law Printer (for Canada) to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, 1873-1951), Chapter 11.

<sup>82</sup> "Miss Ora Hudson will be Deported," *Port Arthur News Chronicle* (henceforth *PANC*), 27 August 1907.

<sup>83</sup> "Gets Business, Should Keep Quiet," *FWDTJ*, 23 August 1907.

avocation by the women was disregarded in favour of hiring inexperienced workers.<sup>84</sup> While the women were able to make headlines and garner public support ultimately much like those who struck in 1903, victories for labour candidates and strikers did not occur as a result. This is not to diminish the role the strike played in female recognition of labour in the region; the active role of not only the 'telephone girls' but of the city regarding female labour did lead to a broader recognition of female labour than in years prior within both Port Arthur and Fort William. But it did not necessarily produce the outcome hoped for by the women who had struck as "a matter of principal."<sup>85</sup>

Media reporting on the strike in both the *Fort William Daily Times-Journal* (*FWDTJ*) and the *Port Arthur News-Chronicle* (*PANC*) was significant as instances of a strike; rebellion and militancy of women were not hidden, but were often placed as front-page news as exemplified by the municipal telephone strike. The trend of reporting on militant women in both the *FWDTJ* and the *PANC* had been established before, and continued after the strike has occurred. So-called 'militant' women throughout Canada and Britain were heavily featured in both papers, not necessarily as champions of their sex, but as women defying the social order of the day. The papers reported almost daily on not only female activities but also their perceived misbehaviours. Headlines such as "Militant Women Betray their Sex" and "Good Girl Gone Bad: Woman Arrested during Public Spectacle at Parliament" labelled women involved in public or political protest as defiant of the social order and betraying their pre-conceived labeling much like the telephone girls.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the reality of female labour was becoming an integral part of

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<sup>84</sup> "Telephone Girls Stand for Principal," *FWDTJ*, 23 August 1907.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> "Militant Women Betray their Sex," *FWDTJ*, 3 September 1904, and "Good Girl Gone Bad: Woman Arrested during Public Spectacle at Parliament" *PANC*, 17 April 1906.

the social and political makeup of the country and the world. With regards to the 1907 municipal telephone strike, the *FWDTJ* reported that “the great majority of the citizens were out to support the girls” during a town hall meeting, one could argue this was showcasing the acceptance of female labour, albeit in certain gendered industries, or could be representative of the strong opposition to the import of foreign labour.<sup>87</sup>

Regardless whether in support of the women or support in principal, the region was beginning to witness the linkages between women, labour and politics regarding employment in the region.

The speculation on public support and activity concerning female involvement moving beyond a passive role in the family wage system became a reality during the 1907 telephone strike. In the time between the discoveries of collusion by Bell telephone in 1903 and the municipal telephone-girls’ strike of 1907, the cities of Port Arthur and Fort William continued to change dramatically. With the establishment of organization like the WAWC at the turn of the century, instances of strike activity, and changing industrial paradigms, an attempt to solidify the presence of a female voice in Canadian society was occurring. Increasing female labour participation rates in the country and the province, combined with an increasing female population and a decreasing gender ratio, all played a role in the transformation of the region’s political and labouring narrative. As more women began to enter the workforce and social, political, and cultural values changed, increased industry, a swelling population and the implementation of public works throughout the area saw the Lakehead transforming into a booming centre of industrial, social, and gendered progress.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2 Ferocious Women (1907-1913)

Industrial progress at the Lakehead transformed the once rough town of prospectors and fortune seekers into an expanding economic and social capital of a growing North. Grain handlers, railwaymen, loggers, and miners comprised the majority of the working class in a region where it was believed they “could produce wealth from rock, as conveniently as the farmer can do it from the soil.”<sup>1</sup> Natural resource extraction, shipping, and a national railway system linking east to west all contributed to a swelling population of immigrant workers and entrepreneurs keen on developing industry in an industrial North. The ‘Guardians of Progress,’ those focused on boosterism and the idea of marketing “two small villages on the shore of Lake Superior into a Canadian version of Chicago,” advertised the Lakehead in the decades preceding the First World War as a center of growth and opportunity with no end in sight.<sup>2</sup> Company’s such as the Canadian Steel Foundry Plant, the Western Drydock Shipping Company, responsible for some of the largest ships produced at the time on Lake Superior, and the Copp Stove Company all came to the Lakehead as a result of the local governments’ push to modernize and expand the region’s economic prospects. Although on the surface the Lakehead appeared to be booming, this process of industrialisation came alongside a legacy of unemployment, poor working conditions, and constant struggle for recognition within Ontario’s north.

Alongside the boom of growth and progress came a struggling lower class employed in unskilled and semi-skilled labour, with the majority of these workers

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<sup>1</sup> “Opinions Column,” *Port Arthur Daily News* (hereafter PADN), 20 October 1906.

<sup>2</sup> Thorold J. Tronrud, *Guardians of Progress: Boosters and Boosterism in Thunder Bay, 1870-1914* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 1993), 3.

comprised of ethnic and racial minorities that struggled throughout the pre-war years. With major industries of mining, lumbering, transportation, and the railroad providing work for unskilled labour, “only the European workers seemed prepared to face the irregular pay, high accident rates, crude living conditions and isolation that characterized this kind of work.”<sup>3</sup> Men and women of all races and ethnicities experienced the side effect of an increasingly industrial nation.<sup>4</sup> With the first major wave of immigrant populations arriving between 1898 and 1914, many of the positions made available for newly landed immigrants were for unskilled or semi-skilled, often dangerous, and low paying labouring positions for men, and domestic service or take home work for women.<sup>5</sup> A growing immigrant population reflected in 1911 census data showcases the growing number of workers (comprising of roughly 40% of the population), both unskilled and semi-skilled coming into the Lakehead region (Figure 3).

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Southcott, “Ethnicity and Community in Thunder Bay.” *Polyphony: The Bulletin of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario* 9, no. 2 (1987): 11.

<sup>4</sup> Between 1901 and 1911 at the Lakehead, those of ethnic origin accounted for roughly 32% in 1901 and 40% in 1911 of the total regional population. For more, see Jean Morrison, “Ethnicity and Class Consciousness: British, Finnish and South European Workers at the Canadian Lakehead Before World War 1,” *The Lakehead University Review* IX:1 (1976): 55-65.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada, (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939), 16-19.

Figure 3: Ethnic Breakdown of the Lakehead, 1911

<b>Ethnic Breakdown of the Lakehead 1911</b>			
	Port Arthur	Fort William	Total
British*	7003	9752	16755 (60.4%)
French	708	944	1654 (6.0%)
Italian	472	917	1389 (5.0%)
German	305	365	670 (2.4%)
Polish	512	215	730 (2.6%)
Scandinavian**	413	360	773 (2.8%)
Netherlands	28	37	65 (0.2%)
Native (Indigenous Canadians)	3	30	33 (0.1%)
Chinese	39	57	96 (0.3%)
Jewish	76	267	343 (1.2%)
Negro	3	1	4 (<0.1%)
Russian***	1421	835	2256 (8.1%)
Other****	237	2719	2957 (10.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,220</b>	<b>16,499</b>	<b>27,719</b>

\*Includes English, Irish, Manx, Scottish and Welsh

\*\*Includes Danes, Icelandic's, Norwegians and Swedes

\*\*\* Includes Finnish

\*\*\*\*Includes Austro-Hungarians

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada (1911)

Employment statistics for men and women are difficult to obtain for both Canada and the Lakehead for two reasons: the first was that even when employment statistics were taken, take home work and home-care were not considered valid employment, and the second was that many women who were involved in active labour were often considered transient or working on a limited time-line and expected to terminate their employment to marry or bare children.<sup>6</sup> With this in mind, while female participation in the labour force at the Lakehead is not actively broken down by occupation in census data until 1921 (and only then for the city of Fort William), the total number of those actively employed can be categorized on the assumption that the region followed

<sup>6</sup> Maurine Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), xi.

national trends of gendered employment based on the limited census data available for men and women at the time.<sup>7</sup> The Lakehead, as a region built on the export of natural resources and the transshipment of goods through the Great Lakes system, introduced a variety of industry and would have allowed for female employment. Although by the outbreak of war in 1914 the population of the Lakehead would increase dramatically with new business interests and the retention of employable enterprises outside of the resource sector, prior to the war years work was often difficult to come by. This difficulty combined with the fact that the Canadian economy experienced a depression beginning in 1913 that would not end until halfway through the war also led to increased hardship in the region, as those employed in resource industries were increasingly looking for work in urban centres.<sup>8</sup>

In 1911, census data estimates that roughly 721 women were actively employed at the Lakehead.<sup>9</sup> With a labour force of over 7,000 in the region, women made up fewer than 10% of the working population at the Lakehead in 1911.<sup>10</sup> The second decade of the twentieth century would change the way in which female employment was available and recognized in Canada and at the Lakehead. Women were becoming more heavily involved in labour both regionally and nationally, with the advent of factory work and, as discussed previously, female exclusive jobs such as the municipal

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<sup>7</sup> Census data was not taken for cities whose total population did not reach or exceed 20,000 permanent citizens. Although the Lakehead experienced population fluctuation due to seasonal work, it was not until 1921 that Fort William reached 20,000.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the Lakehead during the wheat boom and bust, see Jean Morrison, *Labour Pains: Thunder Bay's Working Class in Canada's Wheat Boom Era* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Museum Historical Society, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> James Stafford, "A Century of Growth at the Lakehead," in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, eds. Thorold J. Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2008), 43.



telephone 'girls' in the region. While groups such as the West Algoma Women's Council of Fort William recognized the role of women in all facets of employment, and "who work in whatever field – house, store, factory, office, school, institution or profession,"<sup>11</sup> census data, and labouring opportunity still lacked clarity on female contribution to labour outside the public sphere (see Figure 4).

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<sup>11</sup> "Council Meeting to be held Monday", *PADN*, 13 August 1908.

Figure 4: Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in Canada: 1901-1911

<b>Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in Canada (over the age of 10)</b>								
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>1901</b>				<b>1911</b>			
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>		<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Agriculture*	707,924	46	8,936	4	917,848	39	15,887	4
Fishing and Trapping	27,160	2	24	0.01	34,547	1	265	0.7
Logging	16,055	1	-	-	42,658	2	-	-
Mining	28,341	2	4	<0.01	62,404	3	3	<0.01
Manufacturing	229,027	15	70,508	30	275,439	12	96,795	26
Construction	89,100	6	65	0.03	150,520	6	47	<0.01
Transportation	81,161	5	1,322	1	153,586	7	5,340	1
Railway	27,750	2	29	0.01	65,567	3	56	0.02
Road	27,248	2	23	0.01	49,090	2	18	<0.01
Trade and Finance	91,795	6	7,757	3	193,154	8	28,651	8
Service	100,623	7	135,582	57	139,054	6	183,841	50
Professional	39,521	3	34,679	15	53,720	2	45,402	12
Personal	47,788	3	100,306	42	68,996	3	137,221	38
Clerical	46,220	3	12,569	5	72,595	3	33,756	9
Labourers	126,726	8	1,141	0.5	317,008	13	236	0.06
Other	751	0.05	41	0.02	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,544,883</b>		<b>237,949</b>		<b>2,358,813</b>		<b>364,821</b>	
<b>Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in ONTARIO (over the age of 10)</b>								
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>1901</b>				<b>1911</b>			
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>		<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Agriculture*	302,533	47	3,898	4	301,347	36	5,690	4
Fishing and Trapping	2,038	0.32	8	0.01	3,639	0.44	86	0.06
Logging	6,201	1	-	-	10,521	1	-	-
Mining	3,902	1	1	<0.01	16,738	2	-	-
Manufacturing	145,249**	23	33,763**	31	129,289	15	45,515	29
Construction					53,743	6	22	<0.01
Transportation	78,029***	12	5,026***	5	56,010	7	2,428	2
Railway					25,401	3	20	<0.01
Road					18,677	2	4	<0.01
Trade and Finance					70,719	8	13,953	9
Service	36,719****	6	58,271****	54	49,304	6	69,600	45
Professional					19,286	2	17,066	11
Personal	13,850	2	47,221	43	23,762	3	52,070	34
Clerical	19,689	3	7,604	7	27,538	3	17,442	11
Labourers	50,917	9	30	0.03	117,287	14	142	0.09
Other	280	0.04	24	0.02	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>645,557</b>		<b>108,625</b>		<b>836,145</b>		<b>154,878</b>	

\* Includes all farmer's sons over the age of 14, whether or not reported with gainful occupation

\*\* Separate data is not available for "Manufacturing" and "Construction" in 1901 Census

\*\*\* Separate data is not available for "Transportation" and "Trade and Finance" in 1901 Census

\*\*\*\* Separate data is not available for "Professional" in 1901 Census

Source: Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada, (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939).

