

“Doing What We Could”: Mennonite Domestic Servants in Winnipeg, 1920s to 1950s

Frieda Esau Klippenstein *Winnipeg, Canada*

Introduction

Mennonite women, unaccustomed to being in the spotlight, find themselves the subject of some new interest and discussion. Historians are beginning to ask about their lives and experiences both in the old world and in the new, about their immigration and work experiences, and about their attitudes, characters and world views. Like many other “ordinary” people, Mennonite women throughout history either left few of the traditional written sources, or their stories were not deemed significant enough for collection or preservation. We are thus left to learn what we can from such evidence as photograph collections, artifacts, and oral sources.

In spring of 1987 I collected taped interviews of thirty-four Mennonite women, all of whom had some connection to the Mennonite “Maedchenheime” (hostels of Girls’ Homes for working women) in Winnipeg in the 1920s to 1950s.¹ Most of the women were born in South Russia in towns and villages such as Rudnerweide, Friedensruh, Schoenfeld, and Kronsweide within the Mennonite colonies, the oldest of which were located in the Ukraine, and the newer ones in Crimea, Middle Volga, Caucasus and Siberia.² Their families had migrated to Russia from Prussia and other parts of Europe in the late 1700s and had lived there for generations building farms, churches and schools and establishing social and religious traditions. Then their lives changed completely. The women told stories from their memories of the Russian Revolution, 1917, their immigration to Canada between 1923 and 1929, and their experience of “starting over” in a new land.

Most of the some twenty thousand Mennonites who came to Canada in the 1920s had lost everything they owned in Russia, including large and very prosperous farms, businesses, and family estates.³ The most noted loss of all

was their loss of freedom, especially the freedom to hold worship services and to teach their children their traditions and faith. With hopes of regaining these freedoms, they made their way to Canada where they faced the challenges of re-establishing their livelihoods, making it through the lean years of the 1930s, and paying off substantial Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.) travel debts incurred by more than 13,000 of them.⁴ For a great many of the Mennonite women who emigrated from Russia at that time, a central part of this experience was leaving their families in the countryside and going to work as live-in maids in middle and upper class homes in Winnipeg and other cities.

“We never thought this Maedchenheim would make a big story,” remarked one woman with whom I spoke (11:118).⁵ So far it hasn’t. Most of the standard Mennonite history texts mention the women’s maid experience in passing if at all.⁶ Yet it is a very interesting story, the significance of which has yet to be explored. Questions well worth asking are how the women’s maid experience affected Mennonite family life both then and now, how it affected Mennonite urbanization and the establishment and shape of the city churches, and whether it contributed towards assimilation or adjustment to Canadian life.

Significant light is shed on these questions from the women’s telling of their own stories. In this study the oral sources will be used to examine the question of how the pattern of the women doing domestic work in the city became so well established to begin with. From the perspective of the Mennonite women, a variety of reasons arise and will be elaborated upon. Their explanations involved aspects of their Russian experience, their families’ great financial need, their parents’ attitudes, and their own resources and goals. This study will conclude with some of the women’s reflections on the nature and implications of their maid experience and with some observations and evaluative remarks. This is one example of how women, though living and working in a typically quiet and modest way, have had a profound impact on the shape of Canadian Mennonite history.

Background

The Mennonites in the 1920s were moving into a Canadian context that was conducive to immigrant women taking maid jobs. From the 1880s to the 1930s there was an “acute” and much publicized “servant problem” — the “regrettable,” even “tragic” shortage of women to work as domestics in Canadian homes. The servant shortage received much attention, partly because it was not confined to Canada. Though only a “source of great inconvenience” in the United Kingdom, it was considered “a national danger” in Canada, in Australia and in New Zealand. Note was taken of evidence that in Australia the lack of domestic servants was shown to affect the birth rate, and that in New Zealand the servant shortage in rural homes was shown to cause reduced output of farm produce.⁷ Thus enormous effort was exerted by

private agencies and by the Canadian Immigration Department through the "Canadian Council of Immigration of Women for Household Service" to carry out elaborate schemes whereby large groups of women were recruited specifically for domestic work. The target of recruitment were young single women, war widows and orphans who were English speakers, and of "desirable character for domestic work." In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, efforts focussed first on the British Isles, where statistics showed "a great surplus of women," then on continental Europe. Advance passages were offered to women, while bonuses and commissions were offered to ships for bringing maids, and to conductresses for accompanying, protecting and registering them at special hostels. These hostels, some supported by federal and provincial grants, others by private and public sector agencies such as YWCA, church, ethnic and women's organizations, were set up across Canada to receive and place the immigrant girls and women in domestic jobs.⁸

Winnipeg was an important place for many Canadian immigrants, as it was at least a temporary destination and the first significant relief from the long and rigorous voyage by ship and train. From the 1890s through the 1920s the "gateway to the West" was seeing a steady flow of immigrants coming by train from eastern ports (some 1.8 million immigrants arrived in Canada between 1911 and 1921 and 1.2 million arrived from 1921 to 1931).⁹ Some of the immigrants homesteaded in rural Manitoba or moved on to Saskatchewan or Alberta. Others added to the already crowded Asian, Ukrainian, Italian and other neighbourhoods in Winnipeg's North End, popularly referred to as the "Foreign Quarter," or "C.P.R. Town."¹⁰ Often, during the brief wait at Winnipeg's immigration shelter, young immigrant women were approached by people looking for domestic servants. Hundreds of Mennonite women, many as young as thirteen and fourteen, were separated from their families shortly after arrival in order to take these jobs. Before long, Saskatoon, Calgary, Vancouver and many smaller centres also saw significant numbers of Mennonite girls taking paid domestic work.

While it seems that immigrant women at the time were necessarily streamed into domestic work, the fact that the Mennonite women moved to the city to do this work calls for some explanation. This is because the Mennonites were known as a strictly rural people who had strong inclinations to separate themselves from the world and to protect their language, their faith and traditions. This image was reinforced by the Mennonites who immigrated to Southern Manitoba in the 1870s. They settled on special reserves set aside for them where they recreated the settlement pattern they had in Russia and tried to foster the tight-knit family, church and community life with which they were familiar. They strongly resisted the assimilating forces, especially in regards to their children. They fought for control of their own private schools so that Bible and catechism would be taught and not just the Canadian curriculum, so that lessons would be in German instead of English, and so that studies would not supersede planting, harvesting and

housework in priority. At the very time that new Mennonite immigrants were arriving from Russia, some 6,500 of the previous settlers were leaving Canada for Mexico and Paraguay in protest to the intrusions and threats to their way of life.¹¹ All in all, there is good reason to be surprised that the Mennonite immigrant girls and women entered the city work force *en masse* the way they did.

