

“Unfortunate women of my class”  
Prostitution in Winnipeg, 1870-1910

University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg

Joint Masters Degree

Department of History

By  
Christine Anne Macfarlane

March 4, 2002



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-76795-7

Canada

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA**

**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**\*\*\*\*\***

**COPYRIGHT PERMISSION PAGE**

**“UNFORTUNATE WOMEN OF MY CLASS”  
PROSTITUTION IN WINNIPEG, 1870-1920**

**BY**

**Christine Anne Macfarlane**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree**

**of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**CHRISTINE ANNE MACFARLANE ©2002**

**Permission has been granted to the Library of The University of Manitoba to lend or sell copies of this thesis/practicum, to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and to University Microfilm Inc. to publish an abstract of this thesis/practicum.**

**The author reserves other publication rights, and neither this thesis/practicum nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.**

To my mother – my best editor  
and  
To my father and my husband - thanks

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
Chapter	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. He believed her to be a common prostitute.....	28
3. The unfortunate of our own sex.....	66
4. We were taking our chances all the way.....	98
5. It has turned a certain portion of our goodly city into a reeking inferno – a veritable hell.....	139
6. Conclusion.....	170
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	178

## Abstract

Between 1870 and 1910 prostitution grew both physically and culturally in the city of Winnipeg. It grew in number as prostitutes immigrated to Winnipeg and discovered that it was a profitable place for their business. Consequently, more ethnically diverse women became attracted to the business and by the 1880s American women, both black and white, dominated the trade. Native and Métis women once targeted as the worst of the street prostitutes by City Police were overshadowed and became less visible in the courts and in the press. Prostitution also grew in the minds of the cultural observers that included the newspapers and the dominant Anglo-Protestant elite. Within the forty-year span different ideas concerning prostitutes evolved as the city grew and toleration for their business deteriorated. Debates that took place between civic and religious leaders over the possibility of segregating prostitutes triggered discourses on gender and sexuality that reverberated through the whole city.

The debates over prostitution culminated in 1910 with the designation of Point Douglas as the last segregated district in the city. By this time, city leaders recognised that they could not enforce sexual control over a whole city. Consequently they exploited prostitutes to their political advantage. For these men, prostitutes became cultural representations of the sexual corruption of a modern city. Only their bourgeois sense of morality, they argued, could solve the problem and restore order. By segregating prostitutes they could, to a limited extent, segregate some of the other social ills of the city. This had a significant impact in culturally marking off the space as sexually dangerous and creating a subculture of the marginal – prostitutes, brothel keepers and

their disreputable customers. Choosing to be socially excluded from the rest of the city prostitutes believed they had secured for themselves a measure of protection. Segregation was the most efficient means by which the Anglo-Protestant elite could assert their cultural superiority and moral sensibility over a growing modern city.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. David Burley for all of his help, encouragement, advice and guidance. His historical sensitivity to the subject was invaluable. I would like to thank James Allum and the staff at the City of Winnipeg Archives for all of their help as well as the staff at the Manitoba Provincial Archives and the Manitoba Legislative Library.

Most especially I would like to thank Major David Pitcher of the Salvation Army's Heritage Centre in Toronto who responded to my plea for help with an unquestioning generosity of spirit.

Lastly I would like to thank all my friends and mentors who supported me throughout the writing of this thesis and who inspired different aspects of my work whether in a class room or in a coffee shop including Niki Daniels, Erna Buffie, Dr. Nolan Reilly, Dr. Jennifer Brown and Dr. Tamara Myers.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

and when a discussion rises on the subject, but little sympathy is shown to the erring  
-Winnipeg brothel keeper, *Daily Times*, April 19, 1883

In April of 1883 a noisy group of brothels on Colony Street near Portage Avenue, nicknamed “the Colony Creek residents”, provoked the first heated debate amongst Winnipeg city leaders on the issue of sanctioning a red light district. The dispute over whether to segregate the brothels from residential development or “drive them from the city like the small pox” became the topic of many city council meetings, public forums and church sermons. Articles in such papers as the *Daily Times* and the *Manitoba Free Press* covered the controversial issue unceasingly, conducting numerous interviews with doctors, aldermen, ministers and “anonymous gentlemen.” One interview in particular stands out. On April 8, 1883, a brothel keeper, unnamed, answered her door to a *Daily Times* reporter and offered him and his readers a glimpse into her world.

Aware of the controversy over the brothels and prostitutes on Colony and elsewhere in the city, the keeper talked to the reporter about the prevailing cultural attitudes towards her and the women she employed. “The world may and no doubt does think that fallen women are fit objects of abuse and scorn, and when a discussion arises on the subject, but little sympathy is shown to the erring.”<sup>1</sup> The keeper expressed a profound cynicism towards those who procured her services. “I have long ceased to have any respect for men, and the cruel manner in which some have condemned unfortunate women of my class only increases my dislike.”<sup>2</sup> Asked if she regretted her condition, the keeper replied, “Even a fallen woman has many a bitter hour of suffering and vain regrets

for days that are gone.”<sup>3</sup> While it can never be known whether the eloquent words were reported just as the keeper had expressed them, she undoubtedly offered readers of the *Daily Times* an unusual perspective on her life which would not be seen again in any Winnipeg paper. The keeper, in her frankness, clearly recognised both the social experiences of her situation as a marginalised female member of society as well as the contemporary belief that men and their sexual indiscretions were the cause of many a woman’s “downfall.”

After the keepers agreed to move their houses west of city limits in the summer of 1883, the public debate over their segregation did not flare up again until twenty years later in 1903. Closed down in a huge raid in 1904 the prostitutes dispersed into the city, disappearing into the North and West ends of the city to occupy boarding houses and rented rooms. Four years later, in 1908, the debate again flared when it became clear that the segregation of prostitutes had a distinct advantage over having them spread throughout the city. The reformist campaigns during these time periods, as different parts of Winnipeg society argued over the benefits of segregation versus elimination from the city, generated a prolific set of records, including a highly publicised Royal Commission - records which contain important ideological discussions on the role of men and women in an evolving industrial modern city.

Those records and that debate formed the initial inspiration for the writing of this thesis. Why had the issue of prostitution resulted in such a fiery debate, one which Winnipeg historian Alan Artibise described as the only one to have caused any serious conflict among Winnipeg’s commercial elite?<sup>4</sup>

But to answer that question and as my research into the segregationist campaigns in Winnipeg evolved, the subject become more and more complex, and other questions began to emerge: who were these women and what were their racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds? Why had they turned to the business in the first place? What were the social conditions in Winnipeg through the period 1879 to 1910 that may have influenced such a decision? And finally, what was the effect of the business on Winnipeg's urban development, both socially and culturally?

As the research evolved it soon became clear that in order to answer those questions the methodology of both the cultural and social historian would have to be applied. In each chapter the social reality of prostitution is juxtaposed with the cultural ideas about it in an effort to assess whether or not there was a cause and effect relationship between the two.

Because the records left by the prostitutes themselves are severely limited, the official documents of the time – among them press reports, government documents and judicial records – are used to explore whether or not the dominant culture's ideas, attitudes and moral beliefs about prostitutes changed over time, as Winnipeg grew from frontier town to commercial city. To do that the methods of cultural history, in particular scholarship on gender, is used to explore prostitution as a "cultural construct" of the dominant class – that is, the class which by and large, controls the means of production and public expression. In this instance, as in most, the cultural construct of prostitution tells us more about the dominant culture – its fears, its ideas about sexuality and gender and its notions of "civilised" behaviour and its own internal conflicts than it tells us about the prostitutes themselves.

But just how far removed was the cultural construct of prostitution from the day-to-day social experience of Winnipeg's prostitutes? And how far removed was it from the social experiences of the dominant class that came into direct contact with them?

In an effort to document those social experiences the sources and methodology of the social historian are used, seeking out the voices of the women themselves and official records documenting their actual social circumstances. Records which expressed the contradictions within the dominant culture itself – the conflict between their “ideas” about prostitution and their actual experience of it in the social realm – are also used. At the heart of this exploration lay two fundamental questions – how much control did members of the dominant class really have over the lives of Winnipeg's prostitutes? And how much control did the prostitutes actually have in what appeared to be a society hostile to their existence?

What this thesis documents, is the fact that as different segments of Winnipeg society grappled with the issue of prostitution they were, in fact, involved in a highly discursive debate concerning gender roles and identities in an increasingly important industrial city. Prostitutes of all races – white, native and black - struggled against a strong tide of negative public opinion which defined them as sexually deviant and lacking the critical “feminine virtue” most Victorian women were expected to possess – “sexual modesty.” They acted out against such ideas in various ways, including affronting bourgeois society with public displays of what was perceived as typically anti-feminine actions – drinking in public, accosting people in shops and verbally abusing people as they passed them in the street.

And what of their day-to-day social experience? Given the paucity of records one can only speculate. But it is clear from the record, that the subculture of prostitution mirrored the hierarchical structures of the dominant class. And in the few instances cited, it would seem that, in a few brothels at least, the same weapons of female subordination - intimidation through physical force, debt and drugs - were used within that "brothel hierarchy" by women against women. But there is also little doubt that the brothels also traded dependable employment and relative physical security and companionship for the appropriation of women's sexual labour.

Whatever differences there may have been in the day-to-day interactions between prostitutes, whether between madams and their workers or between prostitutes of different races is largely unknown because they left no records. But it is clear that while there was a brothel hierarchy, that hierarchy was not expressed in racial terms. There were black women who ran brothels that included prostitutes who were white, black and native. At very least it would seem that the brothels were not segregated and that women during this period were not blocked from moving up the hierarchy on the basis of race and that both black and white women moved from being prostitutes to being madams.

But the day-to-day functioning and interactions within the subculture of prostitutes - how they saw themselves and each other and how their attitudes, beliefs and ideas about themselves, their lives and their sense of agency was very difficult to ascertain because these women left no written or oral records, save the few cited. But there were glimmers. From time to time their voices broke through and where they did were included in my analysis.

Also a part of the social experience of prostitutes was the meaning that bourgeois women and men saw in and attached to their lives and livelihoods. Bourgeois women began to seek a public presence in community leadership, and one of the ways they did it was by setting up house of rescue for “women at risk.” The visible presence of prostitutes, especially those who lived and worked in brothels, allowed bourgeois women to argue that only their feminine sensibilities could help save girls who they felt skirted the edges of “moral decency” and were potential recruits for brothels. But, while bourgeois women, like prostitutes, were subject in different ways to oppression caused by the social construction of gender as prostitutes, they were, both by association and race, members of the dominant class-- vulnerable and disenfranchised members, but members by association nonetheless. And in the end, their “house of rescue” rejected the prostitutes precisely because these middle class women embraced the dominant cultural construct of prostitution as “moral failing”, rather than understanding it as the logical economic and social consequence of poverty and marginalisation, gender and race.

Fueled by their desire for sexual and therefore social control, bourgeois men used prostitutes to their political advantage. For these men, prostitutes became cultural representations of the sexual corruption of a modern city. Debates over the benefits of segregating prostitutes or driving them out of the city were used by men to re-assert their voice and public authority over those they perceived as being of a lower class, ethnic heritage and subordinate sex. Ironically, for these leaders, segregation hid, but accepted, the weaknesses of men, especially those who did not enjoy the moral benefits of a Christian family life such as transient labourers and European immigrants. To some

extent segregation afforded protection to women who, through choice or necessity, supported themselves through prostitution.

In fact, the recurrent debate concerning the suppression of segregation of prostitution not only expressed fears over the contamination of social life by immoral women, but it also addressed the nature of male sexuality and masculinity. Implicit in the denunciations of immoral women were doubts about the self-discipline and restraint of men. The officially sanctioned red light district and its location in a central rather than peripheral neighbourhood symbolically conceded that sexual indulgence and prostitution were inherent characteristics of masculinity and urban society. Paradoxically, this acknowledgment created space for women who traded sex to demonstrate to the community their transgression of respectable public and private behaviour, but it also allowed them to achieve their own patterns of career mobility and support.

In sum, one might well speak of the “making” of prostitutes and prostitution in Winnipeg from 1870 to 1910. That construction was both social, in the organisation of commerce in sex, and cultural, in the articulation of meanings associated with the behaviours of women who engaged into and of men who patronised them. By the early twentieth century, the relationship between social experience and cultural representation was one in which prostitutes purchased security with their acceptance of social exclusion.

\*\*\*

In writing this thesis a growing body of secondary literature on the history of prostitution was relied upon. What follows then is a brief survey of the methodology and thematic approaches which were used and expanded upon in my thesis.

The subject of prostitution within Canadian historiography is still relatively new. While rarely a subject independent of other topics, prostitutes have often been treated in histories regarding cultural concepts of gender and sexuality particularly at the turn of the century in Canada. Perhaps the most influential and notable works have been offered by Andree Levesque's analysis of prostitution in Montreal<sup>5</sup>, Carolyn Strange's work on single women in Toronto between 1883-1930<sup>6</sup>, Constance Backhouse's legal histories of women in Canada<sup>7</sup> and Judith Fingard's work on impoverished families in Victorian Halifax.<sup>8</sup> While these works do not represent the complete coterie of Canadian historians who have studied prostitution<sup>9</sup>, they do offer some of the best analysis regarding both the cultural and social history of prostitution in Canada. And their work was invaluable in the preparation of this thesis.

Other studies conducted outside Canada's borders, especially those done in the United States and Great Britain were also of great assistance. In these studies, prostitution, as a historical subject, became part of broader international debate which involved many of the same questions regarding gender, sexuality and the organization of urban life at a period of time some call "the Industrial Age." Of particular note are British historian Judith K. Walkowitz's work on the sexual dangers of Victorian London<sup>10</sup> and American historians Ruth Rosen's work on prostitutes in America,<sup>11</sup> Timothy Gilfoyle's and Marilyn Wood Hill's work on prostitution in New York<sup>12</sup>, and Joanne Meyerowitz's study of women adrift in Chicago.<sup>13</sup>

In a review article on the study of prostitution, Rosen discussed the increasing relevance of prostitution as a subject of inquiry for many different kinds of historians. For Rosen, and others, prostitution appeared to crystallize the "intellectual and political

interests of a new generation of historians: working class culture, the history of women, the development of urban life and institutions and the history of sexuality.”<sup>14</sup> Above all, Rosen states, the subject of prostitution seemed to many historians like an ideal one, “a microcosm in which one could view a society’s organization of sexual and economic life.”<sup>15</sup> This statement, more than any other, guided the writing of this thesis as a kind of “working hypothesis.” One which is born out in the following chapters each of which attempts to explore the ways in which the cultural debate over prostitution, as well as the social reality of prostitution influenced the cultural, social, economic and spatial evolution of the city of Winnipeg.

Moreover, within the studies listed above, three important themes emerge which influenced the writing of this thesis. The first involves the way in which historians have interpreted prostitution as an important reflection of the cultural attitudes being formed and expressed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by those in power. This includes questions over gender and sexuality, and the role of men and women in an evolving industrial society.

The second theme explores the social experiences for those involved in prostitution. Many of the historians cited above have struggled with questions about the role of agency in prostitutes’ lives - the degree to which they controlled the direction of their lives through rational free choice and how, as a historians, one balances agency versus victimization given the paucity of sources regarding prostitutes.

The third theme revolves around historical concepts of urban space. This includes both social space - the spatial physicality of prostitution - and cultural space or the symbolic representation of prostitution as a consequence of prostitutes occupying distinct

areas of the city. What, historians have argued, is so important about where prostitutes were located in a town or city and how does one interpret their movement both socially and culturally?

These themes or questions arose repeatedly during the research and writing of this thesis and to some extent, formed a “methodological guide” for the work. Balancing questions of agency versus victimization, the dilemma how to give voice to a group of women who have been, for the most part, historically “silent”, exploring the divide between cultural belief versus individual or class behaviour and actions, examining the significance, if any, of the urban space of prostitution, emerged as fundamental themes in this work. But while this thesis shares common ground with many of the histories of prostitution cited, it also raises important historical questions which other historians have failed to address.

There is no doubt the cultural construction of prostitution has been explored by a number of authors. In fact, the analyzing of the discourse generated by a variety of bourgeois reform groups in North America and Great Britain concerning the problem of prostitution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is one of the most examined subjects. In her work on single women in Toronto, Canadian Carolyn Strange argues that to study the texts generated by the press, reformers, women’s groups and other authoritative groups concerning the fear of single women alone in the city, does not close off historical questions about “authorship, authority, context, reception and resistance.” For Strange, Toronto’s cultural construction of a “girl problem” in the late 1800s was in response to “debates over the morality of material progress” which saw sexual disorder as the defining feature of too rapid industrialization.<sup>16</sup>

This notion of a culturally relayed fear of sexual disorder also provides the backbone of Andree Levesque's work on Quebec and, in particular, Montreal. For Levesque, studying how women who deviated from the normal expectations of appropriate sexual behaviour, like prostitutes, evolved into the overriding symbol of social chaos need not be reflected in how people – both women and men - actually behaved. Levesque argues that to study the discourse surrounding prostitution, is to study how those in power “mapped out what was permitted and what would be repressed... . It constructed an ideal of femininity with which every woman laying claim to a legitimate place in the social order would have to align herself.”<sup>17</sup>

This debate among historians over the cultural significance of prostitution also began to dictate historical questions about men and their masculine conceptions of power, within private and public spheres. In their introduction to a collection of essays regarding gender in Canada, historians Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan and Nancy M. Forestell argue that the historical inquiry into cultural concepts of gender and sexuality involves not just using men and women as historical subjects but seeking a “sensitivity to where social power was located and how it was used by whom and on whom.”<sup>18</sup>

In the United States and Great Britain such questions have been addressed by many historians of women and prostitution. For instance, Marilyn Wood Hill in her work on prostitution in New York argued that for many of the city's middle and upper class, prostitution became the cultural representation of broader social issues including sexual disorder, class conflict and racial tensions. Rosen's work on prostitution in America explores not only the changing meaning of prostitution over time but also the organisation of gender and class relations in the early twentieth century. Rosen's and

Gilfoyle's studies have used the anti-prostitution campaigns of American reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to explore cultural concepts of sexually appropriate behaviour espoused by the bourgeoisie.

Walkowitz in her study on cultural concepts of sexual danger in Victorian London states that to study prostitution and sexual conflict is not to explore the polarities between classes or gender relations. It is, rather, to highlight "a shifting pattern of cultural and social perspectives, set in dynamic relationship to each other, that offered a range of social constituencies different incitements to self-expression and self-creation in a modern urban landscape."<sup>19</sup>

In her work on prostitutes in Vancouver, Canadian historian Deborah Nilsen suggests that economic factors were the driving force behind many women's entry into the sex trade. She argued that because of the "marginal position of women in the labour force",<sup>20</sup> women rarely gained the wages and work place mobility to achieve a proper standard of living. Prostitution offered them a viable means to earn better wages. Canadian legal historian John McLaren agrees, arguing that the driving motivation behind prostitution "lies deeply embedded in the economic and social system"<sup>21</sup> in the market economies of industrial cities. Both Joanne Meyerowitz and Walkowitz in their studies of women in Chicago and England respectively advance this theory, arguing that because of their subordinate position both in the family and in the public arenas of work, casual prostitution – that is trading sex for either money, gifts or shelter – was an economic alternative for women to either boost low wages or supply an income when none was readily available.

As well, violence, especially to young women as children – whether sexual, physical or emotional – has often been studied as yet another factor in influencing a woman's entry into the sex trade. Such cycles of abuse sometimes forced young girls or women to abandon their homes at an early age. As a result they perpetuated the violence they had been repeatedly exposed to at home by entering prostitution. The brothel often offered them their only safe shelter outside of their family circle. Here they found companionship and other women who might have shared similar backgrounds. Being born into an impoverished family also compelled many women to devise different ways of coping in the face of such material stress. However, as Fingard observed in Victorian Halifax, for such women “opportunities were few and discouragements many.”<sup>22</sup>

Prostitution became often the most available means of survival among a limited array of options for poor women. Many historians, therefore agree, that as women, prostitutes were faced with a discriminatory society that offered them few economic choices. It left them powerless victims of a patriarchal driven state which oppressed them materially, as well as politically, and sexually.

However, there have been changes in the historiography as historians try to seek some degree of “agency” in the choices women made in regard to prostitution. While not wishing to undermine earlier historical conclusions concerning material disadvantage and oppression as a result of patterns of violence and poverty, many historians are trying to seek other factors involved in a woman's decision to become a prostitute coincident with those other significant studies. At issue in these studies are ideas of rational choice, alternative lifestyle and material advantages. As Sherene Razack concluded in her article on prostitution, “to speak of victims must mean bringing to light all of the complex social

relations that are sustained by prostitution and that sustain it – something that a politics of victimhood seems unable to bear.”<sup>23</sup>

These studies do not dismiss the very real and extreme differences in power that exist between men and women, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But they do assign prostitutes something more than just “victim” status. For example, Canadian historians such as Backhouse have shown how prostitutes, often victims of an all male legal system, were sometimes able to use the law to their own advantage. In her work on Esther Arscott, a wealthy brothel keeper in London, Ontario, Backhouse observes that she and women like her were able to use “every resource at her disposal, securing important and unprecedented legal victories.”<sup>24</sup>

Using the scarce sources that exist on prostitutes, other historians like Gilfoyle, Hill, and Walkowitz have also questioned whether prostitution might have offered some women financial security, upward workplace mobility and an alternative way of life from the drudgery and repression of a traditional domestic existence. Prostitution offered those who became keepers or managers of brothels real possibilities for financial security as well as a degree sexual autonomy through the sexual exploitation of other women.