While gendered occupations such as domestic work, teaching, and sewing were un-recognized, increasing opportunity in new areas of industrialisation like factories and automated industries like the municipal telephone system at the Lakehead caused social recognition of female employment. An example of this came from a discussion by the regional chapter of the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) on the merits and implications of the proposed Workingmen's Compensation Act of 1914, and its inclusion of all sexes and ages of workers. The contributions of women who attended the meeting regarding the bill were recognized in the daily newspaper for adding 'zest' to the remarks of the speakers present "in so far as it had to do with women workers" and adding a female voice to a male-dominated narrative. This recognition reflected the presence of a growing female advocacy during the period and was met, according to the report, with organized labour "pledge[ing] their support of the measure, practically in its entirety."<sup>12</sup> Although the definition of 'zest' and what the women in attendance said to elicit such a descriptive response was not recorded, its inclusion as an anecdote to the overall conversation was important enough to note by the attendees. Female advocacy and inclusion in the Act created to compensate in case of injury was supported and exemplified new ways in which women were being included in the growing labour narrative of the region.

The advancements made for women between 1913 and the first half of 1914 seemed to signal an upward trend for female recognition in politics and labour. As late as August 1914 the local Women's Labour Leagues were petitioning for 'half-holidays' for women and girls employed in the city as a means to decrease the strain of working

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<sup>12</sup> "Workmen' in Compensation Bill Includes All Sexes as well as Ages," *FWDTJ*, 21 February 1914.

in the summer heat and to promote the recognition of a growing female workforce with duties in both the public and private sphere.<sup>13</sup> Growing recognition of a “Two-Job” woman, one with both feminine duties and those who took up a “new job as an added burden” to support themselves and their families, were becoming more common in the modern age.<sup>14</sup>

The duality of both private and public lives presented women with additional challenges as well when dealing with husbands, fathers, or sons actively employed in regional labour. Instances of injury, death, or strike could severely affect the private life of women in the region, leading to personal hardship and public intrusion. While those like Mary Peltier representative of the labouring elite discussed in the first chapter would deal with long absences and increased domestic duties, those of the labouring class faced different challenges, especially the immigrant class, when dealing with the politics of the region. The freight handlers’ strike of 1909 exemplifies this duality, and showcases the role women played not necessarily as active labourers like the municipal phone girls, but as quiet supporters to regional labour.

As stated previously, labour in the region, especially in the first decade-and-a-half of the twentieth century, represented a legacy of industrialisation, immigration and precarious employment. Immigrant workers in unskilled and semi-skilled labour comprised of ethnic and racial ‘others’ represented a constantly evolving and changing workforce advocating for safer, more regulated, and better paid employment. Greek and

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<sup>13</sup> The recognition that women would be fatigued from such long hours, as well as their own upkeep of both the home and themselves, was cited in the reasoning for the necessity of a half day. See, “Women’s Labour League to Petition for Half Holiday,” *FWDTJ*, 4 August 1914.

<sup>14</sup> “Are you a Two-Job Woman?” *Port Arthur Daily News-Chronicle* (hereafter PADNC), 10 November 1917.

Italian railway men in particular were in a constant state of flux during this period, with the latter striking at least three times between 1903 and 1907.<sup>15</sup> Each time strikers advocated for higher wages, better working conditions, the end of prejudice, and the certainty of employment for both themselves and their families. Any concessions to working condition made however were short-lived, as companies would redefine working conditions with each new hiring cycle, entering into a cyclical state of loss and gain. This constant state of flux came to a head when CPR freight handlers, with the help of female relations, struck in 1909 with violent and bloody results.<sup>16</sup>

When dealing with a large-scale strike such as the freight handlers, reporters from across Canada often flocked to cities in order to obtain first-hand accounts of the disturbances, as well as local and familial reactions. The 1909 strike proved to be one of the most infamous, recognized, and reported labour disputes of the early twentieth century. Known nationally, “the confrontation of 1909 [was] a classic in Canadian labour history,” according to Morrison, and “among its elements were a foreign born workforce, intense violence, military suppression, conflicting public opinion and intervention by a pro-labour mayor, organized labour and the Department of Labour.”<sup>17</sup> The strike came about as a result of, once again, poor working conditions, the abolishment of previously won gains, and ethnic prejudices, resulting in the abrupt resignation of over 800 workers without warning on 12 August 1909. The strike transformed from a fight for industrial recognition to a regional conflict incorporating local, provincial and federal governments,

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<sup>15</sup> Michel S. Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead: Ethnicity, Socialism, and Politics, 1900-35* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 30.

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed look at the causes and influences surrounding the 1909 freight handlers' strike, see Morrison, *Labour Pains*, 84-96, and Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 29-31.

<sup>17</sup> Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 30.

the dispatch of the local militia, and the dividing of public opinion on labour in both Fort William and Port Arthur.

The strike lasted for three days and ended on 15 August 1909, with significant gains made by the freight handlers. As stated by Morrison, elements of the strike were significant not only for Canadian and regional labour history, but also for the role played by women during the conflict. Local women had to contend with future uncertainty due to their husbands' dependence on employment for the family wage and prolonged absences during both times of work and strike.<sup>18</sup> In existing scholarship, local labour historians have largely overlooked the role played by women and their support both in the home and the workforce during the 1909 strike. Primary material concerning women and their involvement and support of the strike was recorded in a string of editorials written by Garnet Clay Porter, a reporter for the *Winnipeg Telegram*. Published each day of the conflict starting on 9 August 1909, when initial rumours of a strike had begun to circulate before its initial start on 12 August, and ending four days after the strike closed on 19 August 1909,<sup>19</sup> His pieces involved not only the statistical and practical aspects of the strike, but also incorporated a frank and open look at the living conditions, involvement, and participation of women and their families during the strike.

The 1909 strike was infamous throughout the Lakehead and Canada as a bitter and violent episode in labour history. Over the course of several days, workers across

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<sup>18</sup> Fredrick B. Scollie, "Louis Lawrence Peltier (1853-1939): Railway Labour Leader, Mayor of Fort William 1909-10," Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society *Papers & Records* XXXII (November 2004): 13.

<sup>19</sup> "Winnipeg Telegram Newspaper Reports on Fort William Freight Handlers Strike, August 1909 – Written by Garnet Clay Porter," Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, *Papers & Records*, XXXII (November 2004): 31-42.

the city struck for better working conditions and fairer representation in the workforce. Fearing the unrest and with strikers' growing agitation over the CPR's import of railway police and constables, Fort William's pro-labour mayor and union man Louis Peltier was forced to enlist the help of the local militia and police force to maintain order on the urging of local citizens fearful of the 800 workers camped outside the Fort William freight sheds and the city's south side.<sup>20</sup> This mobilization of local militia, frustration over the railway police's attempt to forcefully remove impending strike-breakers and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's (RCMP) effort to exert control over the strikers resulted in a riot leaving 14 dead, including 4 police officers, 8 strikers and 2 bystanders, as well as 30 wounded.<sup>21</sup> Fearing increased violence after the bloody confrontation on 13 August 1909, the local militia and police service were enlisted to conduct raids on private residences in the aim of confiscating "arms, knives, liquor and ammo," in order to eliminate the threat of further violent outbursts.<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, the interference by militia and police forces served to incite more violent outbursts and general resentment for law enforcement figures, already present, to an all-time high.<sup>23</sup> The importance of Porter's reporting on the strike to the study of female participation and attitudes becomes apparent when reading his first-hand accounts on the search and seizure of weapons throughout the city during the strike.

As a male-dominated strike, women were not a focal point of negotiations, government correspondence, or local media coverage. Female contributions, both forced due to their husbands' absence and freely given by women in feeding and

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<sup>20</sup> Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Porter, "Strike and Riot in Coal Dock Section Settled by Appearance of Local Regiment" *Winnipeg Telegram*, 13 August 1909.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Porter, "Strikers Most Law Abiding," *Winnipeg Telegram*, 11 August 1909.

standing alongside the strikers, were apparent, however, with women acting in their maternal role as caregivers and providers of the family and home. What makes Porter's coverage unique is the multiple mentions of not only female disapproval of local militia and police, but also the attitudes and lifestyles of women from lower income areas of the city, a class of people often understudied and often lacking primary sourced material. When reporting on home-to-home searches, Porter noted that "among the working men it produced anger and resentment: among the women a 'ferocity and contempt' for the military."<sup>24</sup> Female contempt represented a new look at how women perceived strikes and the consequences that came along with them. Since the freight handlers were predominately made up of foreign workers, many of those chosen for search and seizure belonged to an immigrant working class, many of whom—both male and female—had pre-conceived notions of the military's involvement in labour, as well as ideals of womanhood in the involvement of labour and revolt.

Pre-conceived notions of the militia and police combined with the intrusion into the homes of the immigrant working class elicited a not unsurprising response from these immigrant women. While Porter describes their anger and resentment as expressions of racial biases, for example when describing Italian women as "fiery," he seems to be commenting on their supposed pre-disposition to anger, rather than recognizing that any person, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or race, would see the intrusion of military men and police as extremely invasive.<sup>25</sup> In a period not far removed from an era of stringent Victorian morality, and the ideal of the home as a feminine domain, the search of the home would have been seen as a violent intrusion into private

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<sup>24</sup> Garnet Clay Porter, "Strike Breakers Are Now Loading Vessels at Ft. William Dock" *Winnipeg Telegram*, 14 August 1909.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



life.<sup>26</sup> In addition the interpretation the female sex could have been different as well since "... conceptions of femininity could ... vary in different cultural contexts. Immigrant women from peasant backgrounds in Eastern Europe may have largely dismissed Anglo-Celtic views of womanhood, while perhaps facing other constraints that were specific to their own ethnic groups."<sup>27</sup> Porter described the intrusion stating, "the wife looked on with a light in her eyes that grew fierce as she witnessed the violent hands laid upon her household articles."<sup>28</sup> Houses were "ransacked" with women and families left to clean up the mess of search and seizure on their homes carried out by men of authority.<sup>29</sup> While Porter took special notice of the women's ethnic and racial background, he fails to comment on the indecency and aftermath that resulted from such an intimate search and the lasting affect it would have on a family.

The discontent of women felt through the disdain at these intrusive search and seizure methods took on a role surpassing the earlier label of caregiver and maternal supporter to one of active participant. In the course of the search for weapons "the women ran into the surrounding bushes with these weapons and concealed them beyond the possibility of detection," noted Porter, a fact known and reported on by local media, but without punishment or inquisition by law enforcement.<sup>30</sup> It is not known why no arrests were made with regards to the concealment of weapons; the relative instability of the situation coupled with the fact that women were carrying out the offence

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ruth Frager and Carmela Patrias, *Discounted Labour: Women Workers in Canada, 1870-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.), 122.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Porter, "Strike and Riot," 13 August 1909.

could be considered as a reason for deference in the matter, although this is speculative at best.

Foreign women again were a point of note when Porter compared female reactions from wives and mothers to those of their husbands. When searching Italian homes, according to Porter, militia were “met with sullen silence and dark glances everywhere. The women displayed much spirit though frequently spoken to in a voice of alarm by their cowering husbands.”<sup>31</sup> Porter reported on one man, an Italian named Pavenoa, whose home was ransacked even after denying having weapons, noting his wife’s disapproval and that “no arms were found, [but] It required the soft tones of her husband repeatedly to soothe her.”<sup>32</sup> Porter went on to note “women of Italian homes displayed more ferocity and contempt for danger during the brief exchange of shots yesterday than men.”<sup>33</sup>

Porter was reporting from a lens of an Anglo-male during the period, and his reporting also lacks a broader understanding of why these women acted the way they did. Although men of English and Irish descent participated in the strike, no mention is made of their homes’ search or seizure, and when their role in the strike is discussed, it is said that they “quit through fear” of the other strikers, rather than in support.<sup>34</sup> With many Italian immigrants coming during Canada’s first wave of immigration between 1898 and 1914, many were relative newcomers to the country with significant handicaps in both social and legal situations. Linguistic misunderstanding,

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<sup>31</sup> Porter, “Strike Breakers Are Now Loading Vessels,” 14 August 1909.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

the invasion of privacy by the militia, and Porter's inherent prejudices labeled these women as timid creatures, whose anger was tied to the home and family.