Mennonite women found themselves in the homes of a broad sweep of Winnipeg's middle and upper class families. Their employers included "top brass" of the T. Eaton Company, city magistrates, doctors, ministers, lawyers and municipal and provincial politicians. The "ladies" of the homes were often women who spent the bulk of their time in club, charity and church work, in family life, and on social events such as "bridge afternoons," dinner parties, and arts events. In the city homes the maids worked six long days a week. Besides often being in complete charge of the children, they also scrubbed floors, cooked and served meals, washed and dried dishes, polished silver, dusted and oiled woodwork, swept carpets, cleaned and hand polished hardwood floors, and washed, dried ironed and sometimes mended the entire family's laundry. These were extremely fatiguing and time-consuming chores with the standard household equipment of the time. At best a maid could look forward to a gas stove and wringer washer, and when she accompanied the family to "the lake" in the summers she could expect a wood burning stove and scrub board.

The young women struggled to learn the English language, usually picked up from the children in the families, from the radio, and from newspaper comics. They also learned "proper" manners and "maid behavior," as well as kosher or other kinds of cooking appropriate to the Jewish, English, Scottish, Icelandic and other families for whom they worked. For their work they were given their room and board and paid a monthly wage usually starting at ten to fifteen dollars, though, for the younger girls (age thirteen to fifteen) and for maids in the 1930s a wage of five dollars a month was not uncommon. The money, which almost all went back to their families, was essential in establishing farms and paying off the burdensome travel debts.

Understandably, the women often suffered intense homesickness and loneliness on top of the culture shock and heavy responsibility of their work. Their needs soon came to the attention of workers in the newly organized Mennonite missions and churches in Winnipeg.¹² First, assistance came in the form of simply inviting the girls into Mennonite homes on their half days off. Then, over the years, the two main Mennonite Conferences supported the establishment of the full-time Maedchenheime (Girls' Homes). Very much like the women's hostels supported by government or private agencies, the Mennonite hostels served as employment centres and "homes" where the women could receive help in finding work, where they could stay between placements, and where they could go on their time off for company, solace and advice. The Mennonite Brethren's "Mary-Martha Home," established on 437 Mountain Avenue, and the General Conference Mennonites' "Ebenezer



Anna Thiessen with some of the young women, ca. 1930.



Maria-Martha Girls Home, 437 Mountain Ave., Winnipeg.

Home," at 605 Bannatyne, were part of the city experience of several thousand women between 1925 and 1959.

The Women's Reasons for Going to Work

Mennonite women have their own perspectives on how they found their path in Canada. From their point of view, a central reason contributing to their becoming domestic servants was that aspects of their Russian experience had prepared them for what awaited them. For many of them city life was not foreign. Over an approximately fifty year period the Mennonites in Russia had developed marked differences from those who immigrated to America in the mid-1870s. While the Southern Manitoba Mennonites were struggling to keep the worldliness out of their schools and villages, many of the Russian Mennonites were having much more contact with the cities and the world around them. One woman I interviewed reminisced about how well-travelled her father had been and how he would return from many parts of Europe with presents of 3-D pictures and with many stories to tell (14:174). During the years before the Revolution, sometimes referred to as "the golden years," the Russian Mennonites accepted and initiated rapid advances in agricultural and industrial technology, which brought them considerable prosperity.¹³ The population grew in the colonies, Mennonite land holdings totalled more than three million acres, and a network of some four hundred elementary schools, thirteen high schools, four girls' schools, two teachers' colleges and three business schools were in place by 1920. Education was valued and encouraged to the degree that studying at colleges, seminaries, and universities became quite common, as did studying abroad, mostly in Germany and Switzerland.¹⁴ Several of the women remarked that their fathers had never been farmers in Russia but rather teachers, village leaders, merchants, mill owners, machine specialists etc. Thus, their attempt to farm in Canada was a very brief and unsuccessful experiment (14:227) (3:371) (4:092).

The girls' life in Russia was also relevant to their Canadian experience because of what it meant to subsequently lose their prosperity and security in violence and bloodshed. The turbulent years of revolution, civil war and famine that spread throughout the Ukraine (1917 to 1921) left the Mennonite settlements in ruins. The gruesome events they lived through prepared the Mennonite immigrants to do without complaint whatever it took to establish themselves in Canada. Several of the women I spoke with mentioned how free their families felt in Canada despite their great struggles in getting started here (9:164) (33:068). One woman, after describing efforts of her widowed mother and four siblings to make a living selling eggs and garden vegetables in Winnipeg, revealed the immense gratitude they had for the bare essentials of life: "We had a good life. Nobody bothered us. We could do as we pleased. We had food. We had shelter. So what more do you want?" (10:211) Some mentioned that their parents "never looked back" (21:110),

and that they themselves were "just grateful to have jobs" and the "opportunity to work" (22:369) (24:063).

Perhaps because of the stability of their lives in pre-Revolution Russia, the traditions of Mennonite family life were very strong. Several women, when asked how they as young girls saw the future appeared perplexed and could not answer. One woman explained that she had never thought of life in terms of many choices and that she simply expected the same lifestyle as her parents had (26:155). Although there were some women, usually from the Mennonite elite, who pursued education or professional training,¹⁵ the most typical pattern for Mennonite women in Russia was the route of marriage, making a home and raising a family. Essential skills included cooking, needlework, gardening and some farm work (14:064). The great upset brought about by the war and immigration left people wondering how to deal with rapid, far-reaching changes and how to regain stability and normal life. One woman, who said she had no idea of what Canadian life would hold, "just took one day at a time" (29:099). Another, who had no friends or family in Canada, looked towards living in freedom here and "nothing further" (15:147).