But these historians often fail to take into account the differences in the quality of life for those women who managed and worked in brothels versus those prostitutes who lived on the street. And it is here that theories of agency versus victimisation become more complex. Many prostitutes in Winnipeg, for example, straddled both worlds, some able to find career mobility and peer support in brothels while others faced an impoverished desperate and violent existence due to their inability to find stable and well paying employment. Therefore, prostitution and the motives behind a woman’s entry into

the business are complex and involve many varied factors which historians are just beginning to explore. In this thesis to evolve a more holistic approach – one that balances ideas of agency versus victimisation is attempted, as it seeks to understand the great diversity prostitutes faced in their business and the degree to which they used their social dislocation to carve out a meaningful existence for themselves and those around them.

It is certainly true that such differences in the life experience of prostitutes were not necessarily reflected in the huge anti-prostitution campaigns that erupted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Such campaigns, while using prostitutes as the symbols of the moral decline of urban life, also tended to identify them in regards to the spaces they occupied within city limits. As Strange observed in the cultural construction of the “problem girl” in Toronto, when women took to the streets as workers in the late 1800s and became a public presence, the spaces they occupied, as a result, were critical in determining their “moral” character. For instance, as young female workers participated in commercial amusements, such as dancehalls, fairgrounds, and restaurants, “they were apt to find their pleasure-seeking redefined as vagrancy, prostitution, delinquency and even sexual psycho-pathology.”<sup>25</sup>

Many historians have argued, therefore, that it is necessary to examine the motives behind the marking off of an urban space by cultural commentators as sexually dangerous. By doing so a researcher can gain further insight into how public women, like prostitutes whose sexual promiscuity was openly observed in certain neighbourhoods, was culturally defined and manipulated by the dominant bourgeoisie. In other words, a prostitute’s negative cultural label was affixed not only by ideas concerning her openly sexual behaviour, but also by where such behaviour was exhibited.

Historians like Canadian Karen Dubinisky in her work on heterosexual conflict in Northern and Southern rural Ontario and Gilfoyle on sex districts in New York City have traced concepts of urban space in relation to ideas of social order and/or disorder. Such neighbourhoods, argues Gilfoyle, and their socially defined illegitimate social activities, were increasingly identified and labelled as areas of “negative vitality” by cultural observers. American historian Peter Baldwin, in his study of prostitutes and space in Hartford, Connecticut,<sup>26</sup> argues that a historical study involving cultural concepts of urban space relate directly to questions concerning notions of men’s and women’s position within the private and public spaces of an industrialising city – both physically and ideologically. Debates over where to move a red light district or whether to shut it down by numerous bourgeois groups in contested power with one another, he maintains, become metaphors for deeper political debates over community leadership and social control.

However the study of urban space remains a topic few historians have treated in their works on prostitution. Modern geographer Phil Hubbard has studied the subject in great detail, exploring the effects of not only where a red light district is situated within a city such as modern London, England, but also how police determine where to focus their policing, which, argues Hubbard, “frequently operated in an explicitly spatial manner which reflects and reinforces the marginal status of female prostitutes.”<sup>27</sup> Further, Hubbard suggests that “little attempt has been made by geographers to examine the nature of these spaces or how they contribute to the social construction of prostitute’s identities.”<sup>28</sup> Hubbard argues that only through historical evaluation of red light districts can one view “the continuing (but contested) process involving the exclusion of

disorderly prostitution from orderly sexuality, removing prostitutes from areas where they would stand out as unnatural or deviant, potentially 'polluting' civilised society."<sup>29</sup> This thesis explores some of the themes outlined by Hubbard and in doing so, makes an important contribution not only to the history and historiography of prostitution, but to the history of Winnipeg's urban development.

Between 1870 and 1910, Winnipeg was a city in transition, evolving from fur trading settlement to frontier community to a modern industrialised modern city. In previous urban histories of Winnipeg covering this period, most historians have drawn upon studies of much older and established cities like Toronto, Halifax, Chicago, New York and London. By and large this "model" for investigation has meant that certain key differences have been overlooked and certain key questions left unasked and unanswered. It is hoped that this thesis addresses some of those questions and points the way for further study.

As this thesis points out, for example, Winnipeg in 1870 was a largely homosocial culture, similar to the one studied by Canadian historian Adele Perry in her work on men and culture in the BC interior between 1849 and 1871.<sup>30</sup> There, as in Winnipeg, a large white male population coexisted with an equally dominant Native and Métis population. White women, even in 1870 in Winnipeg, were a rarity. Because of this, the community of Winnipeg attracted a group of professional American prostitutes who, by the late 1870s, had established large and successful brothels in Winnipeg's growing downtown district.

However, as more and more families begin to populate Winnipeg during the 1880s prostitution, as a result, became more of a concern as prostitutes maintained a

visible public presence on Winnipeg city streets. Class and racial tensions resulted along with sexual conflicts between prostitutes and the bourgeoisie as well as between the prostitutes themselves. In Winnipeg, for instance, tensions escalated between Métis and Native women labelled prostitutes by the courts and the press, and cultural observers who perceived them not only as racially inferior but socially inferior as well. Examining the history of prostitution in Winnipeg during this period has, therefore, allowed me to explore the social changes and urban upheavals which underlie events like this one, while exploring the accompanying and sometimes contradictory shifts or changes in concerns, attitudes, beliefs and anxieties expressed by an evolving power elite.

Few historians have examined prostitution in Winnipeg. Joy Cooper's 1970 article on prostitution delved into how it became an issue in civic politics between 1903 and 1910.<sup>31</sup> Her work was not so much to examine prostitution but rather the impact of the zeal of moral reformers against it as they struggled for community leadership. Cooper's article is more of a study on the political savvy of Winnipeg politicians as it is about the cultural or social impact of prostitution in Winnipeg's past. On the heels of Cooper's article was Artibise's 1975 study of the social growth of Winnipeg between 1974 and 1914.<sup>32</sup> Assigning one chapter to the subject of prostitution, Artibise, like Cooper, evaluated the political effect of prostitution among Winnipeg's commercial elite. However, unlike Cooper, he does offer some insight into the movement of prostitutes within the city but precludes any discussion on sex and gender by focusing on civic policy and law enforcement.

Perhaps the most relevant work has just been published by Rhonda Hinthier in a 2000 article in *Manitoba History* on the subculture of prostitution in Point Douglas

between 1909 and 1912. She explores the district and seeks to prove that the community of prostitutes who lived there “learned to work within and manipulate and oppose the [legal] system in order to achieve their own ends.”<sup>33</sup> Seeking agency in the women’s lives, Hinthorpe fails to understand that the culture developed within Point Douglas was part of a larger historical process the roots of which lay in Winnipeg’s frontier past. The evolution of a red light community, and all of its characteristics, grew and changed long before Point Douglas became the last official red light district in Winnipeg. Therefore, within this limited historiography, there is a need to move past the traditional studies of prostitution which have focused only on the 1903 and 1908 segregationist campaigns. There is also a need to reposition and re-analyse prostitution within the shifting and overlapping social and cultural changes of Winnipeg as it evolved from frontier community to an industrial modern city.

\* \* \*

Each of the following four chapters attempts to understand one facet of the complex societal problems involved in prostitution and the corresponding impact those problems had on the cultural growth of Winnipeg’s urban classes. Chapter Two explores the early years of the city, exploring the role Métis and native women had in casual prostitution and how their presence affected an area of the city called “the flats.” The abortion trial of Marie Trottier and the rape case of the Thomas sisters offer rare glimpses into the grim living conditions of Métis women as a consequence of their class position, ethnic heritage and gender. In the stories a variety of female sexual experiences is

examined, from casual sexual relations to the occasional exchange of sexual favours for some form of payment. How the courts and the press construed such experiences is also explored. The chapter also seeks to understand the cultural changes that occurred with the mass migration of different ethnic groups into Canada and the corresponding growth of single non-native prostitutes on the streets of cities like Winnipeg. The stories of Fiegi Getzel and Betsey Johnston shed light on the growing fears that Winnipeg's dominant Anglo-Protestant elite held about the different ethnic groups that were filling their neighbourhoods and the overlapping threat these groups posed for single young women.

Chapter Three explores the middle class response to these problems, in particular the actions of middle class women who began to form politically active groups and to build homes of shelter for wayward girls. In doing so, they believed that they were solving some of the city's most pressing problems while establishing their own authoritative voices in Winnipeg's rapid expansion. The definition of the type of woman they wanted to help was constantly being negotiated within these reform groups. Their decisions over who was worthy of their help had an important impact on creating a class hierarchy within the domain of the "unfortunate woman", in which hardened prostitutes were placed on the bottom of the list. However, because of the failure of bourgeois women to understand the moral choices some women faced as a result of the poverty and social dislocation, the foundation of bourgeois rescue work began to crumble. A look into the reasons why some women might have turned to casual prostitution is balanced against an analysis of the arrest record in the city's jail to see if bourgeois's concerns over the moral threat prostitution posed to single girls adrift in the city were grounded in reality.

Chapter Four takes the prostitute's perspective. Besides the casual prostitute who worked independently and intermittently in the sex trade, there existed in Winnipeg a highly visible and successful red light district. Through stories in the newspapers, as well as evidence from court records, census records, tax assessment rolls and evidence given at a 1910 Royal Commission, an attempt is made, despite the scarcity of personal accounts, to understand the women involved in the business of prostitution. Family inheritance, race discrimination and the limited opportunities open to the single woman helped explain the complex factors involved in the entry of women into prostitution. Some women found the business to be financially successful, some used it to feed their addictions to drugs and alcohol, while still others found it a means to escape an otherwise constrictive life. Their sometimes-aggressive behaviour in public led to continual discussions, letters and editorials in Winnipeg's newspapers over the ways in which these women fit into or, rather, did not fit into the cultural landscape of the city. As well, their role in the negotiations regarding the designation of the Point Douglas as a "compromise" place for a red light district reflects the enterprising and assertive role these women played in their own history.

Chapter Five examines the coming together of all the different players to debate the segregation of prostitutes in 1883, 1903 and 1908-10. Above all, this chapter explores the complex gender struggle that involved city leaders, prostitutes and general society. In particular, it investigates how male religious and civic leaders needed to establish their dominance over issues of sexual conduct and control. The effect their struggle for power and control had in the debates over prostitution affected women of all classes, and had a profound impact on the cultural attitude of Winnipeg, to women's place in public life. It

is a study of both the social and cultural impact prostitution had on city leaders and in turn, on the city as a whole.

These four chapters refer to a number of different primary sources. As has been noted by many historians of women, records left behind in archives or private collections are often sparse and/or incomplete. More importantly, brothel keepers and prostitutes failed to detail their own lives. As a result, research was pieced together from a collection of different sources between 1870 and 1910 in an attempt to allow the voices of these women to emerge. One of the most important sources for this work was the newspapers. Court cases and newspaper accounts throughout the period of study also offer a glimpse into the legal world prostitutes often found themselves in as well as the prevailing cultural attitudes towards them. In some of these sources the conditions of their lives are reasonably well documented. Their presence within noisy houses and apartment rooms often initiated angry attacks from their neighbours, resulting in letters sent to city council, and to the newspapers as well, which offers an, albeit limited, reconstruction of life in a brothel. Many residents described riotous parties, “immodest” behaviour, as well as violent assaults on women as a common characteristic inside and outside of the brothels.

Along with numerous newspaper articles, the evidence given by brothel keepers, politicians, citizens and social reformers at the 1910 Royal Commission on Social vice was an invaluable source.<sup>34</sup> Evidence at the Commission, for example, from Adjutant McElhane of the Salvation Army, is one of the few but important accounts of the role alcohol and drugs played in the lives of many of these women. Tax assessment rolls from 1891 to 1912 and census records from 1871 to 1901 also allowed for a reconstruction of their lives, especially their ages, race, nationality, their ownership of brothels, their

movement throughout the city and, in some cases, their career progress from casual streetwalkers to successful and wealthy brothel keepers.<sup>35</sup>

Other sources, such as city council minutes and reform pamphlets were examined. For example, one pamphlet by the Reverend Frederic DuVal was used to fill in gaps that other sources left open.<sup>36</sup> Here an important note must be emphasised. The focus of the response to prostitution is seen through the eyes of the Anglo-Protestants of Winnipeg's middle classes. While Catholic churches and homes for women certainly existed in the city, their voice in the debate over prostitution was overwhelmed by those of the Anglo-Protestant elite who dominated churches, business and civic offices and the political leadership in Winnipeg during this period of time. Also, Anglo-Protestant women's charity homes and boarding houses, such as those run by the Women's Christian Union, The Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Salvation Army, had the most complete records as well.<sup>37</sup>

Descriptions of the prostitutes' lives when they were forced to scatter throughout the city after raids and arrests provide insight into the ways these women helped each other by creating a supportive peer network. Here another important note must be emphasised. From 1870 to World War I, the business of prostitution, on the whole, remained in the hands of women. Walkowitz observed a similar pattern in the business of prostitution in Britain: "during most of the nineteenth century, British prostitutes appear to be relatively independent of the control of pimps."<sup>38</sup> Further Walkowitz states that "on the whole [...] prostitution was a trade largely organised by women rather than men."<sup>39</sup> The emphasis, therefore, will be on those women who were brothel owners and managers as well as the women they employed. Encouraged by the city to buy up a number of

homes on Rachel and Macfarlane Streets, an analysis of the negotiations that went on between female brothel keepers and various city organisations in 1908/09, as well as the evidence given at the commission clearly show how Point Douglas came to be chosen as a red light district. It also shows the important role prostitutes played in that decision. Mapping out the movement of prostitutes throughout the city between 1870 and 1910 illustrates how their presence affected concepts of urban space in the city of Winnipeg.

All in all, by seeking information through a wide variety of secondary and primary sources, is to piece together a picture that explores why some women became prostitutes, how concepts of class, femininity and masculinity influenced their lives, and why race played such an important role in how prostitutes were perceived by those who were deeply invested in the growth of the city – mainly men. Moreover, how the prostitutes' presence in the city affected Winnipeg's cultural and geographic growth is examined.

These women were key players in Winnipeg's early industrial expansion. Their lives and the way they negotiated their own autonomy during the city's expansion, will shed light on an important and little known aspect of Winnipeg's social and cultural past.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> *Daily Times (DT)*, April 9, 1883.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Alan F. J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), 246.
- <sup>5</sup> Andree Lesveque, "Le Bordel: Milieu du travail controle," *Labour/Le Travail* 20 (1987): 13-31.; "Etiendre le Red Light: Les reformateurs et la prostitution à Montreal entre 1865 et 1925," *Urban History Review* 17, no. 3 (1989): 191-201; *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).
- <sup>6</sup> Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).
- <sup>7</sup> Constance Backhouse, "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 18 (November, 1985): 387-423; *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and the Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: The Osgoode Society, 1991).
- <sup>8</sup> Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*. (Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1989).
- <sup>9</sup> For other works please see: Deborah Nilsen, "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920," *In her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in British Columbia*, ed. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980); Judy Redford, "Prostitution in Calgary, 1905-1914," *Alberta History* 29, no 2 (Spring): 1-11; John McLaren, "Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada's Prostitution Laws, 1867-1917," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 1 (1986): 125-165; "Recalculating the Wages of Sin: The Social and Legal Construction of Prostitution in Canada, 1850-1920," (Canadian Legal History Project, 1992). Susan J. Johnston, "Twice Slain: Female Sex-trade Workers and Suicide in British Columbia, 1870-1920," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 5 (1994): 147-166; Sharon Anne Cook, "Do Not...Do Anything That You Cannot Unblushingly Tell Your Mother," *Social History* 30, no. 60 (1997): 215-238; David Bright, "The Cop, The Chief, The Hooker, and Her Life," *Alberta History* 45, no. 4 (1997): 16-26; Sherene Razack, "Race, Space and Prostitution: The Making of a Bourgeois Subject," *Canadian Journal of Women and Law* 10, no. 2 (1998): 338-376.
- <sup>10</sup> Judith K. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delights: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). See also her earlier work on the social history of prostitution: *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

- 
- <sup>11</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1982).
- <sup>12</sup> Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York, Prostitution and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*. (New York: Norton, 1992); Marilyn Wood Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1870*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- <sup>13</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- <sup>14</sup> Ruth Rosen, "Go West Young Woman? Prostitution on the Frontier," *Reviews in American History* 14, no. 1 (March, 1986), 91.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 20.
- <sup>17</sup> Levesque, *Making and Breaking*, 12.
- <sup>18</sup> Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan and Nancy M. Forestell, *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.
- <sup>19</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delights*, 10.
- <sup>20</sup> Nilsen, "The Social Evil", 92.
- <sup>21</sup> McLaren, "Recalculating the Wages of Sin", 64.
- <sup>22</sup> Fingrad, *Dark Side of Life*, 91.
- <sup>23</sup> Razack, "Race, Space and Prostitution," 376.
- <sup>24</sup> Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 259.
- <sup>25</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 15.
- <sup>26</sup> Peter Baldwin, "Antiprostitution Reform and the Use of Public Space in Hartford, Connecticut, 1878-1914," *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 6, (September, 1997): 709-739.
- <sup>27</sup> Phil Hubbard, "Red-Light districts and Toleration Zones: geographies of female street prostitution in England and Wales," *Area* 29, no.2 (1997): 133.

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Joy Cooper, "The Red Lights in Winnipeg: An Issue in Civic Politics, 1903-1910." (Manitoba Archive Library Collection, 1970): 2-32.

<sup>32</sup> Alan F. J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975).

<sup>33</sup> Rhonda Hinthier, "The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg: The Culture of Prostitution in the Point Douglas Segregated District, 1909-1912," *Manitoba History* 41 (Spring/Summer, 2001), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Manitoba Legislative Library (MLL), Royal Commission on Vice and Graft in 1910. All Books.

<sup>35</sup> City of Winnipeg Archives (CWA), Tax Assessment Rolls, 1891-1905, Ward 3 and 1908-1912, Ward 5; Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Census Records for Winnipeg, 1871-1901.

<sup>36</sup> MLL, Reverend Frederic DuVal, *The Problem of Social Vice in Winnipeg* (Prepared by the Moral and Social Reform Committee, 1910).

<sup>37</sup> PAM, The Women's Christian Union Collection, P2131-2135; The Women's Christian Temperance Union Collection, P4627; The Salvation Army Heritage Centre.

<sup>38</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitutes in Victorian Society*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2

He believed her to be a common prostitute.

-From the testimony of Sgt. McGowan, *Daily Times*, June 1, 1881

On December 16, 1880, a pregnant Métis woman by the name of Marie Trottier was sentenced to four month's hard labour by Winnipeg's recently appointed police magistrate, Colonel Adam J.L. Peebles. She had been arrested as a vagrant, a common charge for women known to be street prostitutes. On April 16, 1881, Trottier left the jail, now six and a half months pregnant. To celebrate her freedom, it was later reported, she and her sometime lover, George Miller, gathered with friends and became drunk on whisky. Within a month Trottier found herself back before Colonel Peebles. Unable to walk, she entered the court on a hospital stretcher as the key crown witness in the trial of Dr. J. Wilford Good. Good was before Peebles for having "unlawfully procured and administered and caused to be taken by one Marie Trottier a certain poison or other noxious thing with the intent thereby to procure the miscarriage of the said Marie Trottier."<sup>1</sup> The abortion trial was a sensation, and the evidence given became an important record of life among street prostitutes in Winnipeg.

What will follow are the stories of four young women whose lives became public concern in Winnipeg between 1881 and 1885. Each account leaves behind a record of the cultural changes that were taking place during Winnipeg's growth, especially in regards to questions of gender roles, ethnic background and social dislocation. First is the case of Marie Trottier. Her testimony at the abortion trial offers a rare insight into the lives of those women who were believed to be common prostitutes by the dominant cultural elite

of Winnipeg society. As a woman of mixed blood heritage Trottier's story is important as it reveals the limited options open to such women who lived in Winnipeg in the 1870s and early 1880s, particularly in the area known as "the flats". So, too, do the circumstances involving the rape of two mixed blood sisters, the Thomases, and in particular, the younger sister Mary. Her story will further reveal the difficulties mixed blood women faced in the city in consequence of their gender, their race and their marginalised social position.

Finally, the stories of Feigi Getzel and Bertha Johnston shift the focus to the dangers the bourgeoisie believed young single European girls faced when they arrived unchaperoned in the city in growing numbers during the mid-1880s. Their stories reflect not only a change in population, but a cultural change as well, with concern for their well being taking over the problems of mixed blood and native women. Leaving their family circles to find work, mostly in domestic service, these young women seemed to cultural commentators to threaten traditional Victorian family values, a fear that led to an increased focus on the growing moral turpitude of single white woman. Prostitution became the social "evil" of the Victorian age and the Getzel and Johnston stories became evidence for many people of a city on the precipice of moral decline.