This ideology of pre-conceived ideals and ethnic prejudice was further exemplified in later articles when Porter commented on what he believed he would find in an immigrant home, that it would be dirty with large numbers of children, and a lack of sanitation surrounding the men and women of 'foreign descent'. He goes on to write of his surprise when commenting on the cleanliness of the homes, of wives in becoming gowns, and the presence of only one or two children.<sup>35</sup> While Porter found the ferocity of women and their role as supporters and even outspoken advocates for their husbands, fathers, and sons surprising enough to dedicate an entire column to 'ferocious women,' he does little to analyse why these women would be so upset, and again lends their reaction to racial stereotyping.<sup>36</sup>

This stereotyping again downplayed the role women played in the strike's solution as well. It is interesting to note that Porter's personal experience of seeing many immigrant families of strikers with small families did not change the stereotypical description of these families in his published columns. With husbands, fathers, and sons representing the primary earner in a household, women came out again to support of their husbands during Mayor Peltier's address to workers. When strikers and bystanders alike gathered together on 19 August to hear Mayor Peltier advocate for resolution based on government-sanctioned avenues of mediation, men and women alike came to hear him speak. With the Greeks and Italians labeled the backbone of the labour movement, the crowd was broken down in distinct cohorts of the labouring class:

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Garnet Clay Porter, "Ferocious Women," *Winnipeg Telegram: Morning Edition*, 13 August 1909.

“in the rear of the Greeks and Italian line hung the timid Hungarians and Poles and on the outer edge, anxious women with many babies at their sides.” The presence of women, noted Porter, was significant as “it meant bread to many of them and they had a vital interest in the action.”<sup>37</sup>

The actions of women involved in the strike were seen as an extension of their ethnicity and verification of the definition of radicalism that followed many of the immigrant working class. While women were not mentioned as striking ‘workers,’ rather strike ‘supporters,’ Porter comments on the Mayor’s recognition of the “hardworking men and women” of the coal docks, and his willingness to hear their story regarding why they chose to strike added a new element to the strike’s narrative.<sup>38</sup> While it is not known if female workers were present at the docks or if Porter’s word use was in reference to workers or supporters, the presence of women in either capacity represented yet another way in which women were becoming recognized as a part of the labouring and ethnic narrative of the region.

The recognition of women having a vital interest in the strike, in addition to the support and outward disdain for law enforcement described by Porter, highlights a new component of the 1909 strike previously unexplored. When Mayor Peltier cited manliness as a key aspect of his reason for men to return to work and asking strikers to ‘act like men’ in considering their community and familial obligations, it was a half-formed argument that did not account for female support during the strife.<sup>39</sup> The strike ended on 15 August 1909, when Mayor Peltier convinced workers to submit a claim for

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<sup>37</sup> Garnet Clay Porter, “Men Return to Work at Ft. William Today and Will Arbitrate,” *Winnipeg Telegram*, 16 August 1909.

<sup>38</sup> Garnet Clay Porter, “Mayor’s Appeal”, *Winnipeg Telegram*, 16 August 1909.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

reconciliation to the proper government authorities, and pleaded in the attempt to end future violence and maintain peaceful connections between the city and its workers.

The masculinization of labour and the dismissal of a female voice or contribution in strikes belittled the role played by women, and, again much like how Porter portrayed them in his writings, regulated them to the role of maternal influence in the home and extension of racial stereotypes, rather than active participants.<sup>40</sup> While many are remembered for the contributions in strikes and disputes, women are often neglected as having played a key role in support of the striker's through caring for the home and familial well-being, as well as active participants much like the women above, aiding their husband's in a variety of ways such as hiding banned materials, and coming out in support during public spectacles.

After the 1909 strike, the Lakehead again transformed, reaching a pinnacle of achievement for labouring Canada a decade into the twentieth century. The Port Arthur Finnish Socialists Labour Hall, established in March 1910, played host to the Finnish socialist locale and its connection to the Port Arthur branch of the SPC.<sup>41</sup> The erection of the Finnish Labour Hall helped establish a permanent home for socialism in Port Arthur's downtown, marking a significant accomplishment for socialists and Finns

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<sup>40</sup>For examples of female roles in public and private life outside of Northwestern Ontario focused on gender, see Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993); Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Anne Porter, "Women and Income Security in the Post-War Period: The Case of Unemployment Insurance, 1945-1962," *Labour/Le Travail* 31 (Spring 1993): 111-144; and Susan Trofimenkoff, "One Hundred and Two Muffled Voices: Canada's Industrial Women in the 1880s," *Atlantis* 3, no. 1 (Fall 1977): 67-82.

<sup>41</sup>For more on the Finnish Labour Temple, see Marc Metsaranta, *Project Bay Street: Activities of Finnish-Canadians in Thunder Bay before 1915* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Finnish-Canadian Historical Society, 1989).

alike.<sup>42</sup> Both men and women were active participants in the hall's establishment, with women in particular forming an integral part in the hall's success, as fundraisers ensuring the funds necessary for its construction were obtained. Halls established in both Port Arthur and Fort William dedicated to labour and politics were present both before and after the "Finn Hall's" founding and represented the diverse and radical notions of labour in the region. The establishment of such halls represented a huge expense for organizations across the country, and understandably needed significant funding. This was an area in which women as organizers and administrators excelled in their contribution to the continuation of parties and politics.

Newspapers during this period represented the Lakehead's main source of news and education for female contributions to labour and politics. Issues of education, work, home, and family life were discussed in women's columns as well as the approval or dissatisfaction of readers on current happenings in the region. When an issue surrounding a series of newly proposed by-laws were presented to the city, women's columns urged those able to vote to cast their ballot. The columns even went as far as to list those women, who either through ownership, proxy, or inheritance were eligible to vote in the upcoming council meeting to ensure equal representation among the city's citizens. This female contribution to local governance can be found when noting the number of ballots cast by "Eligible Women Voters 280 [number of ballots]" in 1913,

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<sup>42</sup> For more on Finnish migration to North America, see Reino Kero, *Migration from Finland to North America* (Turku: Institute for Migration Studies, 1974); Keijo Virtanen, *Settlement of Return? Finnish Emigrants (1860-1920)* (Helsinki: Migration Institute, 1979); Varpu Lindström, *The Finns in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1985); and the first chapter of Varpu Lindström, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Women in Canada, 2nd ed.* (Beaverton: Aspasia Books, 2003).

concerning by-laws and mayoral elections in the city of Fort William.<sup>43</sup> Women's columns and representation (no matter how small) in local governance were increasingly being reported upon as women began to take a more active role in social, political and labouring life, as the second decade of the twentieth century moved onward towards eventual social equity.

The year 1913 was particularly notable, especially when reviewing local newspapers, as a year in which women more than ever were concerned with not only their community, politics, and labour, but on the national and international discussion on female rights and equity. Articles on suffrage and the right to vote were present throughout the papers at a higher than usual rate, with local and international speakers being brought to the city and reported upon. Although she did not present a formal public lecture, the arrival of Miss Barbara Wylie, an English militant suffragist, proved important enough to be reported on after her arrival in the city. With English suffrage militancy dated back to 1905 with Cristobel Pankhurst's assault on a British constable attempting to eject her from a political meeting on the topic of suffrage, Wylie's visit and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) were viewed in Canada in varied ways by the general public.<sup>44</sup> While Wylie spoke to many sympathetic crowds during her tour,

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<sup>43</sup> "Heavy Vote Today is Indicated by Number of Casting Ballots Early: Workers in Interest of the Bylaws Hope to see them all Approved in no Uncertain way by the Electorate," *FWDTJ*, 6 January 1913.

<sup>44</sup> The WSPU's tactics were known for causing general unrest and often perpetuating violence in their militant action to attain the vote. Both the *Fort William Daily Times-Journal* and the *Port Arthur News-Chronicle* (which later became the *Port Arthur Daily News-Chronicle* in February 1916) gave several reports on the movement's actions both in England, and eventually in Canada as the decade progressed. The chronology of their militancy is described by Deborah Gorham as follows: "From 1905 to 1909, suffragette 'violence' was restricted to heckling liberal speakers ... Only after repeated incidents, in which the women were pushed about by crowds, and police ... Did the women begin to break windows in a form of protest ... the first stone throwing incident

she was also met with the hostility and opposition to the radical tactics of the WSPU and its militant style, and those opposed to suffrage in general.

While staying overnight as a guest of Mary and Louis Peltier, Wylie was called upon to address several informal meetings and by the local newspapers to give insight on her opinions of Western women. Wylie's lectures speak to her popularity; she stated that in Vancouver, "the building in which I spoke was crowded and 200 persons had to be turned away."<sup>45</sup> When asked about female success with regards to suffrage, she was quoted as saying "The women of the West are hopeful they will obtain equal suffrage, in fact some of them expected to obtain it at the present session of the government. While it is too much to hope for to obtain it in the immediate future, I believe it will come to pass in time."<sup>46</sup> The hope Western Canadian (or in this case Northwestern Canadian) women had that equal suffrage would occur in the immediate future did fall in line with the increased activism of women throughout the region, and was reflective of a number of incidents that occurred in 1913.

With increasing recognition of labour and politics in the region, local papers began to advertise the role of women's auxiliaries in fundraising for the erection of labour halls, public events, and noteworthy causes in both cities.<sup>47</sup> While women comprised of those seeking donations and actively organizing socials and events to help pay for hall's, female auxiliaries lacked recognition. Even though they were at the forefront of progress and important to the future of the organization, auxiliaries were

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occurred in 1908 ... [and] the final phase of militancy was the arson campaign, confined to 1913 and 1914." See Deborah Gorham, "English Militancy and the Canadian Suffrage Movement," *Atlantis* 1(1975): 83-112.

<sup>45</sup> "Miss Wylie is Pleased With Canada West: Delighted with Reception Accorded to her by Women of this Country," *FWDTJ*, 21 February 1913.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> "Women's Guild to Aid Work of Erecting New Labour Hall," *FWDTJ*, 2 April 1913.



another example of the fact that even when women were at the forefront of their community, they were still regulated to supportive roles. Mrs. Poole, wife of Henry Poole (a C.P.R railway man), and Mrs. Urry, wife of Fredrick Urry, an architect by trade,<sup>48</sup> became figures in both socialist and labour disputes throughout the region in this regard. Both served actively as members of the WAWC as well as the Equal Suffrage Association in the city. With both Poole and Urry becoming heavily involved in local labour campaigns and active participants in their communities, they are seldom mentioned as major contributors to the labour movement, and often relegated to their married associations rather than their independent work.

As independent organizers, and spousal supporters of their own ideologies and that of their husband's influences, the two women had strong views on female organization and its capabilities. For example, when describing the need for female organizer's on the proposed plan to build new labour temples in the twin cities, Poole and Urry stated that the creation of "a women's guild in each city would give much assistance toward the erection of the proposed Port Arthur and Fort William labour temples," the use of the word assistance still placed female contributions behind those of their male counterparts, yet the suggestion of not one, but two distinct guilds of women in each city showcased their belief in the importance of female support. With Urry pointing out that "the ladies could have dinner and supper at the picnic grounds on labour day," no mention is made of the time or effort that would be required to host such an event<sup>49</sup> Although many of the duties performed by women still fell within

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<sup>48</sup> Among his more notable attributes; founded the Lakehead chapter of the Trades and Labour Council (TLC), oversaw the Finn Hall's construction, and was elected to city council in 1911

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

preconceived social norms of gendered work and space (i.e. cooking, cleaning), their contribution, while not recognized fully in their time, would have been strenuous for any woman to achieve in addition to household duties. Although their 'assistance' was valued in their campaigning and fundraising, women were still being relegated to a support role that would not change until after the First World War.

The twentieth century had thus far proved tumultuous for the Lakehead, presenting new ideas and understanding surrounding labour and politics. Regional instances of strike and revolt in the first decade of the twentieth century attributed to men are placed in a new light when female involvement, and female strikes are brought to the forefront. The forward momentum, created by instances of strike and support in the period between 1903 and 1909, would carry onwards towards the creation and implementation of new organizations, challenges, and questions surrounding sex and the woman question. While some female organizations maintained a permanency and breathed life into the region during the first decade of the century, new groups seemed to come and go daily in women's columns, newspaper articles, and labour papers after 1910. Canada itself was undergoing tremendous change between 1910 and 1913 with a severe economic depression, changing relations with the United States and global powers, as well as the shifting relationship between labour and politics both nationally and in the region.<sup>50</sup> Groups active and established between 1910 and 1913 bring new light to the issues in an evolving community of labour and brought together men and women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds to form their definition of the Canadian society.

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<sup>50</sup> For more, see Morrison, *Labour Pains*.