In some cases news of Canadian life had travelled back to Russia. One woman said she was prepared to be a servant girl in Canada because she had already heard that her family would initially need to be separated and to do whatever work they could until they were established (30:201). Some of the girls had experience "working out" during the difficult times in Russia. For example, one woman described how, at the age of eight, when her family members were refugees in Russia, she worked as a field hand clearing thistles and as a babysitter for seven pounds of flour a week (31:101,147). Another said that becoming a maid was not so strange because her siblings, aged ten and twelve, had done this work in Russia (3:714). For some, though, becoming a servant in Canada was very difficult (14:174). They were old enough to have clear memories of prosperity in Russia and of when they themselves had servants (5:438). Others had to hear from their parents about the servant life: one girl was told by her mother not to be shocked that as a maid she would have to eat alone in the kitchen. This was how they had treated their own maids in Russia, so perhaps now they were "getting back" some of it (9:127).

The reason for becoming domestics in Canada which the women gave most often was their families' great need. Most parents tried to establish farms, in accordance with the initial understanding they had with the CPR. Some of them at first farmed on the land of relatives and some took on the farms abandoned by the "Canadian" Mennonites who emigrated to South America and Mexico during those years. As most of the viable free homestead allotments near the railways were taken by the 1920s, with the help of land agents the majority of the Mennonite immigrants purchased land under a variety of agreements in various parts of Manitoba. The families first made attempts to settle on land near Holmfield, Whitewater, Morris, Osborne, Arnod, and Pigeon Lake as well as near Mennonite centres such as Rosenfeld,

Niverville, Winkler and Steinbach.¹⁶ The new immigrants arrived in Canada shortly before the depression of the 1930s, however, when cash for new farms and for travel debts was very hard to come by. Faced with the challenges of establishing farms with very few resources and with the constant threats of crop failure because of drought, insects and hail, many of the Mennonite immigrants lived in desperate poverty in their first years in Canada. For many, their sons' and daughters' employment was the only source of ready cash.

Though usually busy with farm work, some sons and orphan boys did paid odd jobs such as working on threshing gangs, on construction, in lumber or mining camps, or market gardening (14:338) (19:133) (20:218,242) (21:206) (22:003). But because of the "servant problem," it was really the widows, daughters, and orphan girls who had the best opportunity to earn wages. Domestic work was, as some said, "the only work available" for immigrant women, but it was available in abundance. As well, it was recommended to the newcomers by the Canadian Mennonites and others who temporarily took them in (6:225) (9:010) (10:077). By taking up domestic work, many of the young women set out to pay off their own travel debt, then contributed toward or singlehandedly paid off the debt of their parents and siblings (15:221). For some, this took only three to five years, while for others who had debts as high as one to two thousand dollars, it took fifteen to twenty years (32:163) (20:303,321) (31:292).

Generally, the women expressed the view that their parents did not want to leave their daughters in the city but that they could not find a viable alternative. The great need of many of the new immigrants was shown by the fact that they encouraged their daughters to go to the city even before there were Mennonite Girls' Homes to give them help (1:010) (27:115). The newcomers' need was also evident in the grateful way they received used clothing from the families for whom the girls worked. Even such leftovers as bread crusts and cooking fat were sometimes collected by the girls and sent home to parents (31:361). Many of the girls worked for a very nominal wage or, at times, for no wage at all, receiving only room and board for their efforts (15:160). One woman recalled how in 1925, when she was thirteen and less than a month in Canada, her father took her to Winnipeg to find her a place to work and live. She cried as they walked up and down the city streets until she was hired for three dollars a month and a bed in the living room (8:004).

The establishment of the two Mennonite Girls' Homes was identified by the women as another factor that greatly contributed to their going to Winnipeg to work. Every Thursday afternoon crowds of girls from throughout the city walked or travelled by streetcar to the Homes where they visited, ate their bagged lunches together, sang songs, heard the latest news, and had Bible study together. It was usually eleven o'clock at night before they parted. The women expressed deep appreciation for the Homes. Especially the many orphan girls, those who were very young when they came to the

city, and those who had worked in the 1920s and 1930s speak of the Girls' Homes as a "refuge" and an "oasis" (15:356) (28:123).

Though these Homes saw a few short-term houseparents and various assistants, they were shaped mostly by the great energy and vision of two very dedicated women who made helping the working girls their life's mission. Although quite different in character, Helen Epp and Anna Thiessen performed similar tasks for the working girls. Miss Helen Epp operated the Ebenezer Home for twenty-seven years until it closed in 1959 and Miss Anna Thiessen founded and operated the Mary Martha Home from 1925 until about 1945. The latter continued to live in the Home and to help out there until it closed, also in 1959.¹⁷ The job of the houseparents was to help the girls find suitable places of work to ensure that they were not mistreated, to give them encouragement and advice, and to provide them with a place to stay between jobs and on time off (1:1316) (22:086). The matrons tried to accompany each girl to "check out" the home and meet the employer. Both matrons were known to be "strict" with potential employers. At a time when there were no formal labor laws protecting domestics, the matrons insisted that the employers give the maids half a day off every week, and that they allow them a packed lunch at these times. There was some resistance to this, but anyone unwilling to comply simply would not get a Mennonite maid.¹⁸ Some situations from which the matron would remove a girl included cases when an employer expected her to sleep in a damp unfinished basement, or if an employer was "stingy" and did not provide sufficient food for the maid. Other "unacceptable situations" were if the girl was expected to serve alcohol at late night parties or if there were other "bad influences" to which she was exposed (21:056) (26:004).

Keeping the respective homes functioning was a difficult job. The money received from the church conferences was only a part of what was needed. The women living there paid small amounts for rent, gave small donations, and spent time between their intense work schedule doing hand-work for sale at small church bazaars. The day-to-day burden of running the homes fell on the matrons who tirelessly worked at fund raising, budgeting, telephoning, and collecting donations.