Before the influx of European women, however, native and mixed blood prostitutes dominated Winnipeg's early police courts and Marie Trottier's abortion trial sheds light on their life in the quickly developing urban Victorian culture of early Winnipeg. On May 31, 1881, Trottier, weak and barely coherent, began her testimony before a packed provincial court.<sup>2</sup> At first speaking in French through a translator, she switched to English as she described the events of her life over the past few weeks. She

testified that when she was released from jail on April 16, Miller, her lover and the father of her unborn child, immediately asked her to have an abortion. Trottier refused at first, but Miller continued to pester her about it. Whether Trottier was coerced into having an abortion by him or not, she stated that she willingly met Miller on May 23, 1881 at ten o'clock in the evening on the corner of Notre Dame and Main Streets. From their meeting place they ventured to Dr. Good's office just south of the Red Ball Store and next door to Adam's Tailor Shop on Main Street. Trottier maintained that while she did not speak with Dr. Good personally, she did watch him collect the various powders Miller had asked for. She also paid the doctor the \$25 he requested as a fee. After leaving his office, Trottier and Miller went to a shanty owned by a friend, Thomas George, located in an area known in the local press as "the flats."

Once there, Trottier drank two glasses of a mixture made from the grey and white powders as directed by Dr. Good. At first she felt nothing but within a matter of minutes of swallowing the noxious liquids, pains began in her stomach. Once they started, Miller fled the shanty leaving Trottier alone to deal with her nightmare. When George, the owner of the shanty, returned the following morning, he found Trottier in a bad state, listless and unable to get up. She told him she had given birth and had buried her baby in his lumber pile. She begged George to go for her own doctor, Dr. Edward Benson. When he arrived at the shanty, Dr. Benson took one look at Trottier, the blood on the floor and in a basin beside her, snapped shut his bag and declared that "the only conclusion I could come to was that I wanted to get away and did so," despite the fact that Trottier "looked anxious and said she expected to die."<sup>3</sup> While he believed that she had indeed miscarried

her baby, he did not wish to help her and told her that she could go to the doctor that had done this to her. Dr. Good was sent for, but would not come.

In the meantime, George went to the police, and soon after Dr. Benson left, he returned with Sergeant McGowan of the Winnipeg Police Department. Together they searched for Trottier's dead child in the wood piled outside his shanty, but were unsuccessful. Trottier was then taken to hospital where numerous doctors examined her over several days.<sup>4</sup> At the trial, each of the doctors testified that Trottier did not exhibit any sign of having given birth to a child within the last month. Therefore, due to the opinion of the respected medical authority, the charges against Dr. Good were immediately dismissed, as were the charges brought against Miller. Instead, Trottier "received a reprimand and gave a promise to leave the city within forty-eight hours."<sup>5</sup> Within a matter of months, it was reported that Trotter had once again "established herself along with a number of other birds of the same feather...Nothing more needs to be said to indicate the character of the locality."<sup>6</sup> The "locality" was "the flats" and by returning there, Trottier had re-entered the world of street prostitution.

Details of the lives of street women and casual or occasional prostitutes are difficult to obtain. Unlike "professional" prostitutes who lived in brothels and whose financial livelihood rested solely on their trade, street prostitutes sold sexual favours to supplement low wages or to survive unemployment. It was, in many cases, the only choice left open to them because of the social dislocation caused by their gender and racial heritage. In Winnipeg matters were complicated due to the high number of native and mixed blood women who, like Marie Trottier, were caught up in the trade of occasional prostitution. They were Winnipeg's first casual street prostitutes and, until

single young white women became more visible on city streets by the mid 1880s, they dominated the city court in the 1870s and early 1880s. In her work on Irish prostitutes whose lives in Toronto paralleled those of mixed blood women in Winnipeg, Constance Backhouse observed that the choice of those who turned to casual prostitution was one “of economic necessity “ amongst “a very limited array of options.”<sup>7</sup>

Few historians have written about native and mixed blood people in the city during the early part of Winnipeg’s history. However, their historic role in the fur trade has been the subject of much study.<sup>8</sup> Some historians argue that central to the success of the fur trade in Western Canada in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the informal unions made between white traders and native women described as “mariage à la façon du pays” or “in the custom of the country.” By the early 1800s, native women and their mixed blood daughters, once important players in the fur trading empire, were gradually relegated to serve those white women who had usurped their place. For many, it had a devastating impact on their lives. In 1875 a woman, known as “Fort Garry” and described by the *Manitoba Free Press* as a “dissolute half-breed” was found dead in her shanty. She had married a “dissipated” Englishman who had been sent to Fort Garry. After they married, they traveled together all over Europe, but he eventually abandoned her, just as his contemporaries had done, in order to marry a white woman. She then “like many others...entered upon a career of sin and dissipation” which resulted in an early death.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, while historians have explored the impact native women had in the successful establishment of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), few have yet to uncover what life was like for native and mixed blood women in the post-1870 fur trade era –

especially those who lived in the settlement that became Winnipeg. Once a large and successful fur trading settlement along the Assiniboine and Red Rivers since the seventeenth century, Winnipeg entrepreneurs turned other ventures as the fur trade began to decline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As Alan Artibise observed, “the social make-up of the community – a balanced population of Native, Métis, English and French - was dramatically altered.”<sup>10</sup> Settlement to the west brought along with it opportunities for commercial wealth and by the 1860s the area was redefined thanks to the growing Anglo-Protestant commercial elite who believed themselves to be “the masters of the city, and indeed, the whole province.”<sup>11</sup> Successful businesses owned by such men as J.H. Ashdown and Andrew Bannatyne grew quickly and soon began to change the shape of the city, both physically and intellectually. By 1874, when the city became incorporated, there were close to sixty financial and real estate businesses in Winnipeg run by a growing Anglo-Protestant elite with a common set of values.

Because of these changes, a number of native and mixed blood settlers and traders now found themselves living in an urban centre which offered no real opportunities for them. Coupled with the events that had lead up to the Red River Rebellion in 1870, relations between Winnipeg’s commercial elite and the native and mixed blood communities grew increasingly strained. Socially dislocated and lacking the resources to adapt to a new commercialized urban culture, some mixed blood families moved west of the city limits with many going as far as Saskatchewan. As Gerhard Ens concluded in *Homeland to Hinterland*, “Once Red River ceased to provide an occupational niche in the fur trade, Red River ceased to a homeland.”<sup>12</sup> However, a core of native and mixed blood residents remained in Winnipeg seeking work and, what they found, observes Ens, “had

little in common with the special economic niche that the Métis had carved out in the hunting and trading economy of fur trade days.”<sup>13</sup> As a result, high unemployment occurred and many settled in an area known as the Hudson’s Bay flats. This was an area of land owned by the HBC at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers adjacent to Fort Garry.<sup>14</sup> Bound by water on two sides, it extended between Main Street and the river up to Portage Avenue. Called the flats due to its low-lying land, it was susceptible to flooding in the spring and fall and as a result was deemed unusable by the city.

The unemployed native and mixed blood people who lived on the flats were eyed with increasing uneasiness as alcoholism and crime in the area rose at an alarming rate. This was coupled with a noticeable increase in the numbers of single male transient workers who were flooding the city in search of an easy fortune. A large percentage of these men set up temporary residences in the flats and were often blamed for buying alcohol for the women they “befriended.” The presence of these two groups did not sit comfortably with the growing business and professional interests whose optimism for Winnipeg’s growth and respectability did not include such troublesome residents. As the reputation of the flats as a morally corrupt and physically dangerous space grew upstanding citizens became more and more alarmed. In her work on Victorian Halifax, Judith Fingard observes that the residents of spaces defined as dangerous, “in terms of the both the scorn they incurred and the position they occupied...were members of the underclass of their society.”<sup>15</sup> Further, the spaces they occupied, being both highly visible and central, were defined by “a combination of offenses committed in public,” as well as a general “lack of privacy in the lives of the underclass.” As a result, Fingard argues, “detection occurred at a high rate for the prison repeaters.”<sup>16</sup> By 1884, so disturbing was

the criminal reputation of the flats, even the HBC itself wanted the people moved and the shanties taken down. The Company's Land Commissioner, C.W. Brydges, wrote to City Council on numerous occasions requesting help in shifting the shiftless. "There are a number of houses on streets on flats between Main St. and the Red River on the property of the Hudson's Bay," wrote Brydges. "Some of these shanties are occupied by objectionable persons... and I shall be glad if the city will take the necessary steps to clear away the shanties."<sup>17</sup> As one newspaper had earlier described it, "this rendez-vous of corruption and violence ought to be wiped out."<sup>18</sup>

Women, in particular Métis women, played an important part in the cultural process of defining the flats as both sexually and morally dangerous. According to the dominant social elite the perceived tendencies of Métis women towards drink and prostitution, was the cause of much of the social decay in the area. Marie Trottier and her testimony at her abortion trial, therefore, epitomize the vast cultural changes that were occurring in Winnipeg at this time.

Trottier arrived in Winnipeg in the late 1870s. Born in Baie St. Paul, a small town north of Winnipeg, she was the daughter of Michel and Angelique Trottier.<sup>19</sup> It is clear from the court transcript that she lived in various places in Winnipeg before arriving at the flats. Trottier testified at the trial that within one year she had lived in three homes. One was owned by the famous Métis opponent Dr. John Schultz<sup>20</sup>, another was the brick portion of a warehouse shared by "one McKenzie" and then another by a skating rink. Trottier's movement through the city suggests difficulty in finding stable employment. Her addiction to alcohol may have left her with little ambition to work if she found any at all.

Many young women arriving in the city in search of work, like Trottier, soon discovered that domestic service was often their only option among limited employment opportunities. Neither fully native, nor fully European, the mixed blood daughters of fur trade marriages occupied an uncertain position in Anglo-Protestant culture. In her work on the mixed blood daughters of fur trade marriages, Sylvia Van Kirk suggests that the acculturation process into white society often “rendered the mixed blood girls helpless and vulnerable in a society which was becoming increasingly racist and sexist towards native women.”<sup>21</sup> Arriving in the city, Métis women faced a society that was not certain of the status their parentage gave them. Like those women studied in India during the British Colonial period by Judy Whitehead, uncontrollable sexuality “was also attributed to the ‘baser races’ inhabiting colonial possessions who were thought to occupy a lower evolutionary stage and hence to be closer to nature and the animal world.”<sup>22</sup> And like the Irish prostitutes, “whose race, ethnicity and religion made them vulnerable to the rampant hostilities of a discriminatory social and legal system,”<sup>23</sup> native and mixed blood women found themselves on the margins of a community in which middle class standards were increasingly enforced. Some were able to find intermittent employment, while others searched endlessly without result. The few glimpses offered by court records and newspaper accounts suggest a grim, desperate and sometimes violent existence for those who were unable to find secure employment. Some of them eventually turned to prostitution and came to occupy the marginalized space of the flats, symbolic of their own social position in Winnipeg.

By the time Trottier came to trial in 1881 there was a second area in Winnipeg described as the “flats.” It lay at the end of Notre Dame Street, west of the city limits. A

community similar to that within city limits on Hudson's Bay Company land existed here and was marked by the same high visibility and lack of privacy. This area developed because of the way the early city of Winnipeg handled those convicted of certain offenses – especially prostitutes. Rather than send them to jail, repeat offenders were usually commanded to leave the city at once. For example, Sarah Laroque, a prostitute well known to police was told to “get” by the city court: if found within Winnipeg limits, she would be forced to spend one month in jail. As the newspaper reported she “got.”<sup>24</sup> Expelling criminals from the city limits was an attempt to eliminate those residents who threatened the moral growth of the city. As Backhouse observed in Toronto, in reaction to the demands of the dominant social elite, “the police forces devoted the largest part of their energy to dealing with the most visible members of society’s underclass: streetwalkers and drunks.”<sup>25</sup>

Commanding streetwalkers and drunks to leave the city established another marginalised zone on Notre Dame just beyond city limits. The newspapers, always watchful of the more dissolute residents of Winnipeg, ran occasional commentaries on this new neighborhood. In 1881 the *Manitoba Free Press* published the following descriptive opinion: “[There] are a number of tents in which are harbored as hard a crowd of citizens as can be found anywhere. There are a score or so of half-breed prostitutes and squaws and these attract a number of people from the city, who with the aid of a liberal supply of whiskey manage to make the night hideous.”<sup>26</sup> Another article described the residents as “the vilest characters of the country.”<sup>27</sup> It was believed to be an area where violence and crime went hand in hand. Reports of “half-breed” women whose “faces bore

evidence of severe punishment” were common, and fights between men and women were readily written about.

The newspapers reported such incidents with salacious regularity. “A girl named Eliza Savoyard appeared at the police station yesterday morning and complained that she had been assaulted and beaten by John Mansfield. Her face bore testimony to the truth of her statement for it was terribly swollen and lacerated.”<sup>28</sup> Mansfield was arrested. Two months before Trottier’s abortion trial a “low bagnio on the flats”<sup>29</sup> was raided and “Betsey Parisien, the shockingly wicked keeper thereof with Michael Lard, a frequenter of the place, were run into the cooler. The cause of the raid was a huge row in which the furniture suffered considerably.”<sup>30</sup> A few weeks later “Sarah Kiplan and Edward Grant who had a spirited row on Sunday night and started to demolish a bagnio on the flats were fined \$2 each.”<sup>31</sup> Some of those charged to leave the city filtered back in only to be sent out again. Therefore, the two spaces were inextricably linked due to the movement of men and women back and forth between the two zones.

Familiar residents of the flats included mixed blood women like those already mentioned, Trottier, Sarah Laroque, Betsey Parisien, and Eliza Savoyard along with native women like Tukapayupanook and Beautiful Girl. They appeared with regularity in the Winnipeg police court. Charged sometimes with loitering or vagrancy, they were also more commonly arrested on charges of drunkenness and their exploits were often a source of great amusement to press and court alike. “Tuk-a-pay-up-a-nook had been up before and was again. As there was no possibility of the lady doing the second and third syllables of her name she was yanked towards yonder dungeon.”<sup>32</sup> On the same day, Mary Ann Ossian assisted Beautiful Girl, in her court appearance, since the “maiden of

some 50 or 60 winters” could not “walk straight” on her own. Alcohol undoubtedly played an active role in their lifestyle and was perhaps a key reason for many of these women turning to prostitution.

Prostitution gave women like Trottier a way to stay alive and to satisfy their addiction to alcohol. As Backhouse observes, “additional occupational risks included brutal customers, venereal disease, and dependencies on drugs and alcohol as a means of coping with the stress of the work.”<sup>33</sup> In her testimony at her abortion trial Trottier claimed to drink of brandy or whisky at least three to four times a day, but denied that she had ever been “drunk during that time.”<sup>34</sup> Charges of petty theft indicate that these women resorted to robbery when in need or under stress. Ellen Demaris, described by the newspapers as an “abandoned half breed prostitute,”<sup>35</sup> was arrested for larceny many times. In one case, after being “lured to share the couch of George Wood” in his shanty on the flats, she went through his pockets while he lay in a drunken stupor. When arrested the following day, Demaris was in “a drunken condition.”<sup>36</sup> Four days later Demaris was caught again and her sentence was to scrub the floors of the police station and split wood for its furnace for a total of twenty-one days.<sup>37</sup> However, not all theft charges involved money. In 1877, for instance, Trottier was charged with stealing clothes from Betsey Parisien<sup>38</sup> and almost eight years later she was charged with stealing a piece of beef.<sup>39</sup> Trottier’s record and those of others like her indicate an existence in which the destitute relied on their own resources, often preying upon one another.

Their poverty and their race made native and Métis women marginal both geographically and culturally, as the police and the press associated crime and moral turpitude with their presence in the “flats.” A loose moral character and a loose body

were a dangerous combination and the women who lived in the flats were believed to possess both. Nothing was more evident of their low moral standards, it was believed, than getting pregnant. By 1880, Trottier at twenty-one years had already given birth to three children and was pregnant with her fourth. Her pregnancies would have contributed to her inability to work and narrowed the options open for her to earn a living. Despite being arrested on prostitution charges on a regular basis, Trottier also had a series of informal relationships with various men that resulted in her numerous pregnancies. Miller, Trottier's latest partner, described her relationship with him as an "off again on again" one which continued after she had been released from jail. He was, as described by Trottier, an unemployed labourer and, while they did not live together, Trottier testified that every night they would be either at one or the other's home. Miller often asked her for money to pay for his board as "he was dead broke and could not go to work."<sup>40</sup> Neither could he afford to keep a child. Trottier's other three children did not live with her. However, Trottier testified that "I never took stuff to procure abortion before this."<sup>41</sup>

However, as the abortion trial progressed, it becomes increasingly evident that Dr. Good's role as the supplier of abortifacients was not nearly as important to the case as Trottier's reputation as a woman of low character. On May 31, 1881, Trottier's testimony occupied most of the day, as she described the events leading up to her miscarriage in detail to a packed courthouse.<sup>42</sup> Good's lawyer, Mr. McKenzie, questioned her on her drinking habits. While she insisted she had not been drinking the day she miscarried, she did admit to drinking "sometimes more sometimes less" every day after being released

from jail. George, the owner of the shanty who gave testimony after Trottier, however, insisted that Trottier was sober when he found her in his shanty on May 24.

The trial then paused. The following day Dr. Benson, Trottier's regular doctor, was the third crown witness. Testifying that he had not physically examined Trottier when he arrived at George's shanty, he nonetheless concluded that the evidence surrounding her indicated the abortion of her baby. He also believed that her incoherent speech and difficulty in getting up, although similar to the symptoms of one who had imbibed too much alcohol, were the signs of a woman who was in much pain. Stated Benson, "In my opinion she appeared as if she had suffered intensely."<sup>43</sup> Despite her condition Benson "left because I thought there was something wrong and I wanted to have nothing to do with it". He concluded the first part of his testimony, saying that "I have heard her evidence and from what I saw in the shanty and seeing her there, I have no reason to doubt her story."<sup>44</sup>

However, in the cross-examination of Dr. Benson, McKenzie asked a series of questions that revealed the difficulties women faced in cases involving abortion. Trottier's character, not the facts of the case, suddenly became the focus of the trial. As Strange remarked, "Skillful defense lawyers who borrowed their arguments from rape defenses manage to shift suspicions of moral turpitude from abortionists to clients."<sup>45</sup> When McKenzie asked for Dr. Benson's opinion of Trottier, his reply was damning. "[I have] been jail surgeon and Marie has been in jail several times during the past three or four years. I believe she has been a prostitute for that time, and her reputation for truth and veracity was bad." He went on to say that he considered her a drunk and that "anything of importance she would tell me I would require corroboration before I would

believe it.”<sup>46</sup> Despite testifying that he believed her to have miscarried her baby and that he believed her story given in court the day before, Benson “could not positively swear whether or not an abortion had been committed upon her.”<sup>47</sup> Benson was then dismissed as a witness

Dr. Benson’s testimony was quickly followed by Sgt. McGowan, and McKenzie’s cross-examination again addressed Trottier’s reputation. McGowan testified that he had known Trottier for the past few years and like Dr. Benson his opinion of her was not high. “In my opinion,” he testified, “she is a common prostitute. Her reputation for truth and veracity is not reliable. Her habits are drunken whenever she is out of jail. Her disposition is quarrelsome and bad.”<sup>48</sup> And on this testimony the case adjourned for the day.

The following morning McKenzie re-examined Trottier at the hospital. Sticking to her story, she nonetheless admitted that since her release from jail, she drank hard and had many “turns.” Meanwhile, back at the courthouse an army of doctors waited to take the stand. When cross-examined by McKenzie, some gave evidence of Trottier’s obsession with doctors and her health. They testified that she was always in and out of hospital claiming heart trouble and other various illnesses. During her stay in jail, Dr. Benson attended her on numerous occasions.<sup>49</sup> By the time she was admitted to hospital on May 23, she had already garnered a reputation among the doctors for being somewhat of a hypochondriac, as well as a drunk and prostitute.

Dr. Lawrence J. Munro, house surgeon at the General Hospital, Dr. Lynch, admitting surgeon, and Dr. O’Donnell gave evidence at the trial. When Trottier was brought into the General on May 24, Dr. Lynch remarked that she was in a great nervous

disturbance, which he thought was the result of drink. Dr. Munro stated that he treated her for alcoholism and nothing else. When it became evident that Dr. Good, an attending doctor at the General was to be arrested, the doctors gathered together to examine Trottier in greater detail. Good was a highly respected physician and the possible ensuing attack on his name was a call for immediate action by the medical community. A matron at the General begged Trottier not to “give Dr. Good away....he was a good man and she liked him.”<sup>50</sup> Examined over and over again by numerous doctors, Trottier’s story, however, remained the same, as each doctor questioned her on the events leading up to her hospitalization. Despite the fact that they believed that “Indian and Half-Breed” women like Trottier give and experience birth differently than white women, the three men concluded that “there were no traces whatever of her having been delivered of a child within a month. In this they were positive.”<sup>51</sup> They were backed further by the corroboration of their conclusions by Dr. Cowan, Dr. Codd and Dr. Kerr.