Women in general were becoming introduced to conflicting ideals of femininity and their role in society. While a national phenomenon, the Lakehead serves as a regional study on what women experienced and perceived in the media. Women's work was viewed as a fluid and ever-changing position dependent on a variety of economic, social, and political factors. An essay published in the *Daily Times Journal* entitled "Bright Side of Women's Work" explored the ideology of conflicting definitions of femininity in the region. An excerpt from the article reveals the views some women held regarding the definition of gendered work:

Pleasant conventions on women's work, still sedulously maintained by those who are unwilling to face the harsh reality, is the fiction that all rough and disagreeable tasks are discharged by men. The 'stronger' chivalrously spares women the heavy bodily labour which they are physically unfitted to sustain; and for parallel reason women are excused from work involving prolonged or arduous mental toll ... most people honestly believe that the work of the world is divided on this admirable principal, and they would be considerably startled, and perhaps shocked, if they could be made to appreciate the grim fact ... That an immensely disproportionate share of the unpleasant drudgery of daily life, a great deal of the dangerous work, and most of the autonomous and semi-automatic work, is borne by women.<sup>51</sup>

The essay goes on to state that women in the home, or in their gendered employment, were in fact performing duties that would better fall to men under the category of easy versus hard tasks. Gendered employment is questioned when the author compares the drudgery and hard work of a maid against the 'easy' and pleasant duties of male clerks, calling for an immediate role reversal among the clearly defined lines of male and female employment.

While these printed essays brought to the public ideas of female versus male employment, the author did not account for many women working in industries beyond those involved in paid employment. The author makes comparisons in reference to

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<sup>51</sup> "Bright Side of Women's Work," *FWDTJ*, 24 November 1913.

employment in fields typical of lower class and immigrant women such as domestic services and the idea that “rough and disagreeable tasks” were given to men, but does not allude to the labour intensive and ‘rough’ tasks performed by women in other industries.<sup>52</sup> Although they were not counted as part of official census data, female involvement in rural farms and homesteads were documented during the period and often involved the type of heavy and arduous labour talked about in the newspaper article.<sup>53</sup> This divide between public and private, as well as middle class interpretations and lower class realities, were common among those believing themselves to speak on behalf of workingwomen, but with a limited definition and inclusion of all women, much like the WAWC. This ideology stemmed in some part from the definition of female labour, and its interpretation as either a liberating or oppressive force in the definition of women, and the social interpretation of the female sex.

Although the Lakehead was a region which predominately relied on the export of natural resources and the transshipment of goods from the head of the Lakes (a predominantly male enterprise), gendered employment was still an issue discussed among men and women of the region. The gendered division of labour, especially with regards to a living wage, gave way to an occurrence in the region scandalous enough to make the front page of the local paper. Alice Fleischer, a twenty-year-old woman from

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> For more on female labourers and farm workers, see Carol Lee Bacchi, “Divided Allegiances: The response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage,” in *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, ed. Linda Kealey (Toronto: Toronto Women’s Press, 1979), 89-108.

Brainerd, Minnesota, was arrested and sentenced to six months in jail for dressing up and seeking employment as a man in the city of Fort William over a six-week period.<sup>54</sup>

Taking odd jobs in clerical work and in the downtown hotel industry, Fleischer was able to work a variety of positions before her disguise was questioned six months after her arrival in Port Arthur. The incident opened up questions of female participation in the workforce and the definition of a living wage (among men and women), a question that became the topic of much debate during the First World War.<sup>55</sup> When Fleischer was questioned during her public trial, she stated that “ her dissemblance was not a mere whim nor a means of diversion in a life that has been more than ordinarily hard, but for the purpose of making her way in the world on even terms with men,” and she continued to say “life as a girl is next to being unbearable when it comes to a question of making a living.”<sup>56</sup> The idea that women were struggling to find gainful employment or to live independently in the region was a growing trend, one that pushed women into organizations intent on obtaining equal rights for women, or at the very least a recognition of their contributions to labour, and helped defined a nation that was experiencing the largest economic decline in its history.

The Lakehead’s period of economic depression began in 1913, and lasted along with the rest of the Canadian provinces until mid-1915 after the war began, and the clothing, arming, and deploying of soldiers began to reap economic benefits. Although

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<sup>54</sup> “Girl in Man’s Clothes Works in City Suspected by None: Tired of secluded life of her sex, Alice Fleischer tried the life of youth, and finally secured a jail sentence,” *FWDTJ*, 31 December 1913.

<sup>55</sup> Patricia Connelly, *Last Hired, First Fired: Women and the Canadian Workforce* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1978), 57.

<sup>56</sup> For more on living and family wages, see Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, “The Family Wage’: Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists.” *Capital and Class* vol. 4, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 51-72.

grain continued to move through the region at a rapid pace, local businesses and organizations alike were feeling the strain from a national depression, effecting the price of goods, cost of living, and the scarcity of work, as industries collapsed due to a lack of financing, the end of the wheat boom, and the outsourcing of material manufacturing that pushed thousands into unemployment.<sup>57</sup> The need for pulp, paper, wood, and minerals were necessary in an era of massive growth and industry, but with a weak economy, and the advent of mass unemployment, homes were no longer being built, grain was no longer being shipped, and people were spending less and saving more in order to survive the economic downturn. The war years and the second wave of industrialisation beginning in 1915 and continuing until the late 1920s, eventually opened new opportunities for women in the workforce, but the aforementioned recession between 1913 and 1915 halted the progress many women made with regards to labour in pre-war Canada.

A growing metropolis in the North, the Lakehead represented the growing sentiment toward political and social change during the twentieth century. Although they were hindered by the social decorum of their time, challenge and change regarding women in Canada presented a growing awareness of not only the economic and social fabric of the country but the political expression of its citizens as well. The decade leading up to 1914 was a tumultuous period of constant change and flux. Notable strikes occurred within the region, including the municipal telephone strike of 1907 and the coal handlers' strike of 1909, with both contributing to the transformation and

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<sup>57</sup> For more on Canada and the Lakehead during the pre-war economic depression, see Morrison, *Labour Pains*; Thorold J. Tronrud, *Guardians of Progress*; and Pat Staton, *It was their war too: Canadian Women and First World War* (Toronto: Green Dragon Press, 2006).

definition of labour and female activism in the region. With questions surrounding the definition of female employment, female inclusion in the Workingmen's Compensation Act, the labour supply theory, and the parameters of a male and female living wage, women more than ever were becoming a key point in the narrative of a growing nation. The gains made by women in the formation of female run organizations, participation in strikes, and a growing trend toward the acceptance of a female voice in progressive politics made women much like Barbara Wylie hopeful that female recognition and equality was soon to become a reality.

From strike supporters to caregivers and active members of the labour force, women more than ever were being recognized for their subtle contributions to the region's history. The pre-war years were reflective of Canada's growing and depressing interests. Soon the war would fundamentally change both Canada and its citizens. With an economy facing increasing demand for labour, the war helped to play a significant role in the promotion of female agency at the Lakehead and the entrance of women into the workforce.

### Chapter 3: Replacing Men, at Men's Work (1913-1918)

The Lakehead experienced significant change in its social, political, and economic makeup in the years leading to the First World War. As Ian McKay argues, the 'archipelago' of distinct communities comprising of leftists and labourites within the Lakehead and across Canada fought to find a place and a voice in their struggle for recognition.<sup>1</sup> All genders, races, and classes experienced continuity and change in their day-to-day lives reflective of changing social and political paradigms ushered in by the twentieth century. While the decade and a half leading to the outbreak of the First World War proved to be "one of its most harrowing periods" for politics and labour in Canada, according to Michel S. Beaulieu, "it was also a period of growth."<sup>2</sup> While not speaking directly about female involvement in politics and labour at the Lakehead, Beaulieu reflects the increased notion of a politicised and radicalised group of citizens in Northwestern Ontario. The growing trend towards female involvement in politics and labour, as well as recognition of a female work force through popular strikes, resulted in a growing consciousness of a female role in political, economic, and labouring doctrine at the Lakehead and in twentieth century Canada.

Canada early in the century experienced rapid change in the form of industrialisation, urbanisation, and evolution as a nation. Changing social, political, and economic paradigms caused a shift in the definition of labour, especially with regards to women's entry into the Canadian workforce. What began as a lower-class phenomenon,

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<sup>1</sup> Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, and Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Michel S. Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead: Ethnicity, Socialism, and Politics, 1900-35* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 42.



resulting from economic necessity, became a societal shift for the conscious choice for women to enter into the Canadian labour market. Although peripheral circumstances such as geographic location, age, race, and ethnicity influenced how, or if, women entered into the Canadian workforce, by the beginning of the First World War change was apparent.<sup>3</sup>

The Lakehead was no different than the rest of Canada in this regard. Wartime work for women provided new avenues of support and inclusion within the Canadian workforce, and allowed for the education and expression of a female voice in the arena of political discourse. Although women benefitted from the war in areas of increased opportunity for employment and enfranchisement for some cohorts of women in 1917, the war years were not beneficial for all.<sup>4</sup> Persecution of enemy aliens and naturalized citizens led to an increasingly radicalized working class and a struggle for those who fell outside Anglo British ancestry.<sup>5</sup> With the Lakehead's increasing ethnic population, sex-based discrimination, and social norms of the period cohorts of women not included in new enfranchisement laws made up a large percentage of the region's population, and

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<sup>3</sup> The nexus of identity pertains to all those aspects of day-to-day life that intertwine and create a definition of an individual. This stems from micro principals such as age, and sex to macro principals of national identity, self-definition and learned ideologies and traits. See McKay, *Rebels, Reds, and Radicals*, 40.

<sup>4</sup> The first female voting rights were attained in Manitoba on 28 January 1916. Many provinces went on to adopt amendments to their election acts between 1916 and 1920, with the Northwest Territories being the last to amend their election laws in 1951.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Southcott, "Immigration, Integration and Inclusion in Thunder Bay," in *Immigration, Integration and Inclusion in Ontario Cities*, eds. Caroline Andrew, John Biles, Meyer Burstein, Vicki Esses, and Erin Tolley (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 10. For an overview of the role of ethnicity in regional politics, see Anthony W. Rasporich, "Twin City Ethnopolitics: Urban Rivalry, Ethnic Radicalism and Assimilation in the Lakehead, 1900-1970," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 18, no. 3 (February 1990): 210-30.

were often overlooked when celebrating the rights of women nearly two decades into the twentieth century (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Ethnic Breakdown of the Lakehead, 1921

<b>Ethnic Breakdown of the Lakehead 1921</b>			
	Port Arthur	Fort William	Total
British*	9677	12371	22048 (62.2%)
French	860	942	1802 (5.1%)
Italian	698	1342	2040 (5.8%)
Ukrainian	93	2088	2181 (6.2%)
German	247	190	437 (1.2%)
Finnish	1566	660	2226 (6.3%)
Polish	32	337	369 (1.0%)
Scandinavian **	609	429	1038 (2.9%)
Netherlands	102	76	178 (0.5%)
Native (Indigenous Canadians)	1	38	39 (0.1%)
Jewish	82	289	371 (1.0%)
Austrian	598	454	1052 (3.0%)
Negro	2	10	12 (<0.1%)
Russian	162	134	196 (0.6%)
Other***	257	1181	1438
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>14,886</u></b>	<b><u>20,541</u></b>	<b><u>35,427</u></b>

\*Includes English, Irish, Manx, Scottish and Welsh

\*\*Includes Danes, Icelandic's, Norwegians and Swedes

\*\*\*Includes Austro-Hungarians

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada (1921)

The Lakehead's population increased dramatically between 1911 and 1921, with a growth of more than 6,000 people during the war years. While statistical information is not available (at least that which follows the provincial standard laid out in this thesis), for the war years, the increase in ethnic populations as well as the separation of Finnish immigrants out from the broad category of "Scandinavian" is significant to note.<sup>6</sup> While

<sup>6</sup> The Lakehead region is known in present day for its large Finnish population, representing the second largest grouping of Finns outside Finland. Finnish immigration to the Lakehead brought with it labour leaders, activists and new political ideologies that would come to define the regions role in national politics, as well as international recognition for their contributions to Canadian labour. For more on Finns at the

the war years marked some of the most heavily regulated immigration periods thus far in Canadian history, with measures surrounding desirable versus undesirable immigrants, those of Asian descent suffering some of the worst injustices through head taxes, land taxes and travel restrictions, immigration to Canada and to the Lakehead was not easy. Those who had immigrated, and especially those whose nations were deemed as enemy states during the global conflict by the Canadian government, endured racism that affected not only their social standing in society, but also aspects of their public image including employment and their rights and freedoms. Hiring practices, wage dispersal, and the ability to hire and fire at will based on ethnic prejudice all became factors in an industrial North dependent on foreign labour for many industries including logging, shipping, domestic work, and factory employment. This ethnic prejudice and dismissal came to define instances at the Lakehead and across Canada

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Lakehead, see Christine Kouhi, "Labour and Finnish Immigration to Thunder Bay, 1876-1914," *Lakehead University Review* 9 (Spring 1977): 41-54; Jean Morrison, "Ethnicity and Class Consciousness: British, Finnish and South European Workers at the Canadian Lakehead Before World War 1," *The Lakehead University Review* IX, no.1 (1976): 55-65; Marc Metsaranta, *Project Bay Street: Activities of Finnish-Canadians in Thunder Bay before 1915*. (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Finnish-Canadian Historical Society, 1989); Peter Campbell, "The Cult of Spontaneity: Finnish-Canadian Bushworkers and the Industrial Workers of the World in Northern Ontario, 1919-1934," *Labour/Le Travail* 41 (1998) 117-146; and Michel S. Beaulieu, "Finnish Kanadalainen Sosialismi: Towards an Understanding of Finnish Canadian Socialist Activity, 1900-1939," *Faravid: Historian ja arkeologian tutkimuksen aikakauskirja* [Journal of Historical and Archaeological Studies] 33 (2009): 107-126. For Finns in Canada, see Donald J. Wilson, "Ethnic Voice: The Canadian Sojourn of a Finnish-American Radical," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XVI, no. 2 (1984): 102-115; Keijo Virtanen, *Settlement or Return? Finnish Emigrants (1860-1920)* (Helsinki: Migration Institute, 1979); and Joan Sangster, "Finnish Women in Ontario, 1890-1930," *Polyphony* 3 (1981): 46-54. For more personal accounts, see the section on "Migration/Mouvements Migratoires," in *Canada-Finland, Celebrating 2017: "A brave, hospitable, and altogether admirable people,"* eds. Markku Henriksson, Michel S. Beaulieu, Carmen Pekkarinen, and Mari-Anna Suurmunne (Helsinki: Suomi-Kanada-seura/Finnish-Canadian Society and Embassy of Canada to Finland, 2017), 71-107.

of mass strike, walks outs and sometimes, when circumstance was right, opportunity for both men and women in the Canadian workforce.