The matrons of the two Homes had in common the reputation of being a friend and a great help to any girl in need. Helen Epp was "Mom" to most of the Ebenezer women and Anna Thiessen was "Schwester Anna" (Sister Anna) to the women of the Mary Martha Home. Though strict with the girls "when necessary," both matrons were generally characterized as having "a heart of gold" (3:299) (28:207,268) (31:020,164) (33:014). They tried to give the girls a feeling of family by organizing special birthday dinners and by encouraging church groups to have Easter and Christmas celebrations at a time when they could be there. Probably the most challenging aspects of the matrons' role was dealing with each individual girl's problems, including looking out for physical health, and in many cases trying to provide comfort and counsel for mental stress or depression, as many of the women were

coming to terms with deaths in their family and were still suffering from traumas they had experienced in Russia.

Another dimension to the protective function of the Homes was their strong link to Mennonite teaching and values. The Mary Martha Home was so named after the New Testament story in which Mary was one who listened to Jesus and Martha who served. Another Biblical model presented to the women was that of Dorcas, a woman who was known for her modesty and good works. From her example the girls learned that “the one who fills her time with good works is protected from evil.”¹⁹ The values of devotion and service to the point of sacrifice were strongly emphasized and certainly modeled by both Anna Thiessen and Helen Epp.

Bible studies were arranged on the girls’ time off, as were catechism classes, Bible school courses, and baptisms. Ebenezer women remember a Bible school course — which included Mennonite history, English literature, German literature and Comparative Religion besides systematic study of the Bible — that could be completed by attending one evening a week for three years (28:285). They recall a Rev. Epp who led Thursday evening Bible studies for fifteen years, between a variety of occasional speakers (11:273). The women of the Mary Martha Home remember Bible studies by Rev. Frank C. Thiessen and Rev. A.B. Peters, with much attention to the Gospels and the book of Revelation (15:068). Visitors of both Homes remember sermons on ethical living and on being a witness in the homes where they worked. Discussions ranged from whether or not to tell Bible stories to the children in the homes to moral points about ones’ outward appearance, including such issues as whether or not the girls should use makeup or buy clothes of the latest fashions. A relevant topic to some girls was whether or not it was justifiable to press employers for permission to wear short-sleeved uniforms on very hot days (24:220,285).

The matrons and pastors impressed upon the girls that it was God who had sent them to the city. The Ebenezer women were often reminded by their minister of the importance of their good behaviour in the homes: “You are an open book read by many. That’s how you have to live” (11:231). Similarly, Anna Thiessen wrote: “It is surely not a matter of chance that the Lord sent our Christian girls into the big cities to serve in the homes of those we would not reach otherwise. Some of these homes do not wish to have repentance and holiness preached to them; therefore the preachers and missionaries turn to the poor who are more approachable. And now our sisters are entering the homes of the wealthy, the influential, and the professional people of our country as servants. Their quiet, Christian diligence presents the message of the Cross in a powerful sermon.”²⁰ This attitude was reflected in a poem by one of the girls:

Though I work as a servant / For meagre reward,
Lose my bloom in a lowly place / In a stranger’s house and service;
Though nightly my needle / Works my fingers raw,
My heritage and honour is: “I am a servant of the Lord.”²¹

The women also mentioned their parents' attitudes as influential in their going to the city to work. For many of the parents it was with resignation that they accepted the situation. For others it was with regret that the girls could not pursue the path of finishing school, becoming wives and mothers, and for some, perhaps acquiring training in such professions as nursing, teaching or office work (29:185) (28:358). One woman who "worked out" at age thirteen emphasized that it was very difficult for her parents to let her go. Her father came into the city quite often, taking the horses to the end of the streetcar line, then the streetcar to check on his daughters in the homes where they worked (8:177,187). For many, however, distance, lack of transportation and the schedule of domestic work meant that the girls and their families could see each other as rarely as once or twice a year (33:284). The parents were left, as one woman said, to "agonize and pray for them daily" (28:358).

Usually the parents' main concerns were that their daughters would be safe in the city that they would make a connection with one of the Mennonite churches for the sake of their social and spiritual needs (21:013) (24:261). They appreciated the Girls' Homes because they reassured them of their daughters' safety and well-being and made the girls accountable to someone (6:306). That the Homes were approved and supported by the church conferences was also a comfort to the parents.²² They could read about the activities of the Homes in detailed reports appearing regularly in Mennonite church papers such as *Zionsbote*, *Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Der Bote*.

The parents appreciated the idea that domestic work was safer than other types of work, as the girls were sheltered with a family rather than living alone in a rented room (6:096). As well, they could approve of the type of work the girls were doing, as it fit into their concept of what was appropriate "women's work." During the World War II years, as fewer women were willing to work as live-ins, the Mennonite girls followed the trend of housework by the day or took up assembly line work in sewing factories or in candy or coffee factories. Others received some professional training, usually in teaching or nursing. These also were accepted by the parents as appropriate vocations for women.

Yet another reason the women gave for their going to the city to work was their desire to find ways to adjust to the city, so that it might become less formidable. This was especially significant in light of the fact that many Mennonites — the new immigrants as well as the "Canadian Mennonites" of the 1870s migration — had a suspicion or "fear" of the city. This fear ranged from timidity because of unfamiliarity, to the attitude, as one woman put it, that "the city was where evil lurked from all corners, and if you went to the city you were asking for trouble" (1:1201,871). However, Winnipeg at that time was only a fraction of its present size (nearly 180,000 in 1921) and, according to many of the women, was not nearly as dangerous as today (11:119). The women themselves generally expressed the fear that came from the newness of the situation and the vulnerability they felt in it. One woman, who recalled being picked up from the Girls' Home by her employer for her



Girls making music on their day off.



Girls in the uniforms they had to wear in the afternoons, 1926. Back of picture in German: "For our dear Sister Anna out of love and as a friendly remembrance."

first day of work, said that as she rode to her new workplace she was trying to memorize desperately the route in case she would need to escape back to the Home.