The charges against Dr. Good, who never testified at the trial, were immediately dismissed. Trottier’s testimony at the trial and the sad events of her story could not withstand the powerful evidence given by the doctors from their authoritative positions. Coupled with her addiction to alcohol and reputation as a liar and a common prostitute, Trottier could not escape the damning prejudice that her sex, her Métis status and her low class position gave her. At the closing of the trial, it was Trottier who received a sentence from the court, despite never having been charged with an offense. As Strange argues, “Although abortion patients were crown witnesses and technically not on trial, they often ended up portrayed in court, much like rape complaints, as the real criminals.”<sup>52</sup> With a severe reprimand from Col. Peebles, Trottier was told to leave the city within forty-eight

hours or else she would find herself in jail. She complied with his order and so returned to the familiar lifestyle of the flats just beyond the city limits. For many years afterwards Trotter's name continued to be a familiar one in the police court. Within a year she was arrested again: "the authorities learning that she has no place of residence or any visible means of support brought her up on charges of vagrancy. She is well known as a prostitute of the lowest order."<sup>53</sup> Two years later Trotter received another sentence for vagrancy and spent two months in jail doing hard labour.<sup>54</sup> How her life ended is unknown, but her story gleaned from the records of her abortion trial offered an important window into the struggles native and mixed blood women like her experienced.

Within two years of Trotter's sensational abortion case, a trial occurred involving the rapes of two mixed blood sisters, Mary Thomas and her elder sister, whose name was never released.<sup>55</sup> While not as detailed as Trotter's trial, their story offers another rare glimpse into the world of women involved in casual street prostitution. In the late fall of 1884 the two sisters were sent by their mother into the city of Winnipeg from their hometown of Headingly. Only fifteen and seventeen years old, the two girls found lodging in Mrs. Hogg's boarding house on Fort Street. However, Mrs. Hogg's "boarding house" was well known within police circles as a brothel.<sup>56</sup> Whether the girls were sent there with this knowledge is unknown and the reasons for their move to the city remain speculative. Their mother may have wished to separate Mary, just fifteen and pregnant, from her native husband and so entrusted her supervision to her older sister. In any case, Mary's condition as well as their race more than likely presented obstacles to employment.

By January of 1885, because of their inability to find employment the two girls were known to “escort” men into the city.<sup>57</sup> On January 16, they left Mrs. Hogg’s house in the company of William Hallet and James Rogers. They were taken by the men into the city and subsequently “made drunk when they were driven in a sleigh to the farm of Hallet’s father, nr. [sic] Headingly.”<sup>58</sup> While the elder sister was taken into the house, Mary was taken to a barn where the two men brutally raped her. They then left her there, drunk and frightened, for the night in the freezing cold. Neighbours who heard the commotion during the night investigated Hallet’s property the next day and found Mary in the barn, believing her to be dead. They took her and her sister to hospital. Little is known what happened to her sister but Mary lost both of her feet due to frostbite.

The next day William Hallet’s father went to police to tell them he was afraid of his son’s violent nature. That same day the hospital released information about Mary’s rape. The police took action and Rogers was arrested in St. James, while Hallet was found and arrested at Mrs. Hogg’s. At first, charged with three counts, including rape and grievous bodily harm, the two had their charges reduced to grievous bodily harm alone. The case was set aside for the assize courts in the spring. The headline of the *Daily Times* described the rape case as an “Affair turning out to be a Sensation.”<sup>59</sup>

The charges of rape were dismissed because Mary’s evidence could not, the police court believed, be substantiated. She and her sister were, after all, just “ordinary looking half breeds.”<sup>60</sup> Hallet gave a different story to the provincial court. Picking up the sisters at Mrs. Hogg’s, he testified that he and Rogers were simply escorting the two home to visit their mother. They drove around the city until they all got drunk. Hallet then headed for his father’s farm where he managed to get one sister into the house and

into bed while Mary lay out on the sleigh, passed out and freezing in the mid-January weather. Hallet finally returned for her and placed Mary in a bed, which, he emphasized, had children in it. Hallet's testimony led to the dismissal of the rape charges. The senior Hallet's concerns about William's violent nature and the fact that the neighbours found Mary in the barn, not in the house, apparently did not make Mary's story more believable.

As legal historian Backhouse remarked, "Women who were known to drink alcoholic beverages, frequent taverns or indulge in extramarital sex" were at a distinct disadvantage when complaining of violent rape. "In the language of the courts", argues Backhouse, "they lacked credibility."<sup>61</sup> Nor did Mary seem to show any signs of resistance when raped by Hallet and Rogers, something courts of the day felt was necessary for conviction.<sup>62</sup> As in the Trottier trial, prostitutes lacked credibility and were believed to exaggerate and wildly fabricate evidence and their word, as a result, was suspect. Moreover, as prostitutes, they were offering a sexual service to men and when forcibly taken, they received little sympathy from the court. Combine these factors with the sisters' mixed blood heritage and the fact that they lived in a known brothel and it becomes evident who the courts preferred to believe at the time. As Backhouse stated, "prostitutes [who] lived on the margins were never quite encompassed within the circle of legal protection."<sup>63</sup> It was true in the case of Marie Trottier and also in the case of the Thomas sisters.

Between Trottier's trial in 1881 and the Thomas's trial four years later, Winnipeg had grown substantially. No longer a frontier outpost, with the completion of the transcontinental railroad and growing agricultural settlement, Winnipeg became the

gateway to a region of economic promise. Its business and professional men saw themselves not just as agents of material progress, but also as defenders and exemplars of Victorian bourgeois virtues. In an evolving city, they keenly felt their responsibility to uplift the moral condition of their working class citizens and to promote the bourgeois model of a solid and religiously grounded family life.

The mid-1880s marked a transition. Earlier, reports of the sorry experiences of the Métis and native underclass had entertained as much as they appalled and offended Winnipeg's respectable residents. But soon the newspapers' police court columns gave way to church news, while stories of half-breed prostitutes were replaced by reports of society events, philanthropic fund-raisers and advice columns. City leaders now considered the city a living, breathing body whose soul needed to be nurtured, purified and guided. Therefore, while they built churches and formed philanthropic societies, they also turned an increasingly worried eye on those lost, alone and bewildered souls of the poorer communities, especially unchaperoned working-class girls living alone in Winnipeg. When sexual misadventures involving some of these young women were reported in the press, they were taken up as grave warnings to the community in general, but to women in particular.

As successful businesses expanded and upper middle class neighborhoods flourished, a demand grew for good domestic servants, that is, strong European, preferably British, working girls. Throughout Canada, thousands of girls were brought over from orphanages and workhouses in Great Britain and Europe often arriving alone and unchaperoned in the cities across the country.<sup>64</sup> Not only domestic service, but factories, hotels, restaurants and department stores opened up new employment for single

women. Forced to live away from their families, their status was believed to be a serious threat to the traditional Victorian roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. As one newspaper reported “the spectacles of ‘flashy’ women driving through the streets from one saloon to another are not conducive to good morals or the fair reputation of the city.”<sup>65</sup>

By the time the city saw a rapid increase in the single female workforce, its physical size had expanded and changed considerably with the arrival of immigrants in search of new homes and single men in search of their fortunes. Artibise argued that “while the arrival of tens of thousands of immigrants in Winnipeg may have satisfied the growth ethic of the dominant commercial elite,” it also “presented this group with some of its most serious problems.”<sup>66</sup> As a result of such rapid population growth many of the dominant Anglo-protestant elite concluded that Winnipeg was spinning out of social control.

The movement of working women into highly visible public spaces in the city was important in the history of gender and gender relations within Western culture. Judith K. Walkowitz argued that as women took to the streets of London as consumers, city missionaries, philanthropists or workers in the mid-1800s, their presence “provoked a heightened sense of sexual antagonism” within the male dominated Victorian culture.<sup>67</sup> This, she states, provoked a social backlash against women that still reverberates today.<sup>68</sup> Culminating her argument with the sensational case of Jack the Ripper, Walkowitz observed that many cultural commentators believed that the emerging public role of women was detrimental to the prevailing Victorian socially gendered order. Such order placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of women within the private sphere of the

home. As a consequence, a heavily symbolic and linguistic discourse on the sexual dangers of the city took place in the press and in public speeches. Such concerns seemed realised with the murders of streetwalkers in dark Victorian London by a man dubbed Jack the Ripper. The physical threat he brought to the public streets of London was used by cultural commentators to enhance and emphasize the sexual and physical vulnerability of women in certain public spaces and quelled any possible alteration to the established traditional gender and sexual norms, thereby reinforcing women's subordination to men.

No case paralleling the horrific details of Jack the Ripper occurred in Winnipeg, but there were stories that functioned in a similar way. The presence of young girls on the streets of Winnipeg, especially at night, engaged cultural commentators to reflect on the sexual dangers of the city. In their annual report for 1890, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) observed, "A large proportion of this province are young people and you must have noticed how often gatherings of young people are reported as not separating until 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. Pleasure must first have the warrant that it is without sin, then measure that it is without excess."<sup>69</sup> Concern for the safety of the young women who occupied the streets and places of entertainment at night in search of pleasure, provoked the newspapers to write more often about the dangerous consequences of entering the streets alone. The serious problem of "sidewalk loafers" and "idlers" who blocked the sidewalks so thoroughly that "ladies are obliged to make a detour through the mud to get past"<sup>70</sup> became a frequent complaint.

Besides their lack of gallantry, such men were considered threatening in more sinister ways. The most grievous menace to the safety of young women was a sexual one and the newspapers reported frequently on violent tales of seduction and assault. "Despite

the vigilance of the police, ladies are still nightly insulted by rowdies on the street.”<sup>71</sup>

One evening in 1894 two young women were walking home at night when attacked by a man on Qu’Appelle Street. “Both ladies called for assistance and defended themselves by striking their assailant with some books they were carrying. The man, evidently insane, then took to his heels and made way.”<sup>72</sup> Tales of seductions by immoral young men who wandered the streets in search of their prey served to highlight a young woman’s sexual vulnerability. “A young girl named Mary McAllister, about 17 years of age, was found by Police Constable Faulkner, in the company of two young men on Common Street.” Believed to have supplied her with copious amounts of alcohol, the men then decoyed McAllister “out on the prairie for base purposes.” The two men were arrested and the *Free Press* concluded that “the crime of leading young women astray particularly those employed in shops and hotels is becoming quite common and should be vigorously dealt with by the authorities.”<sup>73</sup>

The most serious danger to the morals of the city was reflected in the lives of those young women who were caught up into a life of dissipation and sin. Prostitution, therefore, became *the* social evil and the most serious threat to any woman living in the city alone. As the WCTU reported, “Scores of women are coming to this country seemingly willing to work...but having grown up without training, either in the home or elsewhere, they are inefficient and so they drift into ways that are dark, and in their fall drag others with them.”<sup>74</sup> Believed to be lacking the moral guidance a family would have naturally given them the dominant Anglo-Protestant middle classes adopted the role of parent. Homes such as the Girl’s Home of Welcome and the Women’s Christian Union Home were established to offer shelter and guidance to those in search of domestic

service and deemed the most vulnerable. In 1902, five years after it had first opened, the Girl's Home of Welcome saw close to one thousand young girls pass through its doors.<sup>75</sup>

Despite such help, many young girls struggled to maintain a living in legitimate work. The sensation-making cases of Feigi Getzel and Bertha Johnston demonstrated for middle class newspaper readers the sexual danger posed by the city to those beyond their moral guidance. The two girls' stories bear witness not only to the growing certainty of the physical dangers of the city streets, especially after dark, by Winnipeg's cultural elite but also to the sexual dangers they believed were posed by an underclass of men and women, especially those of particular ethnic heritage.

In Austria in 1884, Feigi Getzel, a sixteen-year-old Jewish girl, answered a newspaper advertisement for a domestic servant in Canada. She hoped to go to Canada, she said later, "to better herself."<sup>76</sup> Isaac and Etta Braunstein, who had placed the ad, wrote back that Winnipeg lacked good domestic servants, "the women here all being half-breeds and not to our taste."<sup>77</sup> They offered Getzel forty dollars a month, as well as room and board. Getzel accepted. In late July of 1884, Isaac Braunstein traveled to Austria to meet her. Armed with Russian citizenship documents and a certificate of good merit from a rabbi, Getzel journeyed with Braunstein across the Atlantic, arriving in Winnipeg by late August. When she arrived in their North End home, Braunstein and his wife locked Getzel in a room. That evening Braunstein ushered in two men, while his wife stood by and took their money. The men, described in the language of the newspapers as "fiends in human form," then "deliberately outraged the defenseless girl, stifling her screams and during the night abused her in a heartless and blood curdling manner."<sup>78</sup> For the next two weeks Getzel endured abuse and sexual violence, as

Braunstein and his wife kept her locked in her room, opening the door only to let men in and out.

One night, clad only in a shift, Getzel escaped and took refuge in a neighbouring home where she told her story. From there the police were immediately contacted and Braunstein and his wife were arrested. When released the following day, the two searched out Getzel and brutally assaulted her. Arrested once more, the Braunsteins were charged with four offenses, including confining Getzel against her will with the intent to cause her to become a prostitute, holding her illegally in Canada, assaulting her and keeping a house of ill fame. Described by newspapers as having suffered “a fate worse than death” and a “revolting crime”, Getzel was proclaimed an innocent victim to the sexual perils that certain areas of the city posed to young girls of her class.<sup>79</sup>

Public outrage was so intense that the Braunsteins were repeatedly threatened with violence. On the night of September 17, two men entered Braunstein’s home dressed as policemen and arrested him. They escorted him to a dray owned by a man named McKeowen. From there he was driven out to the prairie, where close to a dozen men pulled Braunstein to the ground. Beaten and kicked to the point of senselessness, Braunstein lay still, hoping that his assailants would think him dead. While motionless, the men poured tar over his head. A handful of feathers were thrown into his face and he was left to find his way back to the city and to the police.<sup>80</sup>

In their attempts to identify the men who had committed the assault, two policemen and a reporter from the *Daily Times* entered the north end “shanty town” to interview Braunstein. The reporter, with a flair for the melodramatic described his frightful journey to the Braunstein home. “After wading through a sea of mud the party

arrived at the place, a miserable hovel. The place was full of juvenile hens and roosters and skeleton-like dogs and in the midst of this squalor and dirt lay the victim.”<sup>81</sup>

However, no charges were laid against the attackers while Braunstein claimed that four of the men were Jews known to him, the public felt the treatment was justified. According to the *Daily Times*, there was among the residents “a strong feeling of regret that the tarring process was not more complete” and that the men should be “given six months in jail for having bungled it.”<sup>82</sup> Further, concluded the reporter, “The general opinion is expressed that it will be the cause of making Bronstein [sic] and the other people engaged in the same business to leave town.”<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the Braunsteins did flee Winnipeg and managed to escape the charges awaiting them at the October assize courts.

The Getzel kidnapping case was a sensation in Winnipeg occupying front pages of Winnipeg newspapers for weeks.<sup>84</sup> The deep-seated fear of a white slavery trade became a frightening reality in the story of one young Jewish girl. The fact that Braunstein and his wife were Jewish as well seemed only to confirm the Anglo-Protestant suspicions of that group. By the mid-1880s, as Gerald Friesen observed, “the physical appearance of Winnipeg was marked by a high degree of residential segregation by class.”<sup>85</sup> An Eastern European immigrant population had begun to grow in the North End of the city around the Canadian Pacific Railway depot and large number of Jews along with other poor European immigrants who were arriving in the city occupied an area of the North End known as “New Jerusalem” and the “Foreign Quarter”. Its reputation for disease and filth and the belief of the low moral standards of the immigrants who lived there designated the North End of Winnipeg a space where dangers of all kinds lurked. Isolated from the central core of the city due to the vast maze of railway tracks, yards and

industries, the north end was as Artibise observed “barely disturbed by reality.”<sup>86</sup> As seen by the reporter’s dark journey into the North End mentioned earlier, the Getzel case became a window into the horrors of the North End and showed the various dangers lurking to other young women living in the safety and protection of their own comfortable middle class homes.

Feigi Getzel was sent home to Austria where she could return to her own familiar culture and, more importantly, her family. While Getzel was saved from her frightening ordeal, others were unable to escape their harsh circumstances. One year after Getzel’s nightmare, the case of Bertha Johnston once again raised the fears of white slavery.<sup>87</sup>

In 1883 a twelve-year-old Icelandic girl named Bertha Johnston traveled with her father from Minnesota to Winnipeg. After being placed in domestic service, Johnston’s father left her and traveled north to Lake Winnipeg where he had a job in the fisheries. The Icelandic people, especially those living in the city, were an impoverished group due in part to their ethnicity and inability to speak English.<sup>88</sup> Icelanders in Winnipeg were often mentioned among the residents on the flats, some so poor that they could not bury their own children.<sup>89</sup> Johnston’s decision to place his daughter in service was not unusual considering his own difficulties in finding work. Two years after Johnston went into service, the police raided on one of the most notorious brothels in the city, that owned by Florence “Mother” McKenzie, on Main Street. As police charged the house and arrested everyone in sight, a fourteen-year-old girl approached a detective and told him her story in broken English. It was Bertha Johnston. During the two years she had been living alone in Winnipeg, she experienced what the newspapers described “as a sickening story.”<sup>90</sup>

At the time of the raid, Johnston was living in a boarding house on Alexander Street. Ten days before, she had been out late with a group of friends and on returning home found the doors locked. According to the *Free Press*, she met a man who, on learning of her unfortunate circumstances, encouraged her to go to Mother McKenzie's place which, she said, looked just like a restaurant. Here, he told her, she could get food and some rest in perfect safety until the morning when she could return home. In the *Daily Times*, the story was reported slightly differently, stating that Johnston had fallen in with a group of girls, one of whom was McKenzie's daughter, "Sis", a notorious prostitute. These girls convinced Johnston to go into the restaurant for a bite to eat. Whether it was a sinister single man or a gang of depraved girls, the papers concurred on the events that transpired once Johnston entered the restaurant.

Immediately grabbed by Mother McKenzie, Johnston was taken through the restaurant to a secret part of the building known to the police as the "refrigerator", where prostitutes lived and worked in secrecy. Here Johnston was taken to a bed and Tosh McKenzie, Mother McKenzie's son, assisted by his sister "Sis", "brutally outraged her, leaving her senseless."<sup>91</sup> The next morning Mother McKenzie sent men into her room and for the next ten days Johnston indicated that she was trapped, barred from leaving and given barely enough clothes to keep warm. After Johnston told her story to the police, she was taken to safety, while the McKenzie family, other prostitutes, and a number of frequenters were arrested and sent to jail. After the raid, the police sent Johnston back home to her father, who was now living in Emerson, in the hopes of redeeming her. However, after a year at home, Johnston ran away and, to the disgust of the newspapers, "has since been the companion of the commonest streetwalkers in the city."<sup>92</sup>

Melodramatic stories of “innocent girl in peril” obsessed Victorians in their campaigns against prostitution. Joanne Meyerowitz in her study of women adrift in Chicago described the language of such stories as “highly charged and grossly exaggerated”, reflecting a society that feared it was on the verge of social panic.<sup>93</sup> In the campaigns against the social evil, prostitution stories “focused on the woman adrift as a symbol of purity and naiveté in the evil and sophisticated city.”<sup>94</sup> Usually such tales of a virginal innocent’s downfall into a life of sin ended with either salvation through marriage or a short merciful death or, in the case of Getzel, returning to the safety of her family. In the case of Johnston, her story ends with more of a symbolic death, as she returns to a life of depraved immorality.

Johnston’s story exemplifies, therefore, the innocent girl adrift whose body was, as Meyerowitz argued, believed to be “polluted by invasive social forces.”<sup>95</sup> Moreover, women of the underclass like Mother McKenzie and Sis were often targeted as the “sinister polluter of the social body.”<sup>96</sup> The McKenzies’ depravity was the antithesis of Johnston’s innocence and together they symbolized the dangers posed to and by certain classes of women. The *Daily Times* described the McKenzies’ influence in a more melodramatic and sinister way. Depicting McKenzie as a “villainous old hag” the story of Johnston confirmed “the great evil of these low dives of sin and corruption sending out their degenerating influences from the very heart of the city.”<sup>97</sup> Whether enticed to Mother McKenzie’s dive by a single man or by a group of hardened young girls, Johnston was seen as an innocent victim ensnared into a wicked life and unable to escape its tenacious clutches. Moreover, her lack of a proper family was believed to be the initial

factor that put Johnston at risk. As the newspaper remarked, "left without parent and care she has easily gone bad."<sup>98</sup>

However, while the truth of Johnston's story is obscured by the volatile language and images used by the newspapers, there are hints within the story which suggest a much more complex relationship between Johnston and her foray into casual prostitution. Mother McKenzie was arrested on the night of raid and charged with numerous offenses, including the rape of Johnston. McKenzie's lawyer, often hired by brothel madams, was William Canavan.<sup>99</sup> In his questioning of Johnston he "shocked" a courtroom full of spectators. Relating what was described as "a story of a disgusting nature", Johnston admitted that she had already known many men before arriving at McKenzie's "restaurant." She had had a "criminal acquaintance" with a group of firemen and her rent at the boarding house on Alexander Street was paid by a couple of young boys named Wheeler and Todd. Like Trottier and the Thomas sisters, by exposing Johnston as already morally depraved, Canavan hoped to deflect attention away from Mother McKenzie. The result was successful. McKenzie was charged her usual fine for keeping a brothel and was released. The example of juvenile depravity in the form of Johnston was the cause of "great astonishment" that "a little girl barely into her teens could have been guilty of such immorality."<sup>100</sup>

Johnston's road to casual prostitution, however, was a familiar one for many young girls in her situation. Without parents or friends, abandoned in the city by her father, she may have found her meager wages as a domestic servant barely enough to cover the basic necessities of life. For someone in Johnston's position, casual prostitution was an option that offered a supplemental income to her small earnings. Argues

Meyerowitz, "These women known as occasional prostitutes worked in stores, offices, factories and restaurants during the day and sold their sexual services on occasional nights for gifts or money."<sup>101</sup> The fact that two men paid for her rooms was also common among young women who "supplemented or replaced their wages in relationships that more closely resembled marriage... Sometimes these women lived with the men that supported them."<sup>102</sup> Further, such young women often found a sense of family through connections made with other women in similar situations. As the *Daily Times* observed "it appears that [Johnston's] companions in crime were very little older than herself."<sup>103</sup>

When arrested on April 12, 1885, a year after her ordeal, Johnston, was now considered a "depraved juvenile." When she was picked up on a charge of vagrancy, the city solicitor, Mr. Glass, asked the court to "send her to goal for as long a period as possible." While he commented that there was a need for a reformatory for such young girls, sending her to jail "was the best thing that could be done under the circumstances."<sup>104</sup> Johnston was sentenced to two month's imprisonment with hard labour.