The participation of women in the work force has become a popular topic among historians.<sup>7</sup> In particular, female participation during the First World War has elicited a debate about viewing the war as an oppressive or a liberating force for change. Historians Linda Kealey and James Naylor argue against the influence of the First World War on the liberation of women's rights and freedoms with regards to labour.<sup>8</sup> They cite the war years as responsible for the increased femininity of the workforce, due to the gendered division of labour apparent at the time, with historical data showcasing the increase of 'female' employment in gender specific jobs.<sup>9</sup> Prior to the war, census data showcases this 'gendering of work', with the majority of women being placed in positions seen as an extension of their maternal roles. Domestic work, teaching, and sewing (seamstresses) combined totalled roughly half of the employed female workforce in Canada between 1891 and 1911.<sup>10</sup> Other employment in areas such as clerical work, factory work, and telegraph operators became increasingly popular with

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<sup>7</sup> For example, see Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essay's on Canadian Women's History* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011); Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour & the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Paula Bourne, ed., *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985); and Pat Staton, *It was their war too: Canadian Women and First World War* (Toronto: Green Dragon Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause* and James Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging the Social Order in Industrial Ontario, 1914-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> For more on the gendering of employment, see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labour History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> For more on the breakdown of female employment across recorded census areas, see Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931, Seventh Census of Canada* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939), 16-19.

the advent of new technology and the need for communication during the war, especially between 1911 and 1921 as gender specific jobs were becoming a more fluid concept.<sup>11</sup>

These 'gender specific' jobs, so defined by their lack of hard labour and complex analytical skills, were historically chosen as positions that required little to no education or training.<sup>12</sup> With domestic work, sewing, and teaching seen as an extension of maternal roles, they were also avenues of employment that women could participate in while drawing on their learned knowledge in the home. This learned knowledge combined with industries available at the Lakehead both prior to and during the First World War changed the way in which female participation in the workforce was viewed. Women increasingly were becoming more involved in labour at the Lakehead outside the 'gendering' of employment as new industries came to the region in support of the war effort. Census data indicates that between 1911 and 1921, female participation in the workforce increased by more than 80,000 in Ontario, with women increasingly involved in clerical work, service industries (personal, clerical and professional), and trade that were present in regional centres like the Lakehead during the period (Figure 6).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Maurine Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), xi.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, 16.

Figure 6: Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in Canada: 1911-1921

<b>Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in Canada (over the age of 10)</b>								
<b>Occupation</b>	1911				1921			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture*	917,848	39	15,887	4	1,023,661	38	17,883	4
Fishing and Trapping	34,547	1	265	0.7	29,241	1	51	<0.01
Logging	42,658	2	-	-	38,568	1	-	-
Mining	62,404	3	3	<0.01	48,091	2	2	<0.01
Manufacturing	275,439	12	96,795	26	317,219	12	89,868	18
Construction	150,520	6	47	<0.01	162,200	6	91	0.02
Transportation	153,586	7	5,340	1	185,066	7	14,875	3
Railway	65,567	3	56	0.02	85,027	3	81	0.02
Road	49,090	2	18	<0.01	59,622	2	67	<0.01
Trade and Finance	193,154	8	28,651	8	245,827	9	47,728	10
Service	139,054	6	183,841	50	194,101	7	226,956	46
Professional	53,720	2	45,402	12	78,073	3	92,754	19
Personal	68,996	3	137,221	38	73,320	3	133,201	27
Clerical	72,595	3	33,756	9	127,325	5	90,612	18
Labourers	317,008	13	236	0.06	306,211	11	441	0.09
Other	-	-	-	-	5,509	0.21	1,643	0.34
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,358,813</b>		<b>364,821</b>		<b>2,683,019</b>		<b>490,150</b>	
<b>Number and Percent of Gainfully Occupied in ONTARIO (over the age of 10)</b>								
<b>Occupation</b>	1911				1921			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture*	301,347	36	5,690	4	289,701	31	5,370	3
Fishing and Trapping	3,639	0.44	86	0.06	2,383	0.26	8	<0.01
Logging	10,521	1	-	-	7,935	0.86	-	-
Mining	16,738	2	-	-	8,678	0.94	1	<0.01
Manufacturing	129,289	15	45,515	29	150,226	16	40,089	21
Construction	53,743	6	22	<0.01	64,119	7	63	0.03
Transportation	56,010	7	2,428	2	70,693	8	6,743	3
Railway	25,401	3	20	<0.01	33,712	4	36	0.02
Road	18,677	2	4	<0.01	24,172	3	17	<0.01
Trade and Finance	70,719	8	13,953	9	91,677	10	21,381	11
Service	49,304	6	69,600	45	68,502	7	76,974	39
Professional	19,286	2	17,066	11	28,262	3	30,991	16
Personal	23,762	3	52,070	34	23,888	3	45,551	23
Clerical	27,538	3	17,442	11	51,092	6	43,709	22
Labourers	117,287	14	142	0.09	116,658	13	357	0.18
Other	-	-	-	-	1,749	0.19	411	0.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>645,557</b>		<b>108,625</b>		<b>923,413</b>		<b>195,106</b>	

\* Includes all farmer's sons over the age of 14, whether or not reported with gainful occupation

Source: Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada, (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939)

The Lakehead, as a region built on the export of natural resources and the transshipment of goods through the Great Lakes system, made female employment in public and private centres difficult to attain due to the predominance of labour geared toward male participation, but women were still able to find employment. Public industries where women interacted with, and were seen on a daily basis by citizens, as well as private industries such as domestic workers, and take-home workers sequestered to the private sphere of the home, or unacknowledged presence created a distinct divide in employment opportunities for women. Although by the outbreak of war in 1914, the population of the Lakehead had increased dramatically over the last decade and a half, the Canadian depression of 1913 put a halt to the rapid industrial progress. Work was difficult to come by for all and led to increased difficulties in the region, as those employed in resource industries were looking for work in urban centres. With increasingly large pools of unemployed workers, industries like shipping, mining, domestic work, and clerical services were increasingly being given to more preferred candidates (Anglo-British men and women).<sup>14</sup>

Ethnic divides still categorized many of the region's female-run organizations. With the predominance for crossover from one organization to the next, Anglo women's predominant involvement in both labour and suffrage led to increased ethnic divisions, as well as an additional sphere of difference between women of the region. These ethnic divisions were initially what crippled support for many political parties in the region and continued in the female suffrage and labour movements in the pre-war and

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the Lakehead during the wheat boom and bust, see Jean Morrison, *Labour Pains: Thunder Bay's Working Class in Canada's Wheat Boom Era* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2009).

war periods.<sup>15</sup> While issues surrounding ethnic prejudices, lack of representation, and poor working conditions continued to plague the twin cities, change was also apparent in the establishment of labour groups, instances of strikes with tough losses and hard won gains, as well as an increasing female voice in politics and labour showcasing the region's growth as an industrial centre of the North. Even with these divides, the war years still allowed both labour and suffrage to contribute to the expansion of female rights, whether it was the right to work or the right to embrace their perceived femininity, with women becoming even more active in the labouring and political sphere. The increasing recognition of female work, combined with the advancements made by suffrage in the pre-war years, all signalled a growing trend towards female recognition in labour and politics. This trend and its upward movement, while not halted, significantly slowed and evolved to encompass the events and their repercussions that occurred on 5 August 1914.

With the declaration of war against Germany by the British Empire, Canada prepared for a confrontation like never before. Like other resource-based periphery regions, the twin cities were in the midst of experiencing an economic downturn before the declaration of war was made. The economic boom experienced at the turn of the century evolved into an economic depression, with at least a dozen major factories at the Lakehead shut down beginning in 1914 and the required size of the region's labour force in significant decline. Industries that both cities had fought hard to attain in order to

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<sup>15</sup> For a thorough discussion of the Socialist Party of Canada and its decline, see Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 23-35; Michel S. Beaulieu, "The Lakehead and Canada's First Social Democratic Party: The Search for Socialist Unity," *Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Papers & Records* 39 (2011): 29-54; and Varpu Lindström-Best, "The Socialist Party of Canada and the Finnish Connection," in *Ethnicity, Power, and Politics in Canada*, eds. Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando (Toronto: Methuen, 1981), 116-117.



realize their industrial dreams folded as the war reduced their holdings, rendering their specific brand of manufactured good's obsolete in war-time Canada. The National Tube Company and the Steel Company of Canada were examples of this; both companies had newly-built and operational factories in the region as of 1914, but were thought not to have even started production due to their lack of contribution to the on-going war effort.<sup>16</sup> Investments made in the pre-war period were redirected to industries supporting the war, and new legislation concerning production and distribution by the government impacted profitability for many factory owners. Although labour experienced setbacks before and during the first two years of the war, opportunity existed in the region for both men and women as war-based industry began to play a role for the Lakehead's fledgling economy. While many of the industries created during the war were not geared towards women, or followed the female hiring trend in major cities across North America, some women did experience opportunity economically and politically in the region.<sup>17</sup> Census data was not taken during the war, but based on the occupational trends present in Canada and Ontario between 1911 and 1921 (see Figure 6), in combination with the 1921 census recording employment breakdown of women in the City of Fort William due to its population increase after the war, a snapshot of a selection of female employment can be seen (Figure 7).

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<sup>16</sup> Thorold J. Tronrud, "Building the Industrial City," in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, eds. Tory Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2008), 110.

<sup>17</sup> For female experiences in war-time industry, see Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012) and Ruth Frager and Carmela Patrias, *Discounted Labour: Women Workers in Canada, 1870-1939* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006), 54-75.

Figure 7: Gainfully Occupied Fort William, ON - 1921

<b><u>Number of gainfully occupied Fort William, Ontario – 1921 (over the age of 10)*</u></b>		
	Male	Female
<b>Occupation</b>	No.	No.
Primary	140	-
Manufacturing	737	91
Construction	529	-
Transportation	1,633	39
Railway	1,066	-
Road	188	-
Trade and Finance	653	147
Service	600	521
Professional	167	228
Personal	204	289
Clerical	549	271
Labourers	1505	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,353</b>	<b>1,072</b>

\*Individual city breakdowns were completed for those with a population of 20,000 or more

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada (1921)

With an increase of 80,000 employed women in Ontario between 1911 and 1921, it can be assumed that the Lakehead like many industrial cities in the province would have experienced female employment growth.<sup>18</sup> With total female employment in Fort William set at 1,072 for 1921, this represents a broad estimate of female involvement in the workforce. Although industries such as logging, fishing, railway, and trades (all traditionally male roles) are considered when tallying female participation, employment within the home in roles such as caregiver, proprietor or take home worker (sewing, laundering etc.) are not included in the census categorization for men or women, even though they constituted a majority of work for women during the period. This record of

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada, (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939), 16.

female employment, as well as the recognition of provincial and national trends showcases the effect wartime work had on female employment, a shifting recognition for female involvement in labour, and its repercussions throughout the social, political and economic make-up of the region.