Some women explained that their parents could not prepare them for life in the city because they themselves did not know what it was like. But on the whole the girls received plenty of advice about what to watch out for (16:181). Most women recall warnings about taking rides from strangers and reminders to walk in groups, to look after their money, and to be home early (22:212) (24:309) (26:289). Parents had concerns about the "worldliness" and "evils" in the city. By this some meant the dangerous influences and bad company found at the theatre, at dance halls, and at "wild" parties. Some of the parental advice was rather vague-sounding. Many young women were told "not to get lost in the city," which was probably tied in with more specific warnings to keep away from non-Mennonite people and to go to the Girls' Homes on their time off (22:212) (27:368) (30:251). Also vague were the warnings about the men in the households. Although not much is said about it, some of the women hinted at instances in which maids had to deal with improper sexual advances from men in the homes. This was likely what prompted Anna Thiessen at the 1937 Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference to reprimand parents for allowing their daughters to go to the city while they were still naive and so unprepared to withstand the temptations of city life.²³ Besides danger to their person, two of the worst things that could possibly happen were that girls might marry out of the faith or move out of Mennonite circles.

While many were, as one woman put it, "shaking in their boots" when they first came to Winnipeg, for some of the girls the city was already familiar because of previous monthly shopping trips (3:159). Working in the city also became easier when older sisters and friends had paved the way, establishing a pattern and reporting that the city and the maid work "wasn't so bad" (3:133) (6:063,195) (29:245). This impression spread quickly amongst the girls who walked the streets in the day or night cautiously but without fear, often travelling many miles by foot in order to save streetcar fare (5:227) (6:157) (9:260) (11:044).

What contributed most substantially to making city life less formidable was the growing Mennonite community there. Even before the arrival of the new Mennonite immigrants, families were buying acreages in North Kildonan, then considered just outside of Winnipeg. A community grew, drawing widows with their children and people who were inexperienced in large-scale farming. Many families subsisted on market gardens and poultry, while others came to Winnipeg for such work as construction or odd jobs.²⁴ Mennonite churches and other institutions became established in Winnipeg, and by the late '30s and early '40s, significant Mennonite networks existed. In time the Girls' Homes did not seem as essential, as young women were confident enough in the city to have a suite of their own or had enough connections without the Homes.

Part of the young women's adjustment to the city was developing a sense

of pride about their work. Most were “traditional” maids, answering to bells, eating apart from the family and sleeping in servants’ quarters (27:003) (30:004). In some homes there was less social differentiation. One woman, referring to the family for whom she had worked for thirty-seven years, said, “They used to say I was like one of their family. And yet I wasn’t,” she said, reflecting how, even on a visit after her retirement, the lady was reluctant to have her sit together with her in the parlour (30:004). Some of the women worked for especially “upity-up” ladies. One who had worked in such a home recalled receiving instructions not to say one extra word, “Just what I had to say” (3:656). Added to that, in the 1940s and 1950s, when some of the Mennonites had already achieved some measure of prosperity, some of the women felt that the better-off Mennonites also looked down on the working girls. Nevertheless, the girls’ comradery and their sense of being “ambassadors” in the city (as impressed upon them at the Homes) likely contributed to their self esteem and helped them to feel like more than “just” maids (22:291). Often groups of two, three or more girls would have studio pictures taken in their best serving uniforms, a black dress with a frilly apron and white hat, collars and cuffs (6:364).

Some of the women gave another reason for their city work: that it was an opportunity to improve their own situation. Several of them pointed out that they were not forced to go to the city to work, but that it was their own suggestion. Often this was because they were working at least as hard at home, at household work and in the barns and gardens. While living at home many girls were also doing occasional work for neighbours by the day or for a season (30:166). Not atypically, one woman (who worked as a domestic for fifty-one years) recalled receiving only two years of schooling, because it was necessary for her to work out at nearby farms gathering stones from the fields and, in summer holidays, to do household work (29:160). Domestic work was known to be lighter and higher paying in the city than in the country (25:104) (26:314).

Some women chose city work specifically because it was less lonely than working in the isolation of southern Manitoba farms (4:011) (15:341). One woman described herself as having been “socially starved” in the country (4:177). Working in Winnipeg meant a new social life, as there was more opportunity for a young woman to have friends of her own age through the Girls’ Homes and the churches (9:340) (10:055) (6:157) (20:035) (22:131). Though time off work was scarce, many of the Ebenezer girls recall movies, parties and dances they attended (largely discouraged or prohibited for the Mennonite Brethren young people). Girls of both homes remember being picked up by friends on their time off, going to the country for weddings, and attending birthday parties and wedding showers at the Girls’ Homes or “Jugendvereins” (youth meetings), Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving celebrations at the churches (6:157). Anna Thiessen’s well-kept policy of “no men allowed” at the Mary Martha Home (beyond the church pastors and board members) was not a major obstacle for most of the girls. They arranged

to meet their brothers and friends at such places as parks, bus depots, or "under the clock" at Eatons.

Another positive side to city domestic work was that it meant adventure, growing up, and a chance to learn new things. Many appreciated the opportunities to get to know new people, to learn the English language, proper "maid behavior" and new household technology (10:119) (20:362,377) (11:348) (27:377). One woman said that at first she thought some of the customs in the homes were rather "crazy," but later she thought they were "actually quite nice." She said that she learned a lot about other people: how they think, how they bring up their children, and so on (11:005,332).

Unlike the 1920s and 1930s when the women were usually working for their families' needs, in the years that followed they were often more free to work to save for their own goals (22:358). When speaking of their goals, some said that beyond saving money for travel debt or for parents, they didn't have specific personal goals. so they "banked for the future," which often included hopes for a wedding (5:577). One woman saved for her dream, which throughout her youth was a home in the country where her family could be together (20:267). Sometimes the older daughters in the family dedicated themselves to working out so that younger brothers or sisters could "go far in school." They must have enjoyed the success of their younger siblings vicariously. One woman whose older sisters had worked out was one of the first girls in the North Kildonan community to complete school and to receive the Governor General's medal in grade eleven for being top student in the area (19:337). Some young women saved for education, often an English course, a sewing course, or missionary or Bible training. Others saved for teachers' or nurses' or nurses aid training. Until the 1940s and 1950s, however, it was the "odd case" when a girl would get her high school or teachers' certificate (28:358). Most "didn't have a chance" or found that higher education was not encouraged by their elders (16:129) (10:372). As one woman explained, there were other priorities for Mennonite women: it was more important to learn homemaking skills than acquiring an education (22:355).