Early prostitution in the city was most visible amongst native and Métis women whose gender and race combined to marginalise them in the increasingly white dominated society of early Winnipeg. In the 1870s and into the early 1880s they appeared in numbers before the police court and cases of drunkenness, petty theft and physical assault were as familiar charges against them as prostitution. Living in the flats, native and Métis women struggled to earn a living, often resorting to prostitution as a means to not only provide the basic necessitates of life but, at times, to also feed their addictions. The abortion trial of Marie Trottier and the rape of the Thomas sisters illustrated many

of the obstacles and sometime violent confrontations such dislocated women faced as a consequence of their cultural position as impoverished Métis women.

The moral turpitude of single young girls alone in the city soon displaced the cultural fixation with those people the dominant classes considered socially degenerate. As more and more immigrants arrived in Winnipeg in the 1880s, the fears of the sexual dangers they posed was revealed in the sensational Feigi Getzel kidnapping case. While the Braunsteins were vilified by the press, Getzel's return back to the safety of her own people in Austria also helped to exemplify her social dislocation as a result of her Jewish background. And finally, Bertha Johnston's story illustrated the hazards of morally dangerous white women, like the dreadful Mother Mackenzie and her depraved daughter Sis. The discovery that Johnston's foray into prostitution was earlier than her ordeal in the McKenzie's refrigerator exposed some of the realities young ethnic women had in securing good and safe employment in Winnipeg.

The effect that a story like Getzel's and Johnston's had on the city was seen in the mass response by bourgeois women to the dangers the new city of Winnipeg posed to young, abandoned girls. As a consequence, difficult questions about the moral turpitude of working class women were raised a when bourgeois women chose to mobilise and help those they considered the "unfortunate" of their own sex.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> *Daily Times (DT)*, May 31, 1881; *Manitoba Free Press (MFP)*, June 1, 1881.
- <sup>2</sup> Marie Trottier's abortion trial was reported in both of Winnipeg's main daily newspapers, *The Winnipeg Daily Times* from May 31-June 2, 1881 and the *Manitoba Free Press*, June 1-3, 1881. Both covered the trial on their front pages.
- <sup>3</sup> *DT*, June 2, 1881; *MFP*, June 3, 1881.]
- <sup>4</sup> The doctors included Dr. Lawrence J. Munro, Dr. J.S. Lynch, Dr. J. H. O'Donnell, Dr. Cowan, Dr. Codd and Dr. Kerr.
- <sup>5</sup> *MFP*, June 4, 1881.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, June 20, 1881.
- <sup>7</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Woman and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: The Osgoode Society, 1991), 232.
- <sup>8</sup> See for instance Jennifer S. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980); Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870* (Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg Press, 1994); Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1980). Or a collection of essays edited by Jennifer S. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert titled *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996).
- <sup>9</sup> *MFP*, June 21, 1875.
- <sup>10</sup> Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (Montreal and Kingston: University of McGill Press, 1975), 195.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.
- <sup>12</sup> Gerhard J. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 175.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.
- <sup>14</sup> This is the area now referred to as "The Forks"

- 
- <sup>15</sup> Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victoria Halifax* (Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1989), 10.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.
- <sup>17</sup> City of Winnipeg Archives, City Council Communications #4132 .
- <sup>18</sup> *MFP*, May 23, 1881.
- <sup>19</sup> Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), 1870 Red River Census (RRC/1870), 480, p. 386.
- <sup>20</sup> Schultz owned many buildings in the city in which he rented rooms. For a short biography of Dr. John Schultz see: Jack Bumstead, *Dictionary of Manitoba Biography* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999) 223.
- <sup>21</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 7.
- <sup>22</sup> Judy Whitehead, "Bodies Clean and Unclean: Prostitution, Sanitary Legislation and Respectable Femininity in Colonial North India," *Gender and History* 7, no.1 (1995): 46.
- <sup>23</sup> Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 228.
- <sup>24</sup> *MFP*, February 25, 1875.
- <sup>25</sup> Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 229.
- <sup>26</sup> *MFP*, May 23, 1881.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, July 8, 1881.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, November 8, 1885.
- <sup>29</sup> Bagnio is a bordello or brothel.
- <sup>30</sup> *MFP*, March 12, 1881.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, April 12, 1881.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, November 7, 1874.
- <sup>33</sup> Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 233.
- <sup>34</sup> *MFP*, June 1, 1881; *DT*, May 31, 1881.

---

<sup>35</sup> *DT*, February 2, 1885.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *DT*, February 6, 1885.

<sup>38</sup> *MFP*, July 23, 1877.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, September 3, 1884.

<sup>40</sup> *MFP*, June 1, 1881; *DT*, May 31, 1881.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> The trial was reported in the evening issue of the *Daily Times*, May 31, 1881 and the following day by the *Free Press*, June 1, 1881.

<sup>43</sup> *DT*, June 1, 1881; *MFP*, June 2, 1881.

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

<sup>45</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 167.

<sup>46</sup> *DT*, June 1, 1881; *MFP*, June 2, 1881.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *DT*, June 1, 1881; *MFP*, June 2, 1881.

<sup>49</sup> Dr. Benson was the jail surgeon.

<sup>50</sup> *DT*, June 2, 1881; *MFP*, June 3, 1881.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 167.

<sup>53</sup> *DT*, October 13, 1882.

<sup>54</sup> *MFP*, September 3, 1884.

<sup>55</sup> The case was reported in detail in both the *Daily Times* and the *Free Press* on January 26, 1885.

<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Hogg and her inmates were arrested on April 12, 1885 for keeping a house of ill-fame. *MFP*, April 13, 1885.

- 
- <sup>57</sup> Into the city seemed to mean into the city center where hotels and taverns were located.
- <sup>58</sup> *DT*, January 26, 1885; *MFP*, January 26, 1885.
- <sup>59</sup> *DT*, January 26, 1885.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 87.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 93
- <sup>64</sup> For an article on this demand for domestic servants see Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada," in *Women At Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1974).
- <sup>65</sup> *MFP*, June 8, 1875.
- <sup>66</sup> Artibise, *Winnipeg*, 178.
- <sup>67</sup> Judith K. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.
- <sup>69</sup> PAM, Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) Collection, Annual Report for 1890, P4627, File 1:51.
- <sup>70</sup> *MFP*, July 8, 1874.
- <sup>71</sup> *MFP*, September 5, 1882.
- <sup>72</sup> *Winnipeg Tribune (WT)*, February 9, 1894.
- <sup>73</sup> *MFP*, October 2, 1882.
- <sup>74</sup> PAM, WCTU Collection, Annual Report for 1890, P4627, File 1:52.
- <sup>75</sup> National Archives of Canada, Immigration Branch, Girl's Home of Welcome Annual Report for 1902, Microfilm Reel C 4800 A, RG76, Volume 138, File 33136, Pt. 1: 8.
- <sup>76</sup> *DT*, September 3, 1884.

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Getzel's story was reported in the *Daily Times*, September 3-18, 1884 and in the *Free Press*, September 4-18, 1884. Both newspapers related the same story except that the *Free Press* called her Fanny while the *DT* named her Fiegi. Later the *Free Press* corrected Getzel's name.

<sup>80</sup> The tarring and feathering of Braunstein was covered in both the *Daily Times* and the *Free Press* on September 18, 1884. Both newspapers point the finger at McKeowen and the police as being active participants in the punishment of Braunstein.

<sup>81</sup> *DT*, September 18, 1884.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> See note 77.

<sup>85</sup> Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 210.

<sup>86</sup> Artibise, *Winnipeg*, 160.

<sup>87</sup> Johnston's story was reported in the *Daily Times*, March 5 and 7, 1885 and in the *Free Press*, March 5, 1885.

<sup>88</sup> For reference to Icelandic immigration into Manitoba see: Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) or Wilhelm Kristjanson, *The Icelandic People of Manitoba: A Manitoba Saga*, (Winnipeg: Wallingford Press, c1965).

<sup>89</sup> *MFP*, October 27, 1877.

<sup>90</sup> *DT*, March 5, 1884.

<sup>91</sup> *DT*, March 5, 1884.

<sup>92</sup> *DT*, April 13, 1885

<sup>93</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 62.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 61.

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> *DT*, March 7, 1885.

<sup>99</sup> He was also the lawyer to the Braunsteins.

<sup>100</sup> *DT*, March 7, 1885.

<sup>101</sup> Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, 105.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>103</sup> *DT*, April 13, 1885.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter 3

#### The Unfortunate of our own sex.

-Mrs. A. Rowe, President of the Women's Christian Union Home, 1885

In 1884 Bertha Johnston stood trial on a charge of vagrancy only a year after she had been found in Mother McKenzie's brothel. The lawyer for the prosecution remarked how unfortunate it was that no institution had been designed in Winnipeg to help such "depraved juveniles."<sup>1</sup> His observation was not quite accurate. In 1883, the same year Johnston's father left her in Winnipeg, a group of Christian women representing a wide range of Protestant churches formed the Women's Christian Union (WCU). Its first goal as an organisation was to help single working class women find shelter and companionship in a home bought and staffed by WCU volunteers. However, when the doors of the Women's Christian Union Home (WCUH) opened, its members were startled to discover that the young women on their doorstep were much different from the unfortunate class of woman they sought to help. The WCU became a reluctant leader amongst bourgeois reformers by helping these abandoned pregnant young women find what the volunteers hoped would be redemption and peace. A growing social unease about their alteration in goals only added more fuel to the public fire surrounding the problem of single young women adrift in the city deemed by the WCU as "the Unfortunate of our own sex."<sup>2</sup>

Other institutions that were designed to help destitute women in Winnipeg grew up in the shadow of the WCUH. Common bonds of class, gender and ethnic background

linked many of the founders benefactors, workers and volunteers of such homes and shelters. The Women's Christian Temperance Union's (WCTU) Door of Hope, designed by bourgeois women, also concentrated a large part of its philanthropic efforts on helping those young women believed to be "strangers bewildered and drifting" in a city that offered temptation and sin around many of its "darkest" corners. While the Salvation Army's Rescue Home was not part of the bourgeois reform movement, its erection in 1890 served a similar purpose to the WCUH and the WCTU's Door of Hope. Managed and staffed by female Salvation Army Workers, the Home was considered by bourgeois reformers to be an important partner in their work of rescuing and reforming single women. The function of these homes offers a limited but enlightening look at how some young women in search of work ended up either as occasional prostitutes or as lodgers in notorious Winnipeg brothels.

Bourgeois women were united in the firm belief that only they could solve the social problems created in a commercialised city that was growing too fast for its male leaders to fully contend with. Arguing that only the maternal characteristics of understanding, kindness and feminine virtue could solve one of the city's most pressing problems, middle class women began to use economically disadvantaged women for their own public agenda. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg remarked of this new bourgeois woman, in her work *Disorderly Conduct*: "[she] was confident and independent, a self-created urban expert, she spearheaded bourgeois efforts to respond creatively to the new city and the new economy."<sup>3</sup> Within these new cities young single women began to live and work independently of their families adopting lifestyles often considered socially inappropriate by the middle classes. Perceived by society, especially bourgeois women, as jeopardising

the standard model of the Victorian family, these single young women became the targets of many reform campaigns. Consequently, middle class women believed that one of the most serious problems of women working alone in the city was a coincident growth in prostitution. They believed that those caught up in casual prostitution symbolised the worst consequences of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation.

The existence of more and more abandoned destitute young women, many of them pregnant and looking for help challenged the careful and culturally constructed image of the innocent girl in sexual danger, as illustrated in the previous chapter with Feigi Getzel and Bertha Johnston. Bourgeois women began to reassess the definition of what was meant by “the unfortunate of our own sex.” The social division this term encompassed between the sexually innocent and the sexually indiscriminate came under intense scrutiny. A failure to understand the economic factors behind why some young women chose casual prostitution, therefore, was a key factor in the bourgeoisie’s struggle to understand why this was happening. For the bourgeoisie the casual prostitute was not as easy to identify as she had once been. Who she was, why she had “fallen”, became a matter of great debate. The relationship between casual prostitutes and the bourgeois women who tried to help them, therefore, was symbolic of the larger cultural speculation and public dialogue about what it meant to be a morally fit young woman in Winnipeg at the height of the Victorian age.

The WCU was one of the earliest women’s reform organisations in Winnipeg. Initially promoted by Margaret Bryce,<sup>4</sup> it was an alliance of all Protestant churches in the city. Its founders were convinced of the “utmost importance that in the early history of our country the foundation should be laid in purity and goodness.”<sup>5</sup> The WCU held its

first meeting on February 21, 1883 in the lecture room of the Historical and Scientific Society. On that day, the organisation declared its mandate: "This meeting is called for the purpose of forming a union of Christian women to undertake work among the women of Winnipeg beginning with the establishment of a House for Women."<sup>6</sup> This house, bought and furnished with money raised by the Union, "shall embrace a place of evening-resort for those working during the day-time, a boarding house and a day-nursery for the infants of working mothers."<sup>7</sup> Focusing on those women considered the "unfortunate of our own sex" the WCU desired to "relieve all kinds of distress among women."<sup>8</sup>

However, as they debated their mission, the members of the WCU disagreed about whom the Home would benefit the most. Many of the members believed it should be exclusively for the growing population of domestic servants in the city, while others argued that destitute married women were in desperate need of help. Their disagreement symbolised the changes that occurred in Winnipeg's urban landscape. At the beginning of the 1880s and onward, young working class women began to leave the protection of their family circle. Recognised by manufacturers as a cheaper labour force to men, factories began to encourage the hiring of these women. Hotels and restaurants, which were flourishing by the 1880s, also hired female workers as waitresses and cleaners. Most significantly, as previously mentioned, domestic servants from Eastern Canada, Great Britain and Europe were also being brought in by the hundreds to work in Winnipeg.

In Canada's growing cities, the huge demand for domestic servants amongst the bourgeoisie gave poor working class women, facing a grim future, some hope of financial security. In her article on domestic service in Canada between 1880-1920, Genevieve Leslie traced the journey of domestic servants from the orphanages and workhouses of

Great Britain to Canada. Actively recruited by agents from Canada, girls and young women were hired by the thousands to arrive by ship and take up positions in both rural and urban homes across Canada. Some were adopted into families and found good situations, some were hired and fired according to the wills of their employers and some married the sons or masters they were employed to serve. The agents hired by church groups and women's organisations, which were "essentially operating in their own class interests"<sup>9</sup>, were searching for good sturdy workers preferably English and preferably of good moral standing. However, as Leslie observed many of the young girls, to the consternation of their employers, "came from the most vulnerable and desperate sections of society."<sup>10</sup>

The assumption that all British girls knew how to run a home found itself challenged on a consistent basis. Finally, recognising that such domestic skills could be taught, the agents recruiting the servants, and those who hired them, decided that the character of the young women was more relevant. Argues Leslie, "a servant's character was her most important possession as it could mean economic ruin." She was to be, above all, "clean, celibate, obedient, respectable, hard-working and an early riser."<sup>11</sup> Any deviation from such high expectations, especially through sexual promiscuity, meant that employment, once so easily found was now impossible for the young domestic servant. Although, as Leslie observes, many such girls "were sexually exploited by their employers," the success of their domestic situation was associated with their sexual modesty and restraint.<sup>12</sup> Faced with such a double standard, young women unable to do the work effectively and/or who lacked sexual morals were suddenly confronted with the grim realisation that they were unemployable. Most importantly, wages for servants were

in Canada unregulated and were left up to the discretion of the employer. For many, the wages earned as a domestic was not enough to provide them with a decent living wage. For some of these young women, casual prostitution was a viable and established means of earning money; perhaps even more than any domestic service job could offer them.

On February 24, 1883, therefore, it was not a surprise when the WCU made a firm decision in regards to the type of woman they would help. For them, unfortunates were young women, more often than not domestic servants, who, according to the WCU, lacked family structure. The Home was to provide the parental authority such working women lacked. Reported the WCU, "Finally it was resolved that the institution to be established should essentially be a home for women, particularly for the unmarried and unprotected."<sup>13</sup> Whether the WCU would help deserted and/or destitute wives was "left to the discretion of the Committee of Management,"<sup>14</sup> but domestic servants were, above all, their first priority. Their sexual vulnerability and single status was considered far more threatening to an established social order.

By the summer of 1883, the WCU had successfully purchased a home on Bannatyne and opened its doors, offering what they believed to be a safe, family environment for wholesome young women lacking family guidance and security. While their goal was to prevent them from falling into an unacceptable pattern of sinful behaviour, it began to dawn on the WCU that in many respects they were too late. Most of the single young women arriving at the Home, rather than seeking a place for evening-resort, were looking for a safe shelter for themselves and their unborn children. Consequently, on August 31, 1883, only a month after opening, the WCU could no longer ignore the number of pregnant unwed women knocking on their door. They began

to search for a nursing matron for the Home. By September 28 they resolved "that the Institution now to be opened be used as a maternity or lying-in hospital, the patients to be received as short a time as possible before their confinement and dismissed a fortnight after with their infants."<sup>15</sup>

This change in mandate did not sit well with the majority of WCU members or the broader public. In her presidential address to the second Annual General Meeting, the new president for the year, Mrs. Rowe, commented on the problem. "As was to be expected, the work has not been carried on without difficulties. First, there was the want of public sympathy many feel toward the object of this work; there has also been an amount of misconception as to its motives and aim; many being under the impression that providing a home for these unfortunate ones was but to encourage the sin; and make it easy for the sinner."<sup>16</sup> The WCU found itself continually defending the work of the Home to the larger social circle of Winnipeg's middle class who believed that by offering pregnant unwed women safe shelter, the WCU was condoning premarital sex among the youth of the city.

By 1890 the Home housed thirty-six single pregnant young women. Ironically, despite their willingness to help them and most likely because of the public's discomfort with their work, the WCU continued to describe these young women as exceptions to their rules. In her address in the annual report for 1885 Miss C. Caitlin's comments as the matron of the WCUH are clearly trying to placate growing concerns about the Home's inmates. "Let me say the Institution was never intended for abandoned or dissolute women, nor have such sought its shelter; but the weak, the erring and the unfortunate we have had many. To such a one, the Hospital stands as a sure refuge and safe retreat where

none may taunt her with past sin.”<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the pressing question for the WCUH from its bourgeois benefactors was who amongst “the erring and the unfortunate” were the most deserving? This involved difficult and sometimes convoluted discussions of appropriate sexual behaviour among the unwed. While not wishing to condone such behaviour, bourgeois women began to gradually recognise the reality of it by the number of pregnant women coming to the Home.

Previous to this, pregnant unwed women were believed to be feeble-minded, victims of a degenerate medical condition of the mind. Carolyn Strange in her work on single working girls in Toronto observed that reformers at the beginning stages of their movement believed that “working girls most likely to go astray were the ‘subnormal’ young women themselves likely products of degenerate unions and depraved environments.”<sup>18</sup> However, as more and more women appeared to be engaged in consensual sex, bourgeois reformers were finding it increasingly difficult to identify the abnormal from the normal. The casual prostitute suddenly began to resemble her working-class respectable sister and the two figures began to merge in the minds of reformers. As a result, this crisis reverberated through the bourgeois reform movement and forced an alteration in the traditional concepts of the “unfortunate girl.” Observed Strange, “The convergence of the categories of working girls and ‘occasional prostitute’ was matched by a similar collapsing of the concepts of unwed motherhood and feeble-mindedness.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the definition of the unfortunate, once so black and white to the bourgeois class, became a social conundrum. If premarital or consensual sex was a reality amongst a good number of respectable working girls, the means of identifying the

most deserving of those who took part in such behaviour was now a difficult and confusing task.

In her annual address for 1885 Miss Caitlin, described the “unfortunate” they desired to assist as young women who were drawn to Winnipeg “by the prospect of higher wages. They seek, as a result, positions that offer the greatest pecuniary advantages. These being chiefly hotels and restaurants.”<sup>20</sup> By entering and working for such establishments, “they are at once thrown into the midst of temptation, to which [...] they yield and their bright dreams end in ruined prospects and a blighted life.”<sup>21</sup> Such girls who yielded to temptation were usually “deserted by the betrayer and left to fight the battle alone.”<sup>22</sup> Most importantly, these were young women who, through their own suffering, then desired to seek a life of redemption from their sinful past and, she stated, “It is then that the hospital steps in and offers its shelter and care.”<sup>23</sup> Once introduced to the domestic industry the home provided which had been “previously distasteful to them”, the young women “are found cheerfully submitting to the needful restraint of the Home [which] is, of itself, no small evidence of the reality of their desire for amendment.”<sup>24</sup> The young woman who mistook love for sex and found herself abandoned by her lover was, therefore, considered an appropriate class of “unfortunate.” She could be redeemed by being re-taught the importance of domestic industry, the mainstay behind establishing virtuous and moral female behaviour.