The Lakehead, like many regions across Canada and around the world, experienced a shift in the social and moral definitions given to women during the war. While the ideal of educated women participating in the workforce had been considered in the years prior to 1914, the war acted as a catalyst for feminist ideology and the role of women to evolve from the domestic sphere. With increasing tensions felt throughout the world prior to the declaration of war, an address to the Fort William Women's Institute by a visiting lecturer from the Provincial Women's institute, Miss Collins, "warned mothers against the mistake of shielding girls from work, declaring that every girl without any distinction as regards to social position, should be taught some means of earning a livelihood."<sup>19</sup> The push for both higher education and the attainment of a skill by the speaker was reinforced with the fact that many educated and working women under thirty across Canada were married without restriction and that their work proved to be a relief for their husbands economically and within the home.

The idea of women in the workforce as a means for supplementing a family wage was not new; however, since immigrant and lower class women had almost always worked for economic stability, but the rising trend in the acceptance of all women as workingwomen regardless of class or stature was a new and developing trend.<sup>20</sup> This

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<sup>19</sup> "Miss Collins Address Before Local Women's Institute," *FWDTJ*, 13 June 1914.

<sup>20</sup> Frager and Patrias, *Discounted Labour*, 9. For more on the family wage and the evolution of labour, see Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, "The Family Wage': Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists," *Capital and Class* vol. 4, no. 2 (Summer 1980):

ideology of women in the workforce was compounded with a variety of factors stemming from war, including the increased likelihood of widowhood, and the inability for returning soldiers to work or find work in a limited economy. With the idea of working women coming to the forefront of society, especially with women employed in a variety of manufacturing and labouring sectors across Canada, equal suffrage and its mandate presented challenge and change to the existing economic and political system. While some utilized the war as a means to champion for (limited) female political rights, and at the time local media reported that “suffrage societies are rejoicing over the opportunity to make good the contention that ‘women’s sphere’ can only be marked by the measure of each woman’s capacity,”<sup>21</sup> the goal of suffrage was not to attain employment, but rather to achieve political recognition.

The period between 1914 and 1917 reflected a nation dedicated to the on-going war effort and was reflective of the individuals, groups, and organizations at the Lakehead. Women’s groups and organizers changed from champions of equality and avocation, to groups intent on doing their part to support the on-going war effort. Female suffrage and equal voting rights, while attained in 1917, experienced difficulty with legitimization as a necessity for female equality throughout the First World War, with many citing the enterprise as detracting from wartime efforts. While many labour groups advocated for equal rights in all areas and spheres of society, many women’s groups had been established both before and during the war as a means to attain political autonomy from male-dominated Canadian politics. Local leagues such as the Women’s

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51-72 and Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1919* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 136-177.

<sup>20</sup> Frager and Patrias, *Discounted Labour*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> “Responsibilities of War Accepted by Women,” *FWD TJ*, 3 May 1915.

Patriotic League (WPL), an organization like many in the twin cities who counted its members as serving multiple groups (including suffrage and labour), were advised by their host bodies who were,

Strongly opposed to a campaign for any purpose which tends to disunite women at a time when unity means that essential strength which the empire must have ... and depreciate the fact that organized societies of women are spending money, time and energy on a campaign which tends to divide women.<sup>22</sup>

This led to multiple organizations removing discussion of enfranchisement and female rights at the Lakehead from their meetings during the war. With increasing focus on patriotic duty in the role of fundraising, event hosting, and charitable giving, women at the Lakehead experienced vastly different circumstances during the war dependent on their ethnic, social, and racial backgrounds.

Employment did expand during the period, with training and educational opportunities given to those who volunteered as nurses, and who were now ranked in the Canadian military, alongside those acting as chauffeurs and assistants overseas.<sup>23</sup> Many local women went on to become famous within Canada for their work after the war's end, including Elizabeth Smellie, a nurse serving in both the First and Second World Wars, and who became the first female Colonel in the Royal Canadian Army.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, when the franchise was attained for a selection of women through an amendment to the Election Act in April 1917,<sup>25</sup> and increased again through the Military

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<sup>22</sup> "Opposition Raised to Suffrage Campaign," *FWDTJ*, 5 December 1915.

<sup>23</sup> "Trained Women from All Ranks," *FWDTJ*, and 31 December 1915, and "Women Wanted as Chauffer's," *FWDTJ* 22 September 1915.

<sup>24</sup> Mary R. MacLean, "Colonel Elizabeth Smellie, CBE," *Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Papers & Records III* (1975): 16.

<sup>25</sup> The initial amendment allowed "a) British subjects; b) otherwise qualified as to age, race and residence; and c) the wife, widow, mother, sister or daughter of any person in the naval forces (inside or outside Canada) or any person in the military forces (outside

Voters Act in September of that same year,<sup>26</sup> women were given increased voting rights and were encouraged to vote.<sup>27</sup>

While 1917 is remembered for the enfranchisement of women, and a step forward in political opportunity, it is important to note that the franchise was limited in scope. Local papers of the period gave significant coverage on the franchise, and went as far as to give detailed lists of those women eligible to vote, their voting locations and information on the procedure.<sup>28</sup> However, this was limited to a select few; while women whose spouses, fathers, brothers, sisters or mothers were given the vote on account of their military service, many were denied the same right. Of naturalized Canadians, only those arriving before 1902 and belonging to allied countries were given the right to vote, while those defined as enemy aliens coming from countries at war against the empire were unable to vote in federal elections, regardless of their military familial connections.<sup>29</sup> This held true for aboriginal women as well, with over 4,000 indigenous

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Canada) who was serving or served with Canada or Great Britain (only until demobilization)." See Wartime Elections Act, *S.C. 1917, c. 39*.

<sup>26</sup> The Military Voters Act was expanded to include "Women who are British subjects and on active service for Canada (whether or not they are resident in Canada, including "Indians"), and women who are British subjects ordinarily resident in Canada, including "Indians", who are on active service for Great Britain or an ally (only until demobilization)." See Military Voters Act, *S.C. 1917, c. 34*.

<sup>27</sup> Local media played a significant role in promoting the female right to vote after enfranchisement in 1917, going as far as to list all eligible voters in the city, voting stations and large swaths of space given to the definition of eligibility for those residing at the Lakehead (and in other provinces). For more, see "Port Arthur Women Voters Organize," *FWDTJ*, 29 November 1917, and "Suffrage Meeting Yesterday," *PADNC*, 23 January 1918.

<sup>28</sup> "Women who Vote in Coming Elections," *FWDTJ*, 6 December 1917.

<sup>29</sup> For the Lakehead's view on enemy aliens and franchise, see "Aliens From Enemy Countries Who Naturalized Since 1902 Will Not Have to Fight and Will Not Vote," *FWDTJ*, 7 September 1917. For national discussion on enfranchisement, see the contributions in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); Gloria Geller, "The Wartime Elections Act of 1917 and the Canadian Women's Movement." *Atlantis* 2, no. 1

men serving overseas, or one in three able bodied individuals from indigenous communities at the Lakehead and across Canada, aboriginal men were given voting rights only through the Military Voters Act of 1917,<sup>30</sup> while their female next of kin were denied equal opportunity to their Anglo counterparts.<sup>31</sup>

Racial biases and party politics were a major influence on the attainment of female voting rights, as women who had attained the vote were now responsible for maintaining or electing a new government during a period of turmoil. Indigenous peoples, as well as those of differing ethnic or racial backgrounds were not trusted to vote along traditional lines.<sup>32</sup> With ethnic peoples constituting roughly 40% of the population at this time, discontent with working conditions, recognition in social and military connotations, as well as the absence of white British voters could potentially skew elections in a way undesired by Canadian politicians of the time.<sup>33</sup> Even with

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(Autumn 1976): 88-106; Carol Lee Bacchi, "Frist Wave' Feminism in Canada: The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918," *Women's Studies International Journal* 5, no. 6 (1982): 575-83; and Pat Staton, *It was their war too: Canadian Women and First World War* (Toronto: Green Dragon Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Timothy Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 100.

<sup>31</sup> Indigenous women in Canada did not obtain franchise until 1960, and even then they faced unjust penalties that could result in loss of status under the Indian Act. For more on statistics regarding Indigenous men, see Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 1919* (J. de Labroquerie Tache, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty: Ottawa 1920), 13.

<sup>32</sup> "Aliens From Enemy Countries Who Naturalized Since 1902 Will Not Have to Fight and Will Not Vote," *FWDTJ*, 7 September 1917.

<sup>33</sup> See Figure 5, for ethnic breakdowns of the region. For more on political discord and voting rights, see John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: an Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965); Norman Penner, *From Protest to Power: Social Democracy in Canada, 1900-Present* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1992), 38-52; Franca Iacovetta, *The Writing of English-Canadian Immigrant History* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1997); 11-12, and Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995), 23-54

female enfranchisement in 1917, male and especially female workers continued to endure hardship in the Canadian workforce. Disadvantaged women deemed to fall outside the category of preferred workers filled the void for labour intensive work, with minimal pay, safety regulation and chance for mobility, and instead embraced the role of stagnant labourers.

The inequality felt between Anglo-Saxon women and ethnic minorities at the Lakehead, especially with regards to those women connected to enemy countries, was apparent when seeking work. By late 1915 the war effort has begun to revitalize the Canadian economy; with labour shortages increasing due to a lack of male workers, from both enlistment and dedication to certain industries in logging, mining and shipping, more women were needed to enter the workforce. Advertisements both for work and seeking work in local papers offer a glimpse into hiring practices during the period and how women were able to seek employment.

Local advertisements in both the *Fort William Daily Journal* and the *Port Arthur News Chronicle* advertised for a number of positions including waitresses, domestic servants, maids and magazine girls. Factory work and employment for women was virtually non-existent at the Lakehead throughout the war years, with only two major industries dedicated to the war effort—the Copp Stove company who produced munitions until its factory burnt down in 1917, and the Canadian Car and Foundry Company who produced and launched minesweepers towards the end of the war.<sup>34</sup> For women, “One of the few industries to employ female labourers was the McKellar Bedding Company,”<sup>35</sup> and that due to its position in a section of town known for its

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<sup>34</sup> Tronrud, “Building the Industrial City,” 112.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 110.



houses of ill repute, and women of the night, its location did little to entice women beyond the company's attempt to ensure workers were loyal and happy. Throughout the war years the most common advertisements were listed as seeking domestic services for which "Capable English Speaking Girl," or "Competent Good English Girl," reflected the language use and showcased the preference for a certain type of employee.<sup>36</sup>

While most advertisements posted seeking employment both as an employer, and an employee for English women, or seeking English girls lasted only a few days before their removal<sup>37</sup>, some, such as an advertisement for a "Finnish Girl" wanting work, lasted upwards of two months with no reply or retraction from the wanted section, and reflected other advertisements listing foreign women (or those who did not ethnically identify as English).<sup>38</sup> This in itself is interesting not necessarily even for the lack of response given to a woman clearly defining herself as an immigrant, but in the fact that the relative expense in keeping an advertisement in a paper for that length of time showcases either desperation or the conscious dedication of funds towards obtaining employment.<sup>39</sup> While an analysis of advertisement for employment between 1914 and 1918 saw relatively equal numbers of those wanting, and seeking

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<sup>36</sup> "Help Wanted Female," *FWDTJ*, 22 March 1915.

<sup>37</sup> In analyzing advertisements in the classifieds section of the *Port Arthur News Chronicle* as well as the *Fort William Daily Times-Journal* in February, May, August and November from 1914-1918 (with the aforementioned month's chosen to reflect seasonal employment) a picture of female labour in the region can be viewed. While the overall median number of advertisements for English girls per month was five, and ethnic women three, both stayed relatively stable throughout the war, with neither reaching zero in a month at any point. The calculated length of time advertisements were shown resulted in a median period of seven days for English adverts (calculated from a total of 73), and 15 days for those who did not identify as English (calculated from a total of 48).

<sup>38</sup> "Situations Wanted – Female," *FWDTJ*, 27 March 1915 to 7 May 1915.

<sup>39</sup> For more on types, cost and availability of advertising in local papers during the period, see George MacGillivray, *A History of Fort William and Port Arthur Newspapers from 1875* (Bryant Press: North York, 1968).

employment remaining consistent with only a slight increase during winter months for the duration of the war, this does not necessarily reflect the status of the labour market as newspaper advertisements were often beyond the budget of working class families.<sup>40</sup> With labour shortages increasing for male dominated roles, an assumption that female advertisements would increase between 1915 and 1918 has no footing as the relative number of advertisements, and their lengths of time remained consistent. Language barriers, ethnic backgrounds, and low economic status all played a role in female attainment of work and regulated those industries in which women could seek employment both before and during the war. While some women found new employment and educational opportunities in the region like the factory work offered by the McKellar Bedding Company, domestic or maid work in hotels and private residences, or the Municipal Telephone System, many were still regulated to pre-war ideologies of domesticity and a lower-class definition of employment.