When the women got together at the Girls' Homes, they talked about "work and boys." Most hoped to get married and have families of their own, and this is generally what happened. The usual pattern for Mennonite women was to stay in their home community, become wives and mothers, and help run the household and farm (15:115) (16:045) (2:247) (10:213). While domestic work sometimes contributed towards the goals of the Mennonite young women, at times it was at odds with these goals. One women who did domestic work in the 1940s expressed how she dreaded starting it, because she feared that this was all that would happen in her life, that she would never get married and have a home of her own (9:275). Another woman who moved from Saskatchewan to Winnipeg in 1952 to study there, mentioned her initial reluctance to identify with the Mary Martha Home because of the image of its women being "all over thirty" and destined to be "spinsters for life" (7:273).

Indeed, it seemed that some of the women working in factory or live-in domestic work never married because their work isolated them from regular social life (26:247).

The attitudes and values expressed by the women relate to a final reason they gave for their move to the city to work as domestics: that they were good at it. The Mennonite maids were known to be very honest, efficient and "duty conscious." They were determined and physically strong. They "caught on" easily and "they were willing to learn" (1:621,1548). Even more important, they seemed naturally to "know their place." As one woman described it, the Mennonite domestics "didn't complain, they were very clean, they were shy, they wouldn't talk back and they did what they were told" (16:336).

Also characteristic of many of the young women was a strong sense of obligation and responsibility. This was coupled with respect for their parents. As one said, "Those years we didn't speak up to our parents... They needed help and that was the way it was" (21:235,136). One woman mentioned how her mother always emphasized not to complain or feel sorry for herself (32:359). Although it was not unusual to get "difficult places" where they had to face hard-driving, bossy employers or to work at all hours of the day or night, the Mennonite domestics usually did not consider the work unreasonable (22:369). In part, this may have been because, as one woman said, if they were having a hard time the employer and even the Girls' Home matron, their family, or their peers sometimes thought it was because they didn't try hard enough (6:288). Mostly, however, the consensus was that if the work was too hard, bringing it to the employers' attention or seeking improvement would not help. If the situation became very bad the solution was to quietly quit and find another place (15:297). Moreover, hard work in itself was generally not considered a good enough reason to quit, and sometimes a girl would bear considerable hardship before mentioning it to the matron.

The women's attitude towards work is noteworthy. They did not complain about what today would readily be labelled "menial tasks." During the World War II years when many women were leaving live-in domestic work for "day work," most of the Mennonite women also switched to housework by the day, to factory work, or to working in the kitchens or laundries of hospitals and nursing homes. Many of them worked in sewing factories where for weeks and months on end they would sew the same small portion of one kind of garment. Moreover, instead of an hourly wage they usually started with "piece work" which, until they learned to work at lightening speed, gave them meagre compensation for their efforts. Besides sewing factory work, one woman worked in a factory making caps for army uniforms, another worked in a bindery inspecting tickets, another worked for thirty-four years in a coffee/tea factory at such tasks as filling tea bags. The repetitious, even tedious, fragmented tasks of the assembly line and the long hours (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.) often without coffee breaks were done with the same diligence and care as the housework.

In general the women exhibited a resoluteness and often a kind of

resignation. Some of the women expressed that it was "terribly hard" to be away from their family, or that they regretted having to quit school. While some described working in the city as their decision, many spoke in terms of "taking it" as their "lot" (28:391) (29:003). Similarly, in response to whether or not domestic work was a factor in her never marrying, one woman responded, "No, some things just were not meant to be" (29:237). Another, who came to Canada as an orphan and worked as a live-in or day-work maid from her arrival in 1924 until her retirement in the 1970s, said that it was a very lonely life, "But, well, I came to here, I wanted it like that, I have to take it like it is. Nothing to say anymore... Now I have to be pleased with it as it is" (25:063). It seems that the women did not see themselves as people who had many choices. One woman said, "It wasn't for us to decide, 'What will I do?' There wasn't money to think about that" Another, when asked if she had any regrets said, "No. That's the way it should be for me... You can't turn your life this way or that way" (31:153). It is noteworthy that while these women use this rather fatalistic language, they express a great deal of gratitude and contentment. Quite typically, one woman whose goal was to do church work, "maybe mission work," managed very well to transfer her zeal to the opportunity that arose: her "mission" became her husband and her family (28:335).

Evaluation and Implications

It may be tempting to conclude that the women's lives were sacrificed for the cause of getting their families established in Canada. But how do the women evaluate their experience as they look back on it now? Many must have felt as one woman expressed it: "My life turned out very different from what I expected!" Yet, most insist that they appraised the situation and either chose that life themselves or found their own ways to make "something good of it." One woman declared, "It didn't do anybody any harm. I think it made people out of us!" Others called it "A good learning experience" and a time when "we learned to stand on our own feet." Typically they report, "I got used to it," "As a whole I was treated just fine," and "They were good years, no matter how hard it was sometimes." Many look back with deep gratitude: "I can't be thankful enough for how my life turned out!" (22:165) One woman who emphasized that they came to the city "inexperienced, naive, trusting everyone," said: "Looking back on it all it was a very, very good time. Looking back on it all I thank my God often yet for those people who looked out for us" (28:358).

On the other hand, several of the women expressed how difficult it was: "Thinking back... I don't know how I did it.... I think God helped us. Otherwise we couldn't have done it, because we were too young for that" (31:150). Another who worked as a "scrub woman" from her arrival in Canada until her later retirement said: "Finally we lived it through. It was not easy, but we lived it through" (25:300). Of the whole immigration and

settlement experience, another admitted, "I wouldn't want to live it over again.... They were very hard times" (32:370).

The women's evaluation of their lives reveals much about their fundamental beliefs and attitudes. When asked about their sources of strength during the difficult times, many mentioned prayer, Bible study, and the Girls' Homes (26:199). One said, "God led us in many, many ways. We just kept on going" (33:204). Another said that she knew she had to keep going because she was the oldest in the family (32:359). Sources of strength were described by still another as, "Eating and sleeping and resting and praying: 'God help me. If you want me to be here, give me the strength to do it.' And so God gave me the strength, and here I am!" (25:098). One mentioned how rewarding and satisfying it was when the lady would give her the credit when important dinner parties were successful (30:181). The philosophy that sustained another woman who suffered loneliness while working at the families' secluded summer cottage was expressed as follows: "Actually, I think a lot of times you just have to make your life happy yourself. Otherwise you are down in the dumps! Isn't that true?" (33:328)

When the women reflected on the implications of their city work, they mentioned that it was a *significant time* partly because they could help their families, learn English, and become more familiar with city life and life in Canada generally. More than that, however, many described the significance of their maid experience in terms of it preparing them for their work as wives and mothers. It gave them training in running a household and they "didn't need to learn it after marriage" (20:065). Indeed, among themselves some of the women would joke that after marriage the domestic work continued, but without wages or time off!