Clearly then, it was now understood that the term “unfortunate” could be applied to a class of young woman who, once sexually active, still retained a level of respectability in her person. Said the WCU, “The sin brought most prominent before our notice in connection with our work in the Home is, we at once admit, one of the most

hurtful that can be committed against the well being of humanity.” While the unfortunate who committed a sin was to be helped, the professional prostitute was to be scrupulously avoided. This was to make her more of a social pariah than she had ever been before.

While unfortunates had sexual relations with boyfriends, lovers, even seducers or employers, the prostitute exchanged her body for money, the ultimate subversion of the sexual act. The prostitute did not enter a sexual relationship due to a misguided need for love or through the seduction of an evil man; she actively and knowingly used her body for monetary gain. This meant that not only was she sexually promiscuous, but she could be now classed as mentally abnormal and beyond redemption. Concluded the WCU, “There are two distinct classes which could not be brought together”<sup>25</sup> – the unfortunate who mistook love for sex and the one who exchanged sex for money.

Within this definition, however, there existed a group of women for which bourgeois reformers could not find a satisfactory label. This was the casual or occasional prostitute. Stuck in a grey area somewhere between sexual naïveté and sexual perversion, the casual prostitute used sex for money or favours only occasionally, often holding down another more respectable job as well. As Strange observed in the minds of reformers “the line between noble workwoman and the fallen woman had become blurred by the emergence of a shadowy figure known as the occasional prostitute – a working girl who supplemented her earning by doling out sexual favours.”<sup>26</sup> Bourgeois women, especially those represented in the WCU, struggled to come to terms with the existence of casual prostitutes, while trying to figure out what they should do about them. In 1894, while the home clearly did not want to admit those who were sexually indiscriminate, such as the occasional or casual prostitute, they were still reluctant to turn them away when they

arrived in need of help. The admission policy of the Home and the discretion of those members of the WCU who visited the homes on a weekly basis, writing reports and recommendations and observing the manner and spiritual willingness of the lodgers controlled this seemingly contradictory policy. Therefore, sometimes young women known to be casual prostitutes were let in and sometimes they were not according to which volunteer was visiting during which week.

The admission policy of the WCUH was designed to support the urban vision of bourgeois women by taking a stand against young women who were considered deprived and beyond redemption. Firstly, each woman seeking shelter had to have enough money for room and board for up to nine months. After 1890 the WCUH's maternity ward was absorbed by the General Hospital and the Home became a place where women waited before giving birth. Upon delivery they would return to the home for at least a nine-month stay. By insisting that young women pay for those nine months the WCU hoped the young women's parents would be encouraged to pay for the protection of the Home for their pregnant daughters. It is clear from these new changes that those lacking a comfortable purse could not afford to stay at the Home. No longer would it accommodate young women who had no family, a radical departure from its original mission. At the end of the nine months, the young mothers were then placed into domestic service, usually in the homes of the WCU members. Although there were those who were encouraged not to keep their baby for other reasons, employment often forced them to give their children for adoption.

The young women who chose to stay at the Home were forced to abandon any contact with those who were considered a bad moral influence, including other women

but most especially young men. Mail received at the home was read first by a committee of WCU members who then passed the letter on, replied to it themselves or destroyed it in the belief that its content was detrimental to the moral well being of its intended recipient. For example, one domestic servant who was pregnant by her master's son was never told that her master had written to propose marriage to her, the WCU believing that it was in the young woman's best interest to end all contact with her previous employer.<sup>27</sup>

The Home was designed to teach the unfortunates the benefits of the domestic arts. It was believed that isolation from the outside world and a heavy roster of domestic duties and religious instruction provided the balance young women had lacked while working and living alone. Consequently, The running of the WCUH, the cleaning, the laundering, the cooking, and taking care of the nursery was done by the young mothers. Members of the WCU who visited the Home on a weekly basis checked on the cleanliness of the home and recorded the success or failure of certain tasks each young woman took on. Religious instruction was compulsory and the WCU members were the volunteer instructors. The offer of spiritual guidance was important above all to show the young woman the consequences of their sin: "Hatred of such a sin is wholesome and protective, but we trust the feeling will always spring from a zeal for the upholding of the purity of God's law and such for the sinful one as will prompt to save her from further evil."<sup>28</sup>

While the home was staffed with only one matron, the various members of the WCU took turns visiting the home and checking up on the residents and their observances and recommendations regarding who could lodge at the Home were often contradictory. Wrote one WCU visitor, "We have a few exceptionally trying cases, so

difficult to manage that at times we have been led to believe that there is a certain class beyond our reach.”<sup>29</sup> This class, the casual prostitute, was sometimes taken in but only under certain limited conditions and according to the will of WCU members. For example, if other shelters in the city, in particular the Salvation Army Rescue Home, were too full, the WCU would consider allowing a young woman to stay but only if she showed a convincing degree of contrition for her previous lifestyles and promised to begin a life free from sin. The WCU and other reformers believed that once they were shown the value of religious instruction and domestic industry, casual prostitutes would bend to their natural inclination for a Christian hearth and home. However, as Strange observed, bourgeois reformers increasingly came to believe that once working young women tasted the life of ease that prostitution offered them, they “soon became ‘unfitted for industry’ and unsuitable for moral rescue.”<sup>30</sup>

Consequently, the WCU later regretted the few times they did allow prostitutes into the Home. One lodger, Eva Lennox, whose baby died immediately after birth was simply considered too difficult to handle and was turned out.<sup>31</sup> Another prostitute, Katie Impett, ran away from the home and was not allowed back because of her unwillingness to follow the rules. Other lodgers were warned that if they acted similarly, they too would never be allowed back into the Home. It was recorded that Katie Impett was never heard from again.<sup>32</sup> A certain Miss Lawson, whom the home reluctantly took in, was, the women remarked, “not a person whose influence on the home would have been for the best. We are glad to say that she left.”<sup>33</sup> As Strange suggests, the test of a prostitute’s determination to reform was best reflected in her “willingness to work without complaint.” Further, work allowed reformers to “distinguish the reputable from the

disreputable.”<sup>34</sup> The actions of Eva Lennox, Katie Impett and Miss Lawson were enough to convince the WCU that the women of such character were beyond moral rescue. However, no story illustrates the uneasy relationship the home had with prostitutes than that of Frankie Day.

Frankie Day was a young woman in her early twenties who lived and worked in a brothel known as one of “the West Houses” on Winnipeg’s western limits. One night in October of 1899, a young man of Day’s acquaintance wanted to take her away from her harsh circumstances. Day told him of the WCUH and asked him to go there and to plead her case. On the afternoon of October 18, the young man requested an audience with the matron of the Home. At the time, two members of the WCU on their weekly visit decided to sit in on the meeting and noted the events in the record book. Initially the man told them that he had found his fiancée in a brothel, having tracked her all the way to Winnipeg and then to the West Houses and he “was so deeply distressed at her surroundings that he wept.”<sup>35</sup>

The young man then continued his story, telling the women that Day was also pregnant. He begged the Home to take her in until he could get a marriage licence and marry her. At first, the Home refused his pleas but checked other shelters on his behalf. The WCTU’s Door of Hope, they discovered, had closed for the winter. While the Salvation Army Rescue Home was willing to take the young woman, the young man refused and said that he would marry her right away if only the WCUH would take her in.

The women reluctantly agreed, but pressed the young man to tell the true story. He broke down and admitted that he had just met Day and was so disturbed by her circumstances that he felt compelled to help her. After he promised to get a medical

certificate of the young woman's health, as well as a marriage licence, the WCU agreed that he could bring her to them. But he must marry her, they warned, in front of the matron and a minister of their own choosing. Moreover, they told him he must keep her former place of abode secret from the rest of the lodgers. He immediately agreed to their demands and left to get Day and the appropriate documents. At nine o'clock that evening the man returned once more, distraught. He could not get Day out of the brothel as she owned such a large sum of money to the brothel keeper that she was a virtual prisoner. The young man did not have enough money to help her. The WCU told him that they could do nothing to help him, and he left for the last time. The notes of Sarah Gill, one of the WCU members visiting that day, disclosed the feelings of the group after he had gone. "We certainly feel providence has been good to us for while we desire to rescue and help any we could not but see the danger to others as to the backward nature of this step though we dare not say no when the case was brought to us."<sup>36</sup> Clearly, the WCU felt God had intervened on their behalf.

Such stories reflect not only the difficulties bourgeois women faced in identifying deserving unfortunates, they also illustrate the complete failure of these privileged women to recognise the serious difficulties that working class women faced outside the WCUH's front door. Reforms to working conditions, sex education and the call for a decent living wage for female workers would not become a public issue until after World War One. As Strange observed, "girls who struggled to survive on five or six dollars per week and managed to 'retain their virtue' proved, first that it could be done, and second, that something other than poverty – namely moral weakness – accounted for women's downfall".<sup>37</sup> In the 1880s up to and beyond the turn of the century, bourgeois reformers

believed domestic industry and religious instruction to be the best means of preventing further moral decline of unwed pregnant young women. As Regina Kunzel observed of female reformers in the United States, “[they] treated women they considered their ‘fallen sisters’ with the maternal, religious and domestic influence that made up the redemptive tonic of womanly benevolence.”<sup>38</sup> Other bourgeois reform groups, however, did show some understanding of the more serious issues of a working woman's life. The WCU's sister organisation, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), targeted the all-male judiciary system as a major factor in influencing recidivist prostitutes' lives.

In 1898 the WCTU opened the first Door of Hope in Winnipeg. Existing across Canada and the United States, by regional WCTU groups designed Doors of Hope Homes to target a particular class of women, the inebriated criminal. Prostitutes, who constituted the largest class of female inmates in Winnipeg's prison, were now offered help that was directed at them. E. Cora Hind, Provincial Treasurer of the WCTU, wrote a letter asking for money from City Council and expressed in it an awareness of some of the more serious issues behind prostitution. Criticising the male dominated legal system, Hind wrote, “Through years of visiting the Police Station our women have learned that if anything is to be done to reform the class of criminal women in our city, it can only be done by having women of experience and kindness at the Police Station to deal with them at first hand.”<sup>39</sup> Hind continued her remarks by expressing her disdain for the legal system in which a woman “however vile, is shoved a step lower in being searched by men and being wholly under the control of men while she serves a sentence.”<sup>40</sup>

The Door of Hope, like the WCUH, was designed to help those women who were searching for an alternative to their desperate lifestyle. Unlike the WCU, they did not

struggle to define what type of woman they wanted to help. For the WCTU, alcohol was the main culprit of a woman's fall into a criminal lifestyle and no other issue filled their mandate. Explained the WCTU, "We can scarcely conceive anyone deliberately adopting a life of shame; there is generally a chain of circumstances connected therewith and the dram-shop and the wine-cup is the link." Female alcoholism was also a cause through which bourgeois women, like those in the WCTU, could take some active part in a legal system which they felt was controlled by men to the detriment of female prisoners.

Regrettably, the Door of Hope, while enthusiastic in its desire to help, and successful in identifying a real problem among recidivist prostitutes, closed down every winter, perhaps because of lack of funds and the high costs of maintaining the home during the cold months. By doing so, they shut out women at a time when they needed help and shelter the most. As a result, the Door of Hope helped few women and even fewer turned to it due to its seasonal opening/closing schedule.

On December 13, 1890, Commissioner and Mrs. T.H. Adams opened the Salvation Army Rescue Home at 400 Ross Avenue. Like other rescue homes established by the Salvation Army across Canada and the United States, the Ross Avenue home was geared to "meet the needs of social evils involving disillusioned girls and pregnant unmarried girls, prostitutes, women and girls in trouble with the law, neglected children, etc."<sup>41</sup> It was to be staffed by female Salvation Army officers and run by the women the Home took in. In her presidential address for 1890, Mrs. Bryce discussed the hopes the WCU had about the Army's shelter. The WCU's greatest concern had been to keep disreputable prostitutes separate from the other young women. As Bryce explained, the "experiences of the more depraved had a hurtful effect on the others."<sup>42</sup> For the WCU the

Salvation Army Rescue Home was indeed a godsend, for now they were free to turn away prostitutes and direct them to the Rescue Home instead. While not a bourgeois designed institution, the Salvation Army and especially its Rescue Home was closely tied to middle class reform groups and each influenced the other by their constant contact.

Within the Salvation Army itself, women's social work as Rescue Officers was continually evaluated and discussed throughout the 1890s and 1900s. Numerous guides, editorials and addresses were written to offer guidance to women wishing to become involved in the Army's reform work. In a 1904 international address, Commissioner Adelaide Cox discussed the methods of women's social work within the organisation: "That many women come to us dishevelled, wretched and undone you know; and you also fully realise that the great means of them...is not found in outward reformation but in inward change of heart."<sup>43</sup> For Cox and all others in the Salvation Army, their hopes of "the alleviation of the condition in which these classes are placed" came simply from "the salvation of the individual through faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>44</sup> The grim realities of a working class woman's life was once again overlooked as spiritual salvation was believed to be the most important factor in changing her disadvantaged lifestyle.

Like the WCUH, an important element of the salvation of penitent women was hard industrious domestic work; "unless they work, the Home becomes merely a place of rest where sinful people can recoup lost energies."<sup>45</sup> Army Rescue officers, such as Mrs. Jordan in Montreal, often wrote of her emotional struggles in living and dealing with the destitute women. Warned Mrs Jordan, "although we were to work among this class, we must not make free with them in any way."<sup>46</sup> Strict rules and regulations were designed to ensure just that. A roster of heavy housework combined with religious duties filled each

day in the Rescue Home from seven in the morning until eight in the evening when the young women were to retire for the night. Once in bed they were not allowed to talk, the aim being to keep them from chatting with each other as much as possible. Young women were to show proper respect to their superior officers and above all “no illusion must be made to their former life.”<sup>47</sup>

It was hoped that those taken into the Home would be spiritually saved and “retrieved from their ocean of wretchedness.”<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Rescue Officers had to be as convinced of their own religious grounding as they were about the work in which they wished to succeed. General Booth in an address to Rescue Home officers across Canada and the United States best captures the essence of the Salvation Army’s goal in rescuing young women from their immoral lives. It was not enough, explained Booth, that “a girl loves the poor women and can cry over them [...] It is essential for a Rescue Officer to be a Salvationist.”<sup>49</sup> Reflecting on the thousands of wretched women waiting to be saved by such Officers, Booth declared, “They would like you to save them, but they are not prepared to become Salvationists; therefore they cannot be saved at all, for they must be damned if they cannot be persuaded to come out and be thorough out-and-out people.”<sup>50</sup> Continued Booth, “Only red-religion will save these girls, only red-hot Salvation Army Officers will rescue them.”<sup>51</sup>

The WCUH and the Salvation Army’s Rescue Home communicated with each other on a weekly basis, discussing cases and delivering young women back and forth between them. Gradually, the WCU became more and more troubled by the operations of the Salvation Army Rescue Home. By 1895 the WCU wrote a report on their problems with their Salvation Army friends. In her presidential address, Mrs. Bryce “hesitated to

speaking lest I should be thought to cherish a critical spirit towards another charitable institution in the city.”<sup>52</sup> While the WCU was greatly relieved when they learned that the Rescue was intent on gathering those “lost ones” they themselves did not want and while “the Salvation Army has been considerable successful in work of this kind”<sup>53</sup>, the WCU found themselves discouraged time and again when they met with the Rescue Home to discuss certain cases. “We have learned from committees sent to confer with them [Rescue Home] ...that the class they admit into their Home does not differ from ours in any sense.”<sup>54</sup> Remarking that the success of the Salvation Army’s Rescue Homes with prostitutes, as seen in Toronto and other large cities, was not reflected in the work being done in Winnipeg, Bryce made a public plea for the Salvation Army to “prosecute this kind of welfare with vigour, as good soldiers of the Cross of Christ.” However, she reflected that “this class of outcasts [prostitutes] then, is still uncared for and the Christian Conscience ought to be stirred up concerning them.”<sup>55</sup>

Like the WCUH, the Salvation Army’s Rescue Home often appeared reluctant to take in those young women who failed to show any desire for redemption. As a result, prostitutes who found themselves in dire need of shelter and help were often turned away not so much because of their hardened immoral lifestyle, but because the Salvation Army believed that they were beyond spiritual reclamation. Women would be accepted only if they willingly converted to the form of religion espoused by the Salvation Army. Moreover, the Rescue Home had extremely limited space, with only room in 1890 for twelve young women. How many of the young women the Army allowed in were women of the casual prostitute class is unrecorded.<sup>56</sup>

The question remains, however, with all of the rescue homes available to help single young women and the espousing of concerns regarding their safety, how many of the women that were offered help were actually involved in casual prostitution? Recognition of the economic need for this lifestyle and its subsequent problematic physical consequences was something the reformers were too slow to realise. One of the WCU Presidents, Mrs. Rowe did acknowledge that the paltry wages earned in hotel and restaurants were too meagre for any young girl to support herself. Bertha Johnston's story in Chapter One, and that of Frankie Day mentioned earlier, suggest that money earned by prostitution was certainly a big enough attraction to lure some young women into the trade. Despite some differences, reform groups, like the WCU, the Salvation Army and the WCTU, were bound by one common characteristic. Not one identified the problem of inadequate wages as the cause of a young working-class girl's decline into sexual promiscuity and entry into casual prostitution.

Stories found in Winnipeg newspapers show a striking correlation between poor wages and casual prostitution. In 1882 the *Daily Times* reported that two young women who inhabited one room in a boarding house on Fort Street "were in the habit of receiving a large number of dusky male callers to the great disgust of the other people living in the house."<sup>57</sup> In 1884 the *Free Press* reported that a man named Reid returned to Winnipeg, after a two-year absence, in search of Mary Harvey, his twenty-one year old fiancée. To his surprise he found her in a boarding house receiving male callers on a regular basis. Harvey had arrived in Winnipeg and had worked in various hotels around the city as a domestic servant "until last Spring when she entered upon the disreputable life she was living when Reid found her."<sup>58</sup> Reid's horror at the change in his fiancée was

so great that he stuck a revolver to her head and threatened to kill her if she did not leave the city at once, an action the *Free Press* reporter found quite logical. Not surprisingly, Harvey agreed to her fiancé's demands and it was reported that they left Winnipeg to live in the United States.

In 1892 the *Winnipeg Tribune* reported the case of Lillie Sullivan. Her father, a once prosperous farmer, turned to drink as his finances faltered and in the end he shot his wife to death. After his arrest and conviction, his daughter Lillie headed to the city in search of work but found that, due to her financial circumstances, prostitution was an easier means of support. On July 7, 1892, she was convicted on a charge of larceny for having "lured" a man back to her rooms and then stealing from him once he fell asleep.<sup>59</sup> In order to evade arrest, Sullivan dressed as a man, but police caught on quickly. She was charged with four months hard labour. Sullivan's decline, the *Tribune* reflected, was brought about by not just her lack of a family circle, but by the ease with which she seemed to turn to prostitution, suggesting she was naturally inclined to lead a "dissolute life."<sup>60</sup>

While the stories just described are all singular in nature, together they offer an insight into the difficult circumstances some young women faced once they entered Winnipeg and tried to survive on their own. These stories bolstered the public's concern about the single young female inhabitants of their city. Sensational reports in the papers and the comments of the WCU and other similar evangelical reformers clearly marked off two distinct classes of single young women. Such delineation was designed to educate the public, in particular, the single young female public, by pointing out that those who chose the easy life of prostitution were pariahs, neither socially reputable nor easily

reabsorbed into a respectable lifestyle. As Strange observed, those young women who worked for meagre wages but refused to use prostitution as a supplement to their earnings were considered worthy of rescue and reclamation.<sup>61</sup> The decision to turn to prostitution as a means of earning a living, however, was believed to represent the finite crossover into a life without the possibility of reclamation or redemption.

However, without direct records from the women themselves, it is still too difficult to surmise all the reasons why certain young women turned to casual prostitution, and more importantly how many took this route. Casual and professional prostitutes in the Victorian age, as studied by Judith Walkowitz in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, often shared one overwhelmingly common characteristic, which was their status as orphans or abandoned young women.<sup>62</sup> According to Walkowitz, as daughters within dysfunctional families and/or as orphans abandoned in workhouses and foundling homes, young women were continually undervalued in Victorian working class society, victims of financial exploitation and employment discrimination. Due to the constraints placed upon them because of their gender and “living in a society where status was demonstrated by material possessions”, Walkowitz argues that “women sold themselves in order to gain the accoutrements that would afford them self-respect.”<sup>63</sup> Often feeling, as Walkowitz suggests, “powerless to assert themselves and alter their lives in any other way”<sup>64</sup>, prostitution was a viable working alternative within a limited array of employment options for young and abandoned working class women. Most commonly, domestic servants were often the most vulnerable within the growing class of single working women.