Employers reluctant to hire women, but who did so due to necessity resulting from war, often drew the line when given the choice between labour shortages and hiring marginalised female workers. A major example of this was the city of Fort William's reluctance to hire women as streetcar operators in the city due to a lack of male labour, even though severe labour shortages threatened the transportation and moneymaking abilities of the system for the city.<sup>41</sup> With increasing costs to hire male labourers in a year where work was becoming more populous, and vital industries constituted areas necessary for the war, the city feared a labour shortage among its

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<sup>40</sup> This could be attributed to the fact that many of the region's employment opportunities for men were on a seasonal basis and could indicate a need for secondary employment in winter months to increase the family income.

<sup>41</sup> "Woman Car Conductors May Be Necessity on Fort William Railway," *FWDTJ*, 5 June 1917.

conductors. Although it was decided that “managers should take steps, provided such shortage of labour proved to be imminent, to get a list of woman applicants who could be used as necessary,”<sup>42</sup> no such shortage occurred. Limitations on the hiring of those with differing gendered, ethnic, racial and religious norms was commonplace across Canada, and the Lakehead amongst women (and men) and reflected the biases of the day, slow to change even during the war.

While changing definitions of labour did not benefit all women equally, some women did achieve relative autonomy among the labouring class. While many organizations switched from advocacy into patriotic relief for those overseas, the Women’s Labour League (WLL) was still an active force for change.<sup>43</sup> With a dwindling male workforce and growing fear for the Lakehead’s future economic stability, questions of female participation in labour came to the forefront in 1917. Public holidays and events geared towards labour were still occurring during the war, albeit with a different focus. While many middle class, and immigrant women still advocated for workplace equality and equal rights (for middle class women as a revolution in Canadian labour, and for immigrant women as a recognition of rights they had given up upon entering into Canada), patriotism and the war-effort often overshadowed many labour centered activities. For example, Labour Day 1917 was dedicated to collection for the Canadian Red Cross, and to benefit those overseas even though many immigrant men and women in the city were denied the right to serve their country based on their ethnicity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Women May Run Local St. Cars: Shortage of Male Labour Causes Serious Consideration of such a Move Being Made,” *FWDTJ*, 4 June 1917.

<sup>43</sup> For more, see “Labour Day Work For Women’s Societies,” *FWDTJ*, 23 August 1917.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Labour shortages across the country, especially on farms, caused the government to request additional manpower to be recruited from towns and cities across the country. In August 1917, Fort William Mayor Harry Murphy responded to the call for men, and defined the city's precarious labour situation:

The city is being run on the lowest possible force of men, and we are continually short of help. We cannot lay anyone off, since we are always on the lookout for some man whom we can hire. However necessary it may be to harvest the crop both East and West, it would be a fatal mistake to do anything that would hamper the efficiency of the elevators, which are needed for the handling of the crop when it is harvested. Similarly both the car plant and shipbuilding plants may be regarded as national undertakings, which it would be folly to hold up.<sup>45</sup>

The cities of Port Arthur and Fort William as major manufacturing and transshipment points for goods across the country were holding on to the limited labour force they had available. While essential service industries such as public streetcars run by both cities were being considered for female workers (but never came to fruition) to overtake in the midst of the male labour shortage, female workers in the region were in a position to demand concessions previously unthought-of when entering into a period of relative labour stability. The telephone girls' strike in April 1918 and the role of women in the Freight Handlers Strike in May of that same year showcased female labour at the Lakehead, as well as the role women had come to play in the Lakehead's economic stability during the war years.<sup>46</sup>

The Lakehead 'telephone girls' represented a feminised industry in the twin cities, and had already experienced a strike in the previous decade. While social consciousness was geared towards female patriotism and support of the war effort, the

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<sup>45</sup> "Shortage of Men so Acute Locally that None can be Spared for Farms," *FWDTJ*, 10 August 1917.

<sup>46</sup> "Women May Run Local St. Cars: Shortage of Male Labor Causes Serious Consideration of Such a Move Being Made," *FWDTJ*, 4 June 1917.

telephone girls' strike came as a surprise to the twin cities. Citing recurring issues present among both labouring men and women of the city in various industries, such as working hours, pay scales, and issues of seniority, the girls struck for two days in the pursuit of higher wages.<sup>47</sup> On 15 April 1918, 24 out of the 32 female employees walked out on strike in pursuit of higher wages, citing the fact that they "could not wait a reasonable length of time for the commission to decide as to whether they would grant the wage required."<sup>48</sup> The inability to wait for a commissioned outcome and its negative implication was voiced by Port Arthur's Police Commissioner, who stated that "the telephone operators were very ill-advised to take such drastic action, since the telephone is a public service and, as such, all employees are liable to arrest and fine under the industrial disputes act."<sup>49</sup>

Subjected to pre-existing laws established decades prior to curb unlawful strikes, the telephone girls were treated differently than male strikers of the time. Local news specifically stated the opinion of the police and local authorities that the conflict should be settled in a 'friendly' manner without "invoking the majesty of the law."<sup>50</sup> This 'gentle persuasion' won out, with the girls returning to work after only two days on 17 April 1918, while also showcasing the leniency and differences between male and female led strikes.<sup>51</sup> The strikers were able to attain their requested wage increase from \$30 dollars to \$35 dollars per month for their first 3 months of employment, \$35 dollars to \$40 dollars after 9 months, \$40 dollars to \$50 dollars after 2 years, and \$60 dollars per

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<sup>47</sup> "Port Arthur 'Hello Girls' Still Out," *FWDTJ*, 17 April 1917.

<sup>48</sup> LAC, The Department of Labour, RG27, Vol. 309, Strike 158, Information package submitted to the Office of the Editor for the Labour Gazette, 24, April 1918.

<sup>49</sup> "Port Arthur 'Hello Girls' Still Out," *FWDTJ*, 17 April 1917.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> "Telephone Strike Declared Ended," *PADNC*, 17 April 1918.

month each year after the completion of their third year.<sup>52</sup> The wage increase came with a clause, however, that “there must be perfect harmony and cooperation in the exchange from now on, and disputes between operators to be dealt with individually by the members of the Commission,” reflective of the industry being a public service utility.<sup>53</sup> The wage increase was significant as the women’s yearly income would allow them to live independently and reflected a working class victory for those employed six and a half hours per day, six days per week.<sup>54</sup>

Much like the Port Arthur telephone girls and the essential nature of communication, local shipping enterprises represented an industry necessary to the national economy. While women were treated gently and with as little to do with the law as possible, this was not the case for men employed in the similar industry. The 1918 Freight Handlers Strike represents a significant event in the Lakehead’s labour history as it appears to be the first time women were publicly recognized and “in a body, replaced men, at men’s work,” in the region.<sup>55</sup> While historians have dedicated little space to the 1918 strike and its significance, for those looking at women in labour it proved a pivotal point for women’s participation in the Lakehead’s economy.<sup>56</sup> When strikers refused to work and walked out on 13 May 1918, due to long hours, unsafe working conditions, and general unrest caused by the war and conflicting political factions, women were brought in as workers, and strikebreakers. With over twenty women making up work gangs called in place of men though never labeled as such by

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<sup>52</sup> LAC, The Department of Labour, RG27, Vol. 309, Strike 158, Information package submitted to the Office of the Editor for the *Labour Gazette*, 24, April 1918.

<sup>53</sup> “Telephone Strike Declared Ended,” *PADNC*, 17 April 1918.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> “Real Picnic Say Girls Wheeling Freight Trucks,” *FWDTJ*, 14 May 1918.

<sup>56</sup> See Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 56.

local newspapers, female strikebreakers were involved in a necessary and pivotal industry, and given a voice and the opportunity to participate in the male-dominated sphere of industrial work. With grain companies desperate for work, and a fledgling economy dependent on the transshipment of goods to support its people and the war effort, female participation in the strike, while not having long term gains, did present the idea that female employment had the potential to move beyond traditional definitions and could be adapted to differing industries outside the gendering of labour.

When strikers walked off the job, local Canadian Pacific Railway employers needed to ensure the continuation of shipment within the region. With already significant labour shortages being felt throughout the city, the freight industry needed to find work wherever possible to continue the flow of goods across the country. On 14 May, over a dozen female CPR employees were at work as an “army of office girls” in order to fill the gap left by striking men.<sup>57</sup> While the work being performed by women was defined by CPR superintendent N. Hawkins as “merely out of courtesy for the company,” the office women were actively working full eight hour days and responsible for loading and unloading material from cars and boats. Many did not agree with the CPR’s handling of the situation, with local newspapers citing “considerable indignation ... expressed on all sides over the Canadian Pacific Railway Company putting girls to work in the freight sheds,” and that “a good many people freely denounce the slipshod methods of the company in handling this affair.”<sup>58</sup>

While female labour in dockyards and industry was becoming a common occurrence in other parts of the country, especial during the war years, with an example

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<sup>57</sup> “Real Picnic Say Girls Wheeling Freight Trucks,” *FWDTJ*, 14 May 1918.

<sup>58</sup> “Girl Labour on Docks Causes Indignation,” *Twin City Grain and Trade News*, 17 May 1918.

being the *Halifax Herald's* front page article detailing female employment as riveters in dockyards across the eastern coast of Canada, the indignation felt by the Lakehead's citizens did not necessarily align with the realities being faced by the rest of Canada.<sup>59</sup> Reporters on the strike noted as well that "the sight [of women] would probably create no excitement in France or England, but in Fort William, the sight of trim, capable office girls wheeling trucks and loading freight cars is not only interesting but stimulating."<sup>60</sup> This indignation over female work is further questioned when the women were asked by reporters how they felt about the situation; assuming a negative response, the reporter noted his surprise when the women answered "Why, it's fine" and "Oh! It's great."<sup>61</sup> When speaking on the women's work performance observations on their ability to hold their own among other inexperienced workers created a picture of female capability in a male-dominated realm. With the strike lasting 10 days, women were continuously employed as a viable source of labour for the Port Arthur and Fort William waterfront for the duration of the strike. While mention of the slow pace and inability to keep up with demand were present in newspaper reports, the women recruited to the freight yards were still able to unload and send off over four ships during the strike period without reported accident or mistake.<sup>62</sup>

While a step forward in the recognition of female employment, the strike as mentioned above did not result in long-term gains. When questioning women during the strike on how they viewed the type of employment offered by the CPR, one woman was

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<sup>59</sup> "Hundreds if not Thousands of Women Could be Employed in the Great Ship Yard to Be Established in Halifax: And Why Not in Halifax As Well As in Britain and Germany?" *The Halifax Herald*, 12 July 1918.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> "Girls Wheeling Trucks at Sheds," *FWDTJ*, 13 May 1918.



quoted as saying “Of course it would be too hard to keep up indefinitely, but we are satisfied to fill the gap for the present.”<sup>63</sup> This statement seems to contradict what many of the women are quoted as saying when they labeled the work as “not very strenuous,” and instead embraces the idea that women, whether it be due to perceived physiology or social norms of the time, should not and could not perform the same labour as men.<sup>64</sup> Female labourers (and strikebreakers) at the Port Arthur waterfront recognized the fact that their work on the docks was a short-term commitment and would not result in long-term gains. The 1918 strike, however, did showcase the ability of female workers to participate in, and succeed at, male-dominated spheres of work and to recognize growing opportunities, however small, for women to learn a new skill and enter an avenue of work beyond their ‘perceived’ societal abilities.

The recruitment of women during the 1918 strike showcased female ability to both perform and succeed at male-dominated work in the region. While an accomplishment in public avenues of discussion, many did not view the women’s work as a positive example of women in the workforce. When discussing female recruitment, local grain and trade news saw the incident as reflective of the CPR’s methods of handling the strike and called for government intervention on behalf of the company to stop similar strikes occurring.<sup>65</sup> What is interesting to note about the *Grain and Trade* paper is the fact that the weekly newsletter began publication and was released following the interests of returned soldiers and edited under the Great War Veterans Association. Although labour shortages were commonplace during the war years, many

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<sup>63</sup> “Real Picnic Say Girls Wheeling Freight Trucks,” *FWDTJ*, 14 May 1918.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> “Girl Labour on Dock Causes Indignation,” *Twin City Grain and Trade News*, 17 May 1918.

feared what would happen upon the return of soldiers from overseas after the war's end, especially with regards to employment.