The women mentioned another implication of their maid work, namely that through their hard work and frugal habits they learned to pay off debts, save for their needs, and thus they eventually prospered enough to become solidly middle class. One woman declared: "I never, never would have dreamt that I would ever live in a house like where I used to work for people!" (22:154) In many cases the women's homes are indeed like those of their past employers and that in more ways than size or cost. Several women mentioned that they adopted ways they learned in their work places, such things for instance, as new recipes, "English" manners, and new styles of table setting, serving, and home decor (9:227) (26:331). These acquired styles and customs have since become traditions in many Mennonite homes. The women also had an influence on their employers. For the "society people" among whom they moved they represented what Mennonites were all about. From these young women, many people came to believe that Mennonites were generally honest and trustworthy (30:263).

How their time as domestic servants in the city affected their family life and the lives of their children was recognized by the women as most significant. Several of them reflected on how their daughters' lives took "a completely different path" from their own (28:183). Many said their children are

having "a much easier life," and that they do not understand the obstacles their parents and grandparents had to face (20:313). One expressed fear that her children did not have the skills to make it in hard times (26:084). Similarly, another woman who described her grandchildren as "doing well for themselves," expressed concern about the considerable affluence in the families: "It's too easy for them;" and this affluence, she said, may be harder to cope with than being poor. Many commented on their daughters' choices which they never had. There was recognition that these young people have struggles and challenges to cope with, but very different things from what they had to face (28:241) (33:221).

The women acknowledged that they deliberately contributed to making their daughters' lives different from their own. One mentioned the "sense of urgency" they had felt about their children getting a good education and wondered aloud if it had been emphasized "too much." Like the others, however, she spoke in glowing terms of her children's successes in business and professional life. Remarking that one of her daughters had become a medical doctor, another a nurse, and that her sons were in business, she concluded, "I thank the Lord for that" (28:183).

Reflecting on the different lifestyles and worldviews of the younger generation, some women were led to express that they sometimes could not relate to young people (31:094). One noted how much less modesty young women have today, while another remarked that they often seem restless and unsatisfied (26:084). Summarizing so well the philosophy of her own life, one woman's advice to today's young people was: "Try and do something for someone else... You'll feel so much joy after" (31:123).

Conclusions

While listening to the women's personal stories and interpretations of their experiences, I noted marked differences between the women who went to Winnipeg to work in the 1920s and '30s and those who went in the 1940s and '50s. It is quite clear that in the 1920s and '30s the primary factor in the move to the city was need. In many cases it was a matter of survival. Prepared by the devastation and loss they had experienced in Russia, The Mennonites were exhibiting a not uncommon "immigrant mentality," where individual needs and aspirations were necessarily put aside in order to succeed, where gratitude for whatever they had superseded discontent, and where the feeling of being at the "bottom of the ladder" provoked a humility and a strong work ethic. Despite their distrust of the city and their reluctance to have their daughters work there, parents accepted it as an emergency measure. The Girls' Homes helped them to make that decision and to feel better about it. As for the women, they no doubt felt the uncomfortable if not bewildering role reversal in which instead of being in the usual position of depending on their fathers for their needs, their fathers were depending on them. They "grew up fast," shouldering the responsibilities and proving themselves

capable. Even though they did not know where the city work would eventually lead them, they took it on with courage and displayed the resilience, diligence, and sometimes self-abasement, qualities looked for in good servants.

The women who worked in Winnipeg in the 1940s and '50s described a much less traumatic situation. By then, in most cases the travel debts had been paid and the family farm established. The women were more likely to be working in Winnipeg for their own objectives. Nevertheless, they too made good servants — their background, circumstances and role models had all helped to deeply engrain in them the virtues of helping and serving. As women and often as members of large families, they were taught from very young to “do what they could” to help and to put their own needs aside for the needs of others.

In these later decades, however, the women had a better idea of where their city work would lead, or at least where they wanted it to lead them. Though they had seen some women get “stuck in it,” most of them considered domestic work as “a stepping stone,” an occupation for a time. Most of the young women did this work for a few years between their mid-teens and early 20s. After this they usually married men from their own rural communities and moved to the country to farm. While the women did not complain about maid work, they were more aware of their options and were willing to do the more difficult, lower paying assembly-line work in order to have the freedom of evenings and weekends off. This attitude, typical of domestic workers in general, was largely what brought an end to the “maid” phenomenon in Canada and elsewhere. Because of the universal problems of this occupation (the low social status, hard work, long hours, lack of freedom and loneliness), women changed to other employment when possible.²⁵

By the 1950s people in the churches were beginning to suspect that the Girls Homes were changing from a place of “refuge” to becoming a cheap place to board. Both the Mennonite Brethren and the Mennonite Conference churches made the decision to withdraw their affiliation and percentage of financial support to the respective Homes, thus effectively closing them in 1959. The matrons of both Homes protested, pointing out on-going need, especially that of the new wave of Mennonite immigrants arriving after the war. Even after Helen Epp had retired to a small home in North Kildonan, immigrant girls called her to ask if she had a place for them to stay (11:004). The majority of young women, however, were going to the city less blindly than those fifteen to twenty-five years earlier. New labour laws gave them some protection, they knew the language, they often had some connections in the city, and they had heard or seen first-hand what it would be like.

The women’s move to the city to work had changed from an emergency measure to an accepted trend. Even when the need diminished, they continued to go. Parents’ attitudes slowly changed from fear or suspicion of the city to familiarity and confidence in the Mennonite connections there. The women’s years of work in the cities may well have been a major factor in

precipitating Mennonite urbanization; Mennonite adjustment to the city undoubtedly made it easier for some of their families to settle in urban centres. Certainly they were comfortable enough with the city that it was quite common for them to allow or even encourage their own children to go there for work, high school, college or university, and eventually to retire there. In this way the women's maid work may well have been "the opening of the gate of the city."²⁶ The Mennonite population in Winnipeg today is approximately twenty-five thousand.