As seen in the work of the various homes and shelters erected in the city for single women during the late 1800s, the city clearly felt a concern about such women. Yet even the police court record books for the years 1881, 1891 and 1901 shed little light on exactly how many women were turning to prostitution on a casual basis. When arrested, prostitutes were faced with the possibility of three charges directly related to the act of selling their sexual services. Two of the charges involved brothel raids, being charged either as a keeper of a house of ill fame or as an inmate of a house of ill fame. The other charge, vagrancy, was levelled against those women not connected with a brothel, that is, casual prostitutes picked off the street. While keepers and inmates were usually let go with a fine, street prostitutes were often charged with vagrancy and given tougher sentences. For example, on January 29, 1885, Laura Bellard, an inmate of a rather notorious brothel, was arrested. Described as a "refined lady of easy virtue" she was fined only \$4 and released. However, Adel Pepin, whose case immediately followed Bellard's that day, was described as "another lady of the same character", but one "who occupies a position several grades lower in the social scale."<sup>65</sup> Charged with vagrancy, Pepin was sent down for twenty-one days at hard labour. Considered to be of a lower class than the professional brothel prostitutes, women brought in on charges of vagrancy were often treated more harshly by the court.

In 1881 in Winnipeg, 189 arrests were made in direct relation to prostitution.<sup>66</sup> Fifty-one men were charged with entering and frequenting a house of ill fame. Thirty-six charges were conferred on approximately twenty brothel keepers for keeping a house of ill fame and ninety-five women were charged with inhabiting those houses. They all paid fines and were then released. In the same year, only six women were charged with

vagrancy, but each was given a sentence of hard labour from one week up to four months. Four of them were well-known mixed blood prostitutes.

By 1891 the arrest numbers decrease dramatically with only sixty-three arrests for prostitution related offences.<sup>67</sup> However, of those sixty-three again only six were arrested on charges of vagrancy. By 1901 ninety-eight arrests were made in prostitution related offences and of the ninety-eight, twelve arrests for vagrancy occurred.<sup>68</sup> Clearly then, the police court record book suggests that either casual prostitution was not as prolific as the public felt it to be in the city or it was simply well hidden behind boarding house doors away from the prying eyes of the law.

The lack of visibility of casual prostitutes, as well as their difficulties in finding help from Shelters and Homes, only complicates any attempt to discover and understand their stories. Moreover, the Anglo-Protestant elite, as represented in such groups as the WCU, the WCTU, and, to a lesser extent, the Salvation Army, believed that they were helping in the prevention of fallen young women. By offering family-like communities in which young single women could once more return to domestic duties and religious instruction, the middle classes believed that such young women would willingly be redeemed, thereby re-establishing themselves once more into their natural role as potential wives and mothers. The reclamation process of these women and the Homes built for them were considered great achievements by the city, as they often continued on in domestic service or got married and established homes of their own. As a result of this work, reform groups increasingly defined prostitutes as a class of young woman that had crossed the line of feminine respectability and redemption. The middle class perceived their sexual promiscuity, misbehaviour and abandonment of domestic industry as an overt

threat to the established social order. As Strange observed, the rescue homes, designed and managed by female reformers in response to this threat, were grounded in such a strict sense of propriety that they “simultaneously lent status to respectable working women while establishing lower castes for those who fell short of the mark.”<sup>69</sup>

The difficulties involved in trying to understand young women who turned to casual prostitution eventually led to an abandonment of the cause by bourgeois women. Their cultural presence in the social landscape of Winnipeg continued to be a grey area of debate and censure by the middle classes. By the turn of the twentieth century the rise in a new white collar female worker, who found respectable employment in offices, schools, department stores and hospitals, gave bourgeois women permission to change the focus of their work. By 1904 the Salvation Army’s Rescue Home was absorbed into the Grace Hospital and by 1910 the WCUH became the Middlechurch Home for the Aged. In 1897, a boarding house strictly for domestic servants arriving straight off the train called the Girls Home of Welcome was constructed. The YWCA built a boarding house built in 1905 strictly for respectable white collar working single women. Such actions marked a determined effort by the bourgeoisie to break away from the work of their predecessors. The potential to promote an awareness of the economic hardships confronting working women was never realised because of bourgeois women’s inability to move beyond their debate over what type of young woman deserved their help. Certainly by 1905, the city felt it had a firm handle on offering the right kind of help to the right kind of young women. In a thirty-five page supplement to the *Winnipeg Telegram*, the leading voices of the Winnipeg’s female elite, spear headed by some of the most influential members of the bourgeois class, described the efforts of the YWCA boarding house and other homes like

it in helping the single young working woman. "One distinct advantage in the Young Women's Christian Association boarding home is the fact that only young women of good moral character are admitted...this in itself affords a wonderful protection to the inexperienced young woman."<sup>70</sup> Poor working class women, unable to live on their meagre wages as domestics or factory workers, remained trapped in an economic reality that often saw them turn to casual prostitution to earn extra money. Pregnancy continued to be a serious consequence of that choice.

At the crux of the growing bourgeois women's work amongst "the unfortunate of their own sex" in Canada was the attempt by various groups to organise gender – to define the appropriate roles of both men and women – within the new "pure" nation of Canada they were responsible for building. However, the social reality of occasional prostitution changed the traditional cultural understanding of the sexual nature of working class women. Reform groups began to grow in response to these changes, attempting to re-establish and reaffirm women's roles as wives and mothers. Marianna Valverde, in her work on the English reform movement of Canada between 1885 and 1925, argued that such a purpose encouraged women of the Anglo-Protestant middle class to acquire powerful positions as "rescuers, reformers and even experts, while other women were reduced to being objects of philanthropic concern."<sup>71</sup> Kunzel also argued that female dominated reform groups saw themselves as "heirs to a long tradition of female benevolence."<sup>72</sup> Bringing with them the skills of "sisterhood, sympathy and piety," middle class women believed that they were redirecting young women back to the safe and comforting sphere of maternal and domestic influence.<sup>73</sup> Embracing what has been defined as maternal feminism this new political bourgeois woman, like the members

of the WCU, believed that society could greatly benefit from the rest of society's women embracing traditional virtues exemplified by their roles as mothers and educators of children.

The lack of overt visibility of the casual prostitute meant that public attention began to focus increasingly on a very visible population of prostitute which the reform movement seemed unable to reach – those living in brothels. The panic that took place throughout the Angle-Protestant middle classes over the brothels' presence in the city was, perhaps, the greatest source of social concern absorbing the attention of Winnipeg's elite, especially amongst the male leaders of the city until the outbreak of World War One. Who were these women and what can their experiences as brothel keepers and inmates tell us? Some women chose prostitution as a means to a potentially successful financial future while others became embroiled due to a previous dysfunctional family life or lack of any family, while still others had addictions to drugs and alcohol which often created a penchant for crime. Whatever their individual reasons for entering the sex trade industry, professional prostitutes played a key role in emphasising and defining gender identities and roles within Winnipeg's growing social cultural world. As women, they continually challenged preconceived notions about their sex and were crucial in producing a highly visible yet ghettoised subculture in which they and their business existed and, indeed, flourished.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Times (DT)*, April 13, 1885

<sup>2</sup> Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Women's Christian Union Collection (WCUC), 1885 Annual Report, P2132, File 1: 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 175.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Bryce was the wife of the Reverend George Bryce, founder and first minister of Knox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>5</sup> PAM, WCUC, 1894 Annual Report, P2132, File 1: 7.

<sup>6</sup> PAM, WCUC, 1883 Minute Book, P2131, File 1, February 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada," in *Women At Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1974), 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

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

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> PAM, WCUC, 1885 Annual Report, P2132, File 1: 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 113.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1890 Annual Report, P2132, File 1: 4.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 90.

<sup>27</sup> PAM, WCUC, Visitors Book, P2135, File 1: December, 1899.

<sup>28</sup> PAM, WCUC, 1894 Annual Report, P2132, File 1 : 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1892 Annual Report, P2132, File 1: 7.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>31</sup> PAM, WCUC, Visitors Book, P2135, File 1: January, 1902.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. April, 1901.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., January, 1902.

<sup>34</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 35.

<sup>35</sup> PAM, WCUC, Visitors Book, P2135, File 1: October, 1899.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 111.

<sup>38</sup> Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalisation of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Winnipeg City Archives (WCA), City Council Communications, No. 3828: May 20, 1898.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

- 
- <sup>41</sup> Salvation Army Heritage Center (SAHC), "The Salvation Army Homeside and Bethany Home, Winnipeg Manitoba", in Francis E. Wagner, *Eighty Years With Grace* (Unpublished, circa. 1950), 1.
- <sup>42</sup> PAM, WCUC, 1895 Annual Report, P2132, File 1: 15.
- <sup>43</sup> SAHC, International Staff Council Addresses 1904, 284.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 286.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., *Sin-Chains Riven*, 40.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 44.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., *The Deliverer*, July 1, 1889, 7.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> PAM, WCUC, 1895 Annual Report, P2132, File 1: 15.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> PAM, 1891 Census, T6297, Dist. 7, Ward 4C, Family 373.  
In the 1891 census for the SA home no names of the young women found there matched any of the names of prostitutes found in police court records or brothels for that year, the year before or the year after.
- <sup>57</sup> *DT*, July 10, 1882.
- <sup>58</sup> *Manitoba Free Press (MFP)*, October 17, 1884.
- <sup>59</sup> For full details see the *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 25 and October 28, 1892.
- <sup>60</sup> *WT*, October 28, 1892.
- <sup>61</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 35.

---

<sup>62</sup> Judith K. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

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

<sup>65</sup> *MFP*, January 29, 1885.

<sup>66</sup> PAM, Police Court Record Book, M1210.

<sup>67</sup> PAM, Police Court Record Book #5, M1214.

<sup>68</sup> PAM, Police Court Record Book #9 and #10, M1216.

<sup>69</sup> Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 61.

<sup>70</sup> *Winnipeg Telegram*, May 8, 1907.

<sup>71</sup> Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 29.

<sup>72</sup> Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 4

We were taking our chances all they way.

- Keeper Lila Anderson referring to the move to Point Douglas in 1910

In the early months of 1885, Jane Anderson, owner of a brothel on McWilliam Street, was so indignant by the violation of an agreement she thought she had with the Winnipeg Police, in which she willingly paid fines in order to be left alone, that she hastily contacted her lawyer, W.B. Canavan. Together, in February of that year, they confronted the Police Commission requesting a break from the continual raids and harassment Anderson and her girls were receiving from police and the general public. Reported the *Free Press*, "Mr. Canavan told how his fair client had been ill treated: she had got rid of the inmates of her house and the police had agreed not to pull her, but in violation of such agreement had raided her house at 2:00 on Sunday morning."<sup>1</sup> Anderson told the group of aldermen who sat on the commission that she was aware that many women of her kind had moved out onto the prairie and that she too would be agreeable to joining them if only the city would give her some time to arrange it. Canavan asked the Police Commission to give Anderson a breathing spell of at least three months while she prepared herself to move her business to the free air of the prairie. However, the commission instructed "the chief of police to follow her up and pull her continually as long as she remains in the populated area of the city."<sup>2</sup> Also, her neighbours "who soon found out her character"<sup>3</sup> endlessly complained to the Police. Anderson, therefore, was compelled to move from the city almost immediately.

While Anderson's application to the Commission for assistance was unsuccessful, her lawyer, Canavan, followed it up with a long letter to the *Daily Times* in February of 1885, defending the actions of his client. Stating that Anderson had paid \$600 worth of fines to the courts in just one year, Canavan argued that she and other women like her were at a great disadvantage due primarily to their unfavourable reputation. Suggesting that the Police had a particular bias against the notorious class of brothel keepers in Winnipeg's expanding red light district, Canavan wrote that "the class of people on behalf of whom [the complaint] is made have at least a right to be impartially dealt with."<sup>4</sup> Canavan's defence of the disreputable class in which Anderson was a prominent member was a rare occurrence in Winnipeg's daily newspapers. The success of reformist Reverend J. Silcox and his active followers in 1883 in moving the brothels in Winnipeg's city centre to the uninhabited prairie west of the city limits set a tone of intolerance which cultural commentators, like the *Manitoba Free Press* and the *Daily Times*, encouraged and promoted. Prostitutes, who had once provided amusement and melodrama in the pages of the dailies, were transformed by the words and criticism of reformers into social parasites feeding on the urban body. Anderson's pleas in 1885, therefore, were neither sympathetically dealt with by the newspapers, nor amusingly reproached as they might have been only three years earlier when reformers began to ask questions about why such women were invading the city. The answers to their questions were more elusive and complicated than even they had anticipated.

As mentioned before, the choice to enter prostitution was for most young women the result of complex economical and psychological factors. While family pathology may have played an important part in the recruitment of some women into prostitution, it was

certainly not the only factor. As mentioned in Chapter 2, orphaned girls and girls from broken homes were easily absorbed into the business. As Timothy Gilfoyle observed in his study of prostitutes in New York, “The majority [of prostitutes] were orphaned or abandoned girls who lacked authority figures capable of providing for them or controlling their behaviour.”<sup>5</sup> Race also played an important role in determining the ease with which some prostitutes entered the business. Whether American, British or African, some women were bound by the limitations not only of their sex or low class but just as importantly by their ethnic heritage and the prejudice society harboured towards them as a result. Combined with addictions to alcohol, drugs and the easy availability of money, many factors determined the susceptibility of certain women into joining the business of prostitution.

Without direct evidence from the prostitutes themselves, it is often difficult to pinpoint why some women passed through the business for short periods and why some appeared to make it a long-term career. Some historians have begun to suggest that the latter offered a degree of sexual freedom and emotional flexibility, away from an otherwise constrictive and oppressive culture. The break from an expected pattern of behaviour of women as dutiful daughters, wives, and mothers might have appeared as an attractive and liberating choice. As Judith Walkowitz observed of Victorian prostitutes in Southampton and Plymouth, “Young women, impatient with subordination and fatalistic acquiescence expected of their class, may have been likely to make this break [into prostitution].”<sup>6</sup> Such women who entered prostitution to escape the expectations of their class were also noticed for their “independent and aggressive behaviour.”<sup>7</sup> As part of a distinct female subculture, prostitutes stood out from the urban landscape and, as a result,

their mode of life, as Walkowitz suggested, “may have reinforced their defiance and insubordination.”<sup>8</sup> The prostitute’s distinctive behaviour, continues Walkowitz, classified these women as a special group inclined towards a high degree of self-assertion.<sup>9</sup>

Anderson’s assertiveness towards the police commission and the city in general was, therefore, neither the first nor the last to be displayed by a prostitute in Winnipeg.

Anderson believed that she and others like her had a right to demand fair treatment from the police and the city, regardless of her distinctive position as a brothel keeper and sexual miscreant.

The overt sexuality of female prostitutes was a decidedly large problem for the Anglo-Protestant elite who regarded the women’s sexual effrontery as one of the main social evils threatening the stability of the family structure. As Andree Levesque observed of prostitutes in Montreal in the early part of the twentieth century, “women who offered their sexual services to various and impersonal partners in order to earn a living represented a perversion of sexuality.”<sup>10</sup> Sherene Razack, in her article on space, prostitution and the making of the bourgeoisie, agreed with Levesque. She described prostitutes in the Victorian age as women “who transgress the boundaries of their assigned role as the guardians of morality.”<sup>11</sup> She argues that the bodies of prostitutes “are fundamentally related to the spaces and bodies of respectability” and that, as a result, their bodies and the neighbourhoods they inhabited each became designated as “spaces of impurities.”<sup>12</sup> Stories of the misadventures of certain prostitutes reported in Winnipeg’s press reflect the assumptions the cultural majority held in regards to the women offering their bodies as viable commodities for urban consumption and making their sexuality so openly public and available.

When Anderson finally moved further west onto the “open prairie”, she became part of a segregated female dominated subculture in which brothel managers and their prostitutes lived and operated. This world, defined simultaneously by the prostitutes and the nature of their work, as well as by the spaces they inhabited, did not exist in complete isolation from the rest of the city – no matter how far from the city limits they were pushed. On many occasions the prostitutes aggressively transgressed the socially defined boundaries established between them and general society. As women living outside of a culture that encouraged female subordination, the public greeted any display of self-assertiveness by the prostitutes with great consternation and alarm. The relationship between the women who worked in the sexual service industry and the city of Winnipeg was, however, often ambiguous and, at times, unpredictable and unique in its character. City officials, for instance, were oftentimes as concerned for the well being of prostitutes as they were with ridding their neighbourhoods of them.

Whether some prostitutes were trapped into the lifestyle through deceit, abandonment, desperation, addiction or as an easy way to earn quick money, or whether they willingly entered the business as an alternative to their anticipated Victorian roles as wives and mothers, individual stories of the women involved in prostitution can symbolise the complexities of the role they played in the social evolution of Winnipeg. Such stories can also offer help in understanding prostitution in the construction of the gender of women in general because, as Razack observed, “women in prostitution are integrally connected with women who are not engaged in prostitution.”<sup>13</sup> Above all, while the middle classes of Winnipeg sought to cast prostitutes out of the city they were,

as a result of such action, key players in the actual creation of a female subculture in which prostitutes were able to live and work with a remarkable degree of autonomy.

It is unclear when the first brothel was successfully established in the city of Winnipeg. Certainly as early as 1874 a group of prostitutes was firmly entrenched in the city and were well known offenders in police court circles. Florence "Mother" McKenzie, Lottie Glemore, Ella Lewis, Blondie Jewell, Jennie Lyons and Jennie Taylor operated and managed the more notorious brothels in Winnipeg in the late 1870s. Monthly police raids made on their houses provided great entertainment for the citizens who crowded into the city's courtrooms to watch the proceedings. A number of brothels were often raided at the same time and brothel keepers, like those mentioned, as well as the prostitutes they employed, would then be herded into court in large groups to the delight of courtroom spectators. When rumours of a big raid were leaked to the public in the late winter of 1881, "a large and varied assortment of the unwashed gathered at the portals of the city justice mill to refresh themselves with the sight of soiled doves."<sup>14</sup> During this particular raid the "ex-scullion" keepers, Lottie Glenmore, Ella Lewis and Jennie Lyons were charged and fined \$40 each and their female inmates \$20 each.

Being in the same trade, living in close proximity and often being arrested together was not the only thing many of these women shared in common. Except for Jennie Lyons who was Irish, all the brothel keepers at that time and a majority of the prostitutes were American by birth. Of the twenty-six prostitutes identified in the 1881 census, sixteen were American. Taking advantage of the great opportunity the expanding western city of Winnipeg offered women of their trade at this time in history, American prostitutes moved north and, once settled in the city, formed a strong peer network. In

fact, both the 1891 and 1901 census for Winnipeg, of those who could be identified as both brothel managers and prostitutes in Winnipeg's red light district, show that the largest numbers were American.<sup>15</sup>

A closer look at American prostitute and brothel manager Edna Starr in the early 1880s suggests that this close network of American women was not a new event. Articles in the *Daily Times* and the *Manitoba Free Press* which recorded Edna Starr's story, reported that she was considered one of the most notorious brothel keepers in Winnipeg. In March of 1883 the raid on her Alexander Street house prompted an investigation into her past by the police court. According to various reports, Starr was quite wealthy by the time she arrived in Winnipeg in 1881.<sup>16</sup> She admitted to having known Jenny Taylor in the United States, which explained why she boarded in Taylor's house after landing in Winnipeg. Starr eventually moved out on her own, purchasing a house on Alexander Street. During police inquiries into her past, Starr refused to discuss how much money she had, stating only that a part of her income had come from the sale of her home in Virginia. She also refused to discuss her past, other than that her parents were still living and she did not want them identified. To the police she declared herself "a retired lady" and, when she left Taylor's brothel, she referred to herself a "reformed prostitute."<sup>17</sup> However, it is clear that Starr left Taylor's brothel to open her own brothel, for she landed in court numerous times in the 1880s, usually accompanied by the three to four prostitutes she employed. Starr's experience, although limited by the nature of the sources, suggests some of the long distance peer networking that appeared to exist between American prostitutes both in Winnipeg and the United States.

Not only American prostitutes took advantage of the opportunity Winnipeg offered them to ply their trade. Brothel managers of British origin also established themselves in the city. Florence McKenzie, a widow with four children and an eighty-one-year-old mother, was from Scotland and in 1881 she reportedly ran a successful laundry business. However, perhaps because of the number of dependants she had or the limited money her laundry business was making, McKenzie also began a highly successful prostitution enterprise. By 1885 she had closed her laundry and was operating a restaurant on Main Street. She also rented the building next door to her restaurant and there she kept a number of girls including her own daughter Sis in a series of rooms dubbed “the refrigerator.”<sup>18</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, involving the story of Betsey Johnston, Florence McKenzie was known in the city as “Mother” McKenzie, although her type of mothering was the direct antithesis to the Victorian expectation of what a mother should be. Identified as a member of the criminal underclass of Winnipeg, McKenzie and women like her, who challenged societal norms with their aggressive behaviour, argues Razack, “are already thought to inhabit the space of prostitution.”<sup>19</sup> Coincident with their extreme poverty, and their apparent “choice to inhabit what is already presumed of them” was, Razack argues, part of an intricate social structure informed by the “patriarchy, capitalism and imperialism” of the Industrial Age.<sup>20</sup> With few ways to make a good living in such a gender biased and racialized culture, women like McKenzie had only a limited number of options to turn to for their family’s survival. Gilfoyle, in his study of the whorearchy in New York, argues that the Industrial Age offered self-assertive women, like McKenzie, an opportunity to turn prostitution into a new visible commodity and by doing so transform it “into a distinctive part of the urban

female economy.”<sup>21</sup> Using her laundry and restaurant business as fronts, McKenzie’s financial success as a brothel owner seems to bear out Gilfoyle’s conclusions.

While the majority of prostitutes in Winnipeg were either American or British by birth, close to one third of the prostitutes had backgrounds that can be identified as African descent.<sup>22</sup> Thus, unease over colour and ethnic differences might have heightened public opposition to the brothels and their inhabitants as far back as the 1880s and well into the 1900s. In Winnipeg, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a small population of African Americans lived in Winnipeg, working mainly as railway workers, usually conductors and porters. By 1880, African American prostitutes had located in the city. Pussy Allen, an African American prostitute, also known as Kitty, made much press in 1880 when she had an African American man brought up on charges of sexual assault. Also, a black woman and her crippled daughter were arrested in 1883 for keeping a house of ill fame.<sup>23</sup> The mother’s identity as a widow and the physical disability of her daughter suggests that prostitution may have been the easiest means for her to earn some sort of living and remain at home with her daughter. As well, a series of raids on “coon dives” occurred in the mid 1880s, suggesting that in the early years, African American prostitutes were separated from non-black prostitutes.<sup>24</sup>

By 1901 the census records recorded the colour of the prostitutes and of the sixty-four cited, nineteen or close to one third listed Africa as their descent and the United States as the place of their birth.<sup>25</sup> More interestingly, five of the ten brothel keepers, including Georgie Daly, Olga Ross, Doris Venette, Lottie Dayton and Blanche Moore were of African descent and managed both black and white prostitutes. The only contemporary mention of African American prostitutes was in an article found in the

*Manitoba Free Press* during the 1910 electoral race for mayor. A group of middle class women, concerned for the young women of their city, came together in St. George's Church to endorse the anti-segregationist candidate for mayor, E.D. Martin. Among the wives of some of Winnipeg's commercial elite in the audience were a number of active reformers, such as Mrs. McElhaney, wife of the Adjutant of the Salvation Army and her friend, Mrs. A.M. Fraser. Fraser eloquently informed the group<sup>26</sup> that Winnipeg was only as great as its citizens. "As the citizens make it so is the city," she said and made a strong plea for the "colored people" of the city.<sup>27</sup> She suggested that black women could not get their names placed on respectable domestic servant list because of their colour. As a result, said the impassioned Fraser, "the doors to vice were thrown wide open", and she "charged the citizens with responsibility for these conditions."<sup>28</sup> Such condemnation of the citizens of Winnipeg certainly suggests that life for African American people, especially women, was made difficult through the extreme prejudices of the ruling Anglo-Protestant classes.

Studies of black prostitutes in Nova Scotia by Fingard suggest that prostitution was "a reasonably attractive way to earn a livelihood to a black woman who could look forward only to a life of drudgery and poverty afforded her by white society."<sup>29</sup> Further, Razack suggests that the "processes of sexualization and racialization" presume women of colour and poor women "to be sexually available and aggressive."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, while all the black prostitutes listed in the census records were American by birth, it is uncertain whether they arrived in Winnipeg looking to make money in a profession they had already entered or whether conditions in the city were such that prostitution was, as

Fingard and Razack suggests, the easiest and expected means for them to earn a reasonable income in a white dominated society.

Class inheritance and family pathology were also critical in determining the lives of children, in particular girls who were born into families with a penchant towards crime and prostitution such as the McKenzie family. The McKenzies' records, although limited, emerge as the most prominent local example of deviancy passing from one generation to the next. As mentioned earlier, Flo McKenzie's daughters, Evelina, (known as Sis) and Millie, were absorbed into their mother's life of prostitution and crime at early ages. By age sixteen the more infamous daughter, Sis, had already been arrested several times on prostitution related offences. And Sis was an aggressive recruiter of other young women into the hardened world of prostitution. As Walkowitz observed of similar groups in London, "most prostitutes were recruited into prostitution by other women – a process that is best understood as a system of access and initiation similar to that operating in other occupations."<sup>31</sup> Sis's brother, commonly known as Tosh, was also a familiar face to police and the general public. Arrested numerous times on charges of larceny, weapon possession, and sexual assault, Tosh was regarded as a mean figure on Winnipeg's streets. He was also a boxer and his pugilist efforts brought in big crowds to the Victoria Theatre.

Their mother was a serious and, to a degree, successful businesswoman. McKenzie was well known for running successful brothels concurrent with other "entrepreneurial" exploits such as laundries and restaurants. When discovered and driven from various rented rooms, McKenzie would not hesitate to seek out rooms in even more respectable neighbourhoods. In 1883 she horrified the public by successfully renting a set

of rooms for her prostitutes in a building owned by a professor of religion: “the goings on there have been a source of annoyance and disgust to the people for some time past the result being the appeal for police intervention.”<sup>32</sup>

This apparent defiance of moral propriety permanently marked McKenzie and her family as social miscreants, standing outside the parameters of common decency and social approval. While reports of the McKenzie family disappear from the public record in the late 1880s, their successful venture in the city of Winnipeg despite their marginal status speaks volumes for the ways in which they, and other families like them, were able to manipulate their environment. As Fingard observed of similar families in Halifax, “disadvantaged by their wretched origins and harsh settlement experiences, [they] devised various ways of coping with the alien environment.”<sup>33</sup> While it appears that the McKenzies were fairly financially successful despite their lower class position, they were a continual target of police harassment, arrests and raids. The psychological effects of their contact with the other side of the law may have kept them bound closely as a family. However, the children’s adoption of their mother’s deviant lifestyle was in all probability due to her giving them little choice in the matter, as she had recruited them into the business well before they were old enough to make any decision of their own.

While the McKenzies were one of the most infamous criminal families in Winnipeg’s lower classes in the 1880s, their disappearance from the public record by the late 1880s means that their story can never be fully explored. Other families who were part of the same criminal underclass in Winnipeg are even more difficult to find. However, one other couple offers a small glimpse into another aspect of the dangers of prostitution. Madeline McClellan and William McClellan, husband and wife, operated a

brothel together and were raided on numerous occasions. They were friends of Flo McKenzie and sometimes they were brought in to face charges of keeping bawdy houses along with her and her family. The personal relationship between Madeline and her husband was a violent one. Although partners in the prostitution business, Madeline often brought her husband up on charges of physically assaulting her.<sup>34</sup> Violence against women in this business was, as Razack suggests, a part of the trade in which consenting to perform a private act for money makes “the violence permissible” against the bodies of prostitutes.<sup>35</sup> While such violence can be material as well as physical, the attacks on women caught up in the sex trade were frequent and considered an unwelcome but unavoidable side effect of the business. As Razack states, by transgressing the boundaries of morality, they transgress into a world with few rules and where “prostitutes encounter considerable violence.”<sup>36</sup> However, as seen in Madeline McLellan’s case and in others like her, some prostitutes attempted to use the courts for a degree of protection against such violence. Punishment against the offenders was rare, since, as Backhouse argues, “[they] were part of a designated group of women whose sexuality was viewed as publicly available”<sup>37</sup> and, therefore, this made sexual assault charges almost irrelevant due to the character of their business.

As a result of their numerous sexual transactions, pregnancies were also an unwelcome side effect of prostitution. Many of the women, if unable to pay the monetary fine imposed on them by the court in charges of drunkenness or vagrancy, were forced to bring their children with them to prison while they served their time. Isabella Minie, charged as a vagrant on April 25, 1881, was unable to find someone to take her children

during her incarceration and the courts concluded that Minie “has three young children who will have to stay with the mother in the police station for 21 days.”<sup>38</sup>

Female members of families in prostitution often followed in their mothers’ or sisters’ footsteps. This can be found in evidence in police court reports and in the census records. While names were rarely consistent and varied considerably throughout the period being studied, Sarah and Jane Stanley, Gladys and Amy Yates, Sarah Jane and Lydia Brown and Marie and Lousia Dupont were acknowledged as sisters by the courts working in the same brothels. Such evidence suggests that sisters were not uncommon companions and co-workers. While Fingard argues that “our knowledge of the nature of female poverty and the significant incidence of inter-generational prostitution would suggest that the daughters of female heads of families figured even more prominently,”<sup>39</sup> it is difficult to make any conclusions regarding similar women in the city of Winnipeg due to the scant record. However, the striking similarity between those families in Halifax studied by Fingard and the limited evidence of the criminal pattern of some of the familial relations in Winnipeg suggests that to some degree family pathology did play a role in prostitution in the city. It also marked those involved in such a trade as being part of a deviant criminal underclass in which women figured prominently.

The vast majority of prostitutes found in the 1881, 1891 and 1901 census records appeared to be single young women between the ages of 18 and 25.<sup>40</sup> Their sudden arrival in the city was matched by their quick departures. The high turnover of young women in and out of the business does suggest, as Walkowitz observed, that for most of these young women “prostitution represented only a temporary stage in their life.”<sup>41</sup> While many prostitutes arrived and left sometimes within a matter of months, some

names do remain consistent over a period of time. As Gilfoyle, Levesque and Backhouse observed of brothel keepers in New York, Montreal and Toronto respectively, some women chose prostitution as a long-term career. Looking at this group reveals some of the motives behind their entry into the sex trade industry. Moreover, recognising the movement of some women from prostitutes to brothel owners and managers suggests that for these women prostitution offered upward occupational mobility and, to a certain degree, economic security.

As already seen in the story of Florence McKenzie, prostitution for some women was a serious business matter. As Gilfoyle observed “probably the most attractive feature [of prostitution] was the possibility of economic advancement best exemplified by the madam.”<sup>42</sup> And while most women who entered prostitution did so for a short time, reflects Gilfoyle, “some made it a career.”<sup>43</sup> When city officials re-located the red light district to Nellie Street in 1883, the female brothel keepers purchased four of eight properties. That is, women owned both buildings and land.<sup>44</sup> Sarah Jane Brown, Lydia Brown, Elizabeth Dudley and Caroline Von Shultes continued to own the vacant pieces of property on Nellie well after the houses were physically moved to Thomas Street in 1892-1893.<sup>45</sup> Found in both tax assessment rolls and the 1891 and 1901 censuses, such ownership suggests that during the evolution of prostitution in Winnipeg, women became not just managers of the brothels, but owners of property, and taxpayers. They, therefore, had a vested interest in the business of prostitution, and were consumed by a need to protect their interest. By 1903 keepers, including Caroline Von Shultes, Ruby Tone, Blanche Moore, Estella Moore, Kittie Raymond, Ada Russell and Lily Carr owned six of the eleven homes on Thomas Street.<sup>46</sup> By 1911, settled firmly in the Point Douglas

neighbourhood, all of the homes were owned or mortgaged by women brothel keepers. Together they paid close to \$20,000 for the privilege of having their own space.

A number of the prostitutes who moved into the Point Douglas area settled there for a long period of time. Minnie Woods, Georgie Daly, Olga Ross, Carrie Hough and Carrie Hastings once listed as prostitutes and then in subsequent records as keepers suggest that within the unstable movement of women to and from the sex trade, there were those who found the trade worth the investment. Caroline Von Shultes, for example, who immigrated to the city in 1880s and reportedly left the city for New York by the time the Point Douglas district was established, owned and operated many successful brothels in her close to twenty years in Winnipeg. Besides owning four lots on Portage Avenue, Von Shultes also owned eight lots near Notre Dame Avenue. In 1891 her property investments were assessed at close to \$9,000.<sup>47</sup> Financially independent women like Von Shultes took advantage of their marginalisation and managed to find a degree of material stability despite the many negative aspects of their trade.

Female brothel managers certainly occupied a distinct position in the city. The money they earned gave them more financial and personal freedom than those women who worked for them did. In her study of Esther Arscott, a rich and successful brothel owner in Ontario, Backhouse states that there were “class gradations within the ranks of prostitutes themselves” and due to their wealth “upper class prostitutes secured legal assistance from upper-class lawyers.”<sup>48</sup> Just like Esther Arscott, keepers in Winnipeg hired lawyers and demanded fair treatment as they negotiated with the city for a free space in which they could operate their businesses without harassment or interference from the public at large. As Razack argues, prostitutes trapped in the social undercurrent

of the Victorian age struggled “for the right to be seen as giving moral virtue and for the right to have a private sphere.”<sup>49</sup> Such women were aware of their socially marginalised status, despite their apparent wealth, and used the law to establish their rights to live unmolested in the city.

The keepers’ complex relationship with the law and the public can perhaps best be understood in the negotiations that took place between the city and a group of brothel keepers in 1908 regarding the neighbourhood of Point Douglas. Several of the women involved, including Minnie Woods, Georgie Daly, Marjorie Morrison, Helen Sloan, and Marie and Lousia Dupont negotiated with police, real estate businessmen, as well as Manitoba’s telephone company and various shops and draymen to create for themselves a world in which they could function without the interference and harassment they had been habitually subject to.

When the city shut down the western brothels following a spectacular raid on Thomas Street in 1903, moral reformers and their followers sincerely believed that such action would effectively drive the business of prostitution from the city. To their discomfort as well as to the discomfort of various homeowners, the women dispersed into the city, disappearing into boarding houses, rented rooms and hotels. The control of the business through the system of raids and fines, which the city had always followed, was made increasingly more difficult as the women separated and became no longer visible easy targets. According to newspaper reports and the investigation of the Royal Commission on Social Vice in 1910, the brothel keepers were aware separation from their companions would allow them some anonymity in neighbourhoods in the North and West Ends on streets and avenues such as James, Ross, Pacific, Logan and Jarvis. As

time went on, however, the keepers grew dissatisfied with the arrangement, as their businesses suffered from the lack of control and protection that their old neighbourhood had afforded them. Police were also frustrated, unable to keep tabs on the movement of prostitutes as they had in the red light district. With the citizenry just as dissatisfied, newspaper owner and business leader, William Sanford Evans used the issue to his political advantage. Running for mayor in 1908, Evans outlined a strong segregationist platform that swayed enough voters for him to defeat the anti-segregationist candidate E.D. Martin in December of that year. Finally the police believed they had the sympathetic ear of the city council through Mayor Evans, as well as support from the majority of Winnipeg's citizenry. As a result, a series of negotiations took place between these defenders of respectability and the prostitutes themselves in order to re-design a plan of segregation that would satisfy all parties.

On November 25, 1909, one of the most important documents during these negotiations was made public. It was a letter written seven months earlier, on April 20, by T. Mayne Daly, police magistrate of the city, to the Winnipeg Police Commission.<sup>50</sup> Published in all the major newspapers, his letter described the negative consequences of the closure of the Thomas Street brothels in 1904. Outlining an increase in the crime rate, Daly concluded, "I am satisfied that both statistics and experience justify me in saying that immorality in the city is very largely on the increase."<sup>51</sup> Daly's letter provided a powerful argument to re-segregate the prostitutes: "The present system of dealing with this matter, which has been in vogue during the past five years, has proved an utter failure."<sup>52</sup> At the same time, Chief McRae backed Daly's conclusions by complaining that he was too short-staffed to deal with the situation as it was.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore,

deputation after deputation of irate citizens from the north and west ends of Winnipeg assaulted city hall on a regular basis complaining of the financial and social impact that prostitutes were having on their neighbourhoods. Indeed, the residents of Ross and Pacific Avenue were so angry by the decline in their property values that they threatened to take matters into their own hands and burn the brothels that had arrived on their streets right down to the ground.<sup>54</sup> The pressure of the police and the citizenry forced the Police Commission to act and, as a result, it passed a resolution regarding the prostitutes on April 21, 1909. Lundrum McMeans, an alderman for the city and member of the Police Commission, remarked during his testimony at the Royal Commission that they had resolved to leave the Police Chief to deal with the matter. However, he went on to say that “it was understood by the commission that they [prostitutes] were to be driven into one corner.”<sup>55</sup>

That corner turned out to be the Point Douglas area, a move supported by the authorities and the prostitutes themselves through their spokeswoman, Minnie Woods. Woods, dubbed by John Gray as the “Queen of the Whores”,<sup>56</sup> had owned a successful brothel, employing twelve girls, on Thomas Street for three years before she was shut down. An American by birth, Woods had arrived in Winnipeg at the turn of the century and was well known to Chief McRae. She was the first brothel owner he approached after the commission passed its resolution, which certainly reflected her status among her peers. Meeting in the spring of 1909, Chief McRae and Minnie Woods began a series of negotiations over a new location and the terms of their re-segregation. McRae later credited Woods with having chosen Rachel Street in Point Douglas. Giving testimony at

the Royal Commission, Woods stated, "There was nothing else down there outside of the gasworks. There were no private dwellings or anything."<sup>57</sup>

In this Woods was wrong. There were a number of private dwellings in the area. Acting on inside information from Chief McRae, real estate investor John Beaman<sup>58</sup> hurried to buy up the existing private homes in anticipation of selling them back to the prostitutes. Beaman offered the residents more than their houses were worth in order to achieve an easy buy. For example, in 1908, 176 McFarlane was assessed \$1,200. Beaman offered the owner \$4,500, re-selling it to Helen Sloan for \$7,500. Once he had purchased the majority of the homes on Rachel and McFarlane, Chief McRae suggested to Beaman that he approach Minnie Woods who would then supply him with a list of buyers. All in all, purchasing over twenty properties, Beaman made close to \$70,000 profit from his transactions.<sup>59</sup>

The city's desire to be rid of the prostitutes was matched only by the prostitutes' desire for secure living arrangements, as their willingness to pay inflated prices indicated. However, the brothel keepers believed that this money also brought a degree of protection against future raids and harassment. As Louisa Dupont and other keepers testified, "We wanted to live there. We were willing to pay for the privilege of living there."<sup>60</sup>

In their agreement with the police, the keepers agreed to contact the police whenever a prostitute left the neighbourhood, to tell them where she was going and to report back to them when she returned home or was out past curfew, (which was established as eight o'clock in the evening). As well, there were to be restrictions on loud piano music, bright porch lights and large house numbers and any other method the

keepers might use to attract attention to themselves and their business. With a laundry and a dressmaker on the street, and pay phones so they could order groceries and alcohol, the women were nearly cut off from the rest of the city.

By these agreements with the police, the women paid a fine of \$108 each every four months for the privilege of serving liquor without a license. Further, for their own protection, the women were allowed to hire detectives from the General Detective Agency for \$15 a month to cruise the streets and act as bodyguards, police watchers and bouncers. They were also allowed whistles to alert others of approaching police officers.<sup>61</sup> The keepers, having paid inflated prices for their homes, were intent on demanding the protection such prices afforded them. Their willingness to follow certain rules and remain segregated within the confined streets of Rachel and McFarlane demonstrates how these women were able to achieve a certain level of autonomy within the city's jurisdiction.

Despite being more financially able than the women they employed, the keepers were still women occupying a marginal and socially unacceptable place in Winnipeg society. Beaman, in selling the properties to them at inflated prices, took advantage of that status using the women's need for his own gain. Moreover, despite establishing mutually agreed upon conditions for their settlement, many acknowledged that the keepers had received the raw end of the deal. Adjutant McElhaney of the Salvation Army testified at the Royal Commission that "the taxes they are paying, the prices they have to pay for their houses – they get generally bled all round."<sup>62</sup> However, a peer support system responded to their marginalisation. Their sexual availability, whether they themselves viewed it as freedom from convention or as a necessity for their own survival,

meant that whether a keeper or a prostitute, they were women adrift in a city which held much animosity towards them and their ascribed sexual perversity. As Meyerowitz suggests, such peer networks were inevitable and necessary regardless of a woman's financial status within the sex trade or society in general. While the social networks offered a degree of protection and economic stability for the prostitutes, such relationships, Meyerowitz argues, "were not necessarily ideal, deeply binding or conflict free."<sup>63</sup> Living together in the segregated district of Point Douglas did not mean harmony among the women, but it was certainly preferable to living in a hostile city, separated from each other with little protection from harassment by police and the general public.

Once relocated, the press and the public became upset that women in prostitution appeared so unwilling to escape their harsh lifestyle and seek out a purer life. When Adjutant McElhaney of the Salvation Army entered a brothel on Rachel Street with his wife and members of the "League of Mercy", he was intent on saving a girl rumoured to have recently been trapped there through a dependency on opium. At the Royal Commission McElhaney testified as to the conditions of the brothels and the girls that worked in them. He stated that through the use of alcohol, morphine and opium, brothel keepers maintained a hold on the girls: "when they [the girls] wanted to come away some of them in charge would jolly them and get them drunk."<sup>64</sup> Through forced addiction the girls were led to believe that they could leave voluntarily, but he testified, "They were under a false sense of luxury."<sup>65</sup> Further, the girls were kept in debt and, if they made an effort to leave, the keepers "threatened to take their drugs away."<sup>66</sup>

What seemed to disturb McElhaney the most was the apparent unwillingness of this particular girl and others to leave the brothel. He observed that although some of the

girls had a chance to leave and evade the threats of their brothel keepers, they never did. Indeed, McElhaney could not persuade any of the young women to go with him and find shelter. This may also have been a practical choice for the girls, since the Salvation Army, as McElhaney admitted