The idea that the war brought opportunity and advancement for women's rights in labour was represented in distinct ways. Middle class women were often quoted with regards to their wartime work as a 'patriotic duty' with a concrete end at the culmination of the war, much like the role played by the female 'strike breakers' during the Freight Handler dispute. The sentiment of female labour existing past the war represented a labour issue unique to different cohorts of women. There were those employed both prior to and during the war, as lower class and working labourers, mainly comprised of immigrant women engaged in domestic work, sewing and laundering. The second cohort comprised of lower and middle class women who entered the workforce for the first time either as a new opportunity, or as a necessity due to economic strife, widowhood, or some combination of the two represented the rising prevalence of gendered spheres of work in industries such as clerical work, teaching and professional services. These women, like the municipal telephone girls who had fought for increased wages and the few who gained employment in the Lakehead's factory sector, wished to remain in their positions moving forward. The desire of women to remain in the workforce led Canada's wartime Prime Minister Robert Borden to echo both a fear and a hope felt by many male and female Canadians on the issue of women in labour when he stated "Women once engaged in ... work [would] never give it up."<sup>66</sup>

The First World War presented Canadian women with an unprecedented opportunity to enter the paid labour force, one they were reluctant to give up. The role played by the war as both a liberator and an active force of change for women in the

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<sup>66</sup> Frager and Patrias, *Discounted Labour*, 156.

Canadian workforce represents a societal shift in the North American image of female labour, and the Lakehead was no exception. Female organizations, working groups and labour participation all played a role in the recognition and changing status of women in the region.

## Conclusion

The first eighteen years of the twentieth century had brought significant change to the Lakehead and Canadian society. Growing into its status as an independent nation, one comprised of an ever-growing multi-ethnic and multicultural population that consistently defined and redefined all aspects of public, private, and personal life. While many historians believe the First World War defined Canada as a nation, it was well on its way in embracing the continuity and change brought by the generations before, in the decade and a half leading up to, and during the conflict. The war had significant impact on the region with more than 4,000 men and women across Northwestern Ontario enlisting for service, with many never to return.<sup>1</sup> Communities across Canada, including the Lakehead, felt the ramifications and loss from a world at war, and gained new perspective on the social, economic, political, and labouring currents of the region.

The post war period reflected the changing nature of labour and politics as well as the redefining on the role of women. With female relatives and active duty servicewomen gaining the vote in 1917, and the push for female labour as an active force during the war, the return of battle-hardened soldiers and the refiguring of industrial mechanisms created, adjusted, and made rich on the engine of war encountered new expressions of labouring and political strife from all fronts. The post war period proved volatile, with many serving men and women returning to find themselves unemployed or unqualified in industries changed by the war effort. While female employment during the war began to change the definition on the role of female

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the region during the First World War, see Michel S. Beaulieu and Chris Southcott, *North of Superior* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 2010), 78-80.

politics and labour, many women vacated their positions either willingly or without choice in order to accommodate returning men.

The Lakehead overall did not follow the pattern of deferment seen in other Canadian cities for women with regards to giving up their positions to men for the simple fact that “Unlike elsewhere, women and children seem to have been largely absent from the factory floor, no doubt a reflection of the type of resource based industry that dominated the local economy.”<sup>2</sup> The industries where women were largely present reflected gendered areas of employment, and therefore had little effect on the predominantly resource-based and male-dominated industries of the period. Women at the Lakehead, as seen throughout this thesis, while active in the labour force were still largely regulated to feminine areas of employment such as telephone operators, occasional labourers and domestic workers in varying industries. When women were given the opportunity to participate in the active labour force however, much like their role as ‘strike-breakers’ in the Freight Handlers Strike of 1918 and the 1918 municipal telephone strikes, they proved to be both capable and willing to take-over in unavoidable situations made possible by the on-going war, and advocate for themselves.

While the post-war period did continue to give women the opportunities, experiences and education needed to continue their fight for equality, many major post-war events were limited in their involvement of women. One such example is the Winnipeg General Strike, arguably one of the largest and most infamous

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<sup>2</sup> Thorold J. Tronrud, “Building the Industrial City,” in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, eds. Tory Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Museum Historical Society, 2008), 112.

demonstrations in response to working conditions in the post-war period.<sup>3</sup> Beginning on 15 May 1919 the strike centered on the exploitation of workers in low paying, high risk, and precarious employment.<sup>4</sup> With Winnipeg and the Lakehead both geographically close, relative in size, and with “Port Arthur and Fort William, known throughout the pre-war period as two of the most unsettled regions of the country,” many assumed that the strike would have a significant impact on the region, but while efforts were made to try and garner support for their fellow workers by unions, councils and trades “no such unrest occurred.”<sup>5</sup> Although the strike was representative of growing problems in regions across the country concerning the labouring class, the Lakehead in the post-war period experienced a “period of relative labour harmony in the region,” with many not wishing to replicate the violent and bloody episodes of earlier strikes.<sup>6</sup>

Female involvement in labour and politics, as well as the struggle of labouring workers throughout the region, grew significantly in the twentieth century. Many of the political, social, and labouring changes made in the first 18 years of the decade led to an evolution on the understanding of a working class history in the region and in Canada. The experience of women at the Lakehead in the early twentieth century represents a parallel narrative to the previously largely male dominated labouring and

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the strike, see J. M. Bumsted, *The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919: An Illustrated History* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1994); Michael Dupuis, *Winnipeg's General Strike: Reports from the Front Lines* (Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2014); and David J. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations and the General Strike* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990). For a look at female involvement in the strike, see Mary Horodyski, “Women and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919,” *Manitoba History* 11 (Spring 1986): 28-37.

<sup>4</sup> Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 65.

<sup>5</sup> See, Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead*, 67 and Michel S. Beaulieu, “Reacting to the Worker's Revolt: The Lakehead and Winnipeg General Strike,” *Left History* 14, no. 1 (2009): 8-32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

working class histories of the region. Adding to pre-existing scholarship on the role of women, the review of a selection of event's showcasing both the region's uniqueness, and similarities to the rest of Canada helps to analyze the role of women at the Lakehead.

Even though female labour participation during this period increased, and directly challenged preconceived notions of femininity, it is important to reiterate again that circumstances of employment were not equal for all women. Though women statistically increased with regards to labour participation,<sup>7</sup> these numbers still do not include the role played by domestic labour in the home, a majority of agricultural work, take-home work, or the work of those women deemed marginalised or others in employment that was not counted towards government census statistics. The increasing transition of middle class women into the workforce caused some employment to be redefined, as white collar or upper class, and some deemed inferior or lower class. This definition of labour pushed women in different directions and often into highly differentiated circumstances with regards to wages, safety and the availability of work.

When discussing the labour and the liberation of women in the workforce, issues of race and ethnicity are important factors in the plight of new and pre-existing workingwomen. This influx of not only lower class but also middle class women into the workforce severely affected those women (and men) of differing ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds in employment as well as the type of work available to them. When Anglo-British women left low paying, highly segregated employment in domestic services, take-home enterprises and agriculture prior to the war, to paid positions in

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<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Trade and Commerce, *Occupational Trends in Canada, 1891-1931*, Seventh Census of Canada, (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1939).

municipal, factory, and burgeoning industries, they left behind their role as stagnant labourers; a role that needed to be filled.<sup>8</sup> This division of labour only added to the already expanding role of women in the workforce as well as creating new barriers to female participation.

Disadvantaged women deemed to fall outside the category of preferred workers filled the void for labour intensive work, with minimal pay, safety regulation and chance for mobility, and instead embraced the role of stagnant labourers. Employers reluctant to hire women, but who did so due to necessity, often drew the line when given the choice between labour shortages and hiring marginalised female workers, as exemplified by the reluctance to hire female street-car drivers by the city of Port Arthur. Limitations on the hiring of those with differing ethnic, racial and religious norms was commonplace across Canada amongst women (and men) who did not fit the classic model of a white French or British Canadian citizen, and is again exemplified through the advertisements depicted in local papers across the Lakehead region. Between 1901 and 1914 over 2.9 million immigrants came to Canada to support the growth of the Canadian economy and to fill manual labour positions created by the 'wheat boom'.<sup>9</sup> Though many like Sanna Kannasto and other notable Finnish women made a name for themselves in the labour movement, much of the everyday occurrences and those involved in labouring and political strife were subtle in their contributions, execution and

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<sup>8</sup> The definition on the evolution and categorization of female labour is broken down by Patricia Connelly. Floating labour consists of labourers employed in one area for a set amount of time dependent on age who are eventually discharged to seek work in the same industry at a higher level. Latent labour consists of labourers whose employment is eliminated forcing them to seek employment in an unrelated field. Finally, stagnant labour consists of those whose labour is infrequent and often results in the highest amount of work, for the lowest wages. See Patricia Connelly, *Last Hired, First Fired: Women and the Canadian Workforce* (Toronto: The Women's Press 1978), 22.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.



recognition. These immigrants were employed in agricultural sectors across Canada and were the first to experience the economic impact of the recession in 1913. Men and women employed as agricultural workers, domestic servants, and unskilled labourers were left destitute after the economic bust and continued to suffer throughout the war.<sup>10</sup> This left a large cohort of women unemployed or working in industries that were underpaid, overworked, and often dangerous.

According to Ruth Frager and Carmela Patrias, historians have labeled working class women as a single cohort without regard to race, class or ethnic divisions. Both Patrias and Frager define women as “active agents in the paid labour force, manoeuvring within sharp constraints to make the most of limited options.”<sup>11</sup> Treating all women as a single cohort with similar experiences and advantages has historically been an acceptable practice when regarding women and labour. Although historians often use generalized information and assumptions, the treatment of women as individuals each with a voice and differentiating set of circumstances surrounding their participation is necessary in order to attain a broader understanding of women and work. With the increase in the relevance of social history as well as changing attitudes towards historiographical analysis of women and work, a different picture appears with regards to the Lakehead and female participation. This active status lost when Anglo-Canadian women and immigrant women are viewed together with regards to employment opportunities and the ability to fight for their rights as workers, is subsequently gained back when a regional view of labour and politics is made in order to establish a new narrative on the involvement, and participation of women in labour. While many

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<sup>10</sup> Ruth A. Frager and Carmela Patrias, *Discounted Labour: Women Workers in Canada, 1870-1939* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006), 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

communities like the Lakehead were limited in the availability for female employment based on the fact that “In many small towns, patterns of women’s employment depended a great deal on the types of local industries, particularly on the presence or absence of the kinds of industries that typically provided jobs for women,” opportunities still existed in a resource dependent and a male dominated gendered employment based community.<sup>12</sup> The trend continues when analyzing several other factors of Canadian economic development such as differing expansion between rural and urban, marginalized ‘others’ versus middle class women, and the growing distrust that represented differing social, ethnic, and racial classes, all of which play a key role in the recognition of parallel histories and women’s narratives.

Class struggle and the differentiation between the multiple tiers of Canadian society greatly impact the way in which labour history is viewed, especially with regards to female participation in politics and labour. Although the entry of women into the labour force is viewed positively by feminist historians, it presented new and emergent problems for those women listed above who fell outside the classist norm of employability in macro level nationalist histories. In examining the Lakehead as a regional example of female labour, using a selection of events, people, organizations, and strikes a better understanding of female influence on the continuity and change is given. The analysis of labour as both a liberator as well as an instigator for the increased feminisation of workers is enforced by the gendered divide between working women and marginalized women.<sup>13</sup> Organizations like the West Algoma Women’s

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>13</sup> Kori Street, “Patriotic not Permanent: Attitudes about Women’s Making Bombs and Being Bankers,” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada*

Council and individuals like Mary Peltier and Mrs. Poole often failed to recognize different voices in working-class narratives, and instead perpetuated, “The fault lines that divided them [and] prevented women from acting collectively to overcome the disadvantages they all faced in the paid workforce.”<sup>14</sup> Gains made with regards to labour for working women were still regulated by societal perceptions of femininity and domesticity at a time where industrial labour participation reached an all time high for the Canadian workforce, yet instances of rebellion, acceptance and change were occurring.

The Lakehead, like many regions across Canada, experienced the evolution of a nation bent on industrialisation, modernisation, and the advancement of society. Female involvement in politics and labour represented changing ideologies and definitions of social and gendered norms. Again, this thesis is not intended as an analysis of the support or denial of female participation in socialist or labour organizations; rather, its main purpose in exploring a parallel narrative to the national picture of female participation in labour on a regional scale has helped to recognize a female voice and presence at the Lakehead between 1903 and 1918 in politics and labour. Though shortcomings in available information from the period will not allow for a fully defined analysis of female influence at the Lakehead, by selecting key events, organizations and people, a new and expanded picture of female participation emerges. Taking into account a variety of factors concerning all facets of lived experience and a combination of ‘old’; ‘new’ and ‘new new’ labour histories in order to create a holistic look at female participation in politics and labour at the Lakehead.

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<sup>14</sup> Frager and Patrias, *Discounted Labour*, 151.

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