The decades in which Mennonite women flocked to the cities to work were an important time of transition. Though our sources of information are very incomplete, it appears that this widespread movement of single Mennonite women to work outside their homes was unprecedented. That the women see the major value of their maid experience as preparation for their role as wives and mothers shows how the city work with all its newness also resulted in the reinforcement of traditional roles and values (22:372). On the whole, the women's ultimate vocation was that of wives and mothers. But the traditional path was no longer the only acceptable one.

Mennonite history is traditionally a lineup of great preachers, missionaries, businessmen, administrators and government negotiators. The story of the young Mennonite women is one significant example of how the lives and work of "ordinary" people continues to affect Mennonite life to this day.

Notes

¹This project was supported by grants from the Manitoba Heritage Federation Inc. and the Provincial Archives Manitoba (P.A.M) Oral History Grants Program. The tapes and 170 pages of interview outlines are identified as the *CMBSC Oral History Project, 1987*, and are held at P.A.M. and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

²Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus* (Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Counsel, 1962) p. 19.

³The Mennonites owned more than three million acres in South Russia at the time of the Revolution. See Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), p. 141.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 384

⁵The footnoting system used throughout the text of this paper identifies the interview and the place on the tape from where the information comes, eg., (11:118) refers to interview #11, and #118 on the interview outline and tape.

⁶See Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, p. 474-5; J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of M.B. Churches, 1975), pp. 157,206; E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd.), pp. 215, 248, 267; Henry C. Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Berne Indiana: Mennonite Book Concern, 1941), pp. 710-11.

⁷Provincial Archives Manitoba, Immigration Branch Records, MG4 D1 vol. 113,114. These were all places where male settlers greatly outnumbered female settlers, suggesting that the goal was as much to recruit women for settlement as for domestic service. See also Marilyn Barber, "The Servant Problem in Manitoba, 1896-1930," *First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History*, ed by Mary Kinnear (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1987); and Helen Lenskyj, "A 'Servant Problem' or a 'Servant-Mistress Problem?' Domestic Service in Canada, 1890-1930," *Atlantis*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Fall 1981), pp. 3-11.

⁸From about 1870 to the 1930s over 250,000 women immigrated to Canada, stating their intended occupation as domestic service (Marilyn Barber, "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domesticity for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930," *The Neglected Majority*, ed. by

Alison Prentice and Susan M. Trofimenkoff (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p. 102. In Winnipeg, the first hostel for domestic servants was the "Girls' House of Welcome" which was founded by Miss Fowler, opened in the late 1890s and operated until the early 1930s (P.A.M.: Immigration Branch Records MG4 D1 vol. 138. See also Barber, *First Days*, p. 101).

⁹Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, p. 248.

¹⁰See Alan F.J. Artibise & Edward H. Dahl, *Winnipeg in Maps, 1816-1970*, (Ottawa: National Maps Collection, Public Archives of Canada, 1975), p. 41.

¹¹Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, pp. 190-1; and Anna Thiessen, *The Mennonite Brethren City Mission in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada, translated in 1984 from German to English by Ida Toews, 1955), p. 36.

¹²The Mennonite Brethren Church established a mission with twenty-two members in 1913. See Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, p. 189.

¹³James Urry "Through the Eye of a Needle; Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 3 (1985), pp. 7-35. Urry writes in detail about the measure, sources and development of Mennonite wealth in Russia and the class system that existed.

¹⁴Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, pp. 140-41.

¹⁵One of the women whose family was very wealthy in Russia said that as a young girl she first dreamt of being a doctor, but it was not "the right time"— she would not have been accepted into the universities because she was a Christian (14:198). Formal education for girls in Russia was the same as for boys in elementary school, then separate from about age fourteen or fifteen. In girls' schools the curriculum consisted of such courses as literature, humanities, singing, drawing (14:129,144). Not many young women had career plans because of the political upheaval, though they did take what opportunities there were to study (3:076). Some of these as well as widows and older single women did such work as teaching school or seamstressing (14:064).

¹⁶See Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, pp. 186-202, a chapter on acquiring land. Also see page 198 for a map showing location of the mentioned Manitoba towns.

¹⁷For much more information on Anna Thiessen and Helen Epp, see Neoma Jantz "Sister to Many: Anna Thiessen (1892-1977)," *Women Among the Brethren*, ed. by Katie Funk Wiebe, (Hillsboro, KA: General Conference of M.B. Churches, 1979); Marlene Epp, "The Mennonite Girls' Homes of Winnipeg (1925-1959): A Home Away From Home," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 6, (1988), pp. 100-14; and Eric Rempel, "Eben-Ezer Girls' Home, Winnipeg (1926-1959)," Unpublished paper, (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 1977).

¹⁸Thiessen, *The M.B. City Mission*, p. 65.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 75.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 71.

²²The Ebenezer Home was financially supported by the General Conference Home Missions Board and the Women's Vereins in the United States; Katherine Schellenberg Klasen, "The Winnipeg Maedchem-Heim-Ebenezer," *Mennonite Historian*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (March 1984), pp. 1-2.

²³Peter Penner, *No Longer At Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), p. 20.

²⁴Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, p. 189.

²⁵Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," *Women at Work, 1850-1930*, ed. by Janice Acton et al (Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), p. 857.

²⁶Cornelius Krahn, "Research on Urban Mennonites," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 23, No. 4, (October 1968), pp. 189-192. Similarly, Marlene Epp in "Mennonite Girls' Homes of Winnipeg," calls the Mennonite women "pioneers" in the city for their families. The interviewed women whose parents gave up farms to move to Winnipeg attributed the move to a variety of reasons, for instance, that their sons (who were essential to the farm) were sent to camps as conscientious objectors during World War II, or that illness, a spouse's death, successive bad crops or lack of experience made farming unviable. In conjunction with these factors, it is certainly reasonable to suggest that their daughters' previous experience in the city contributed to the families' decisions to move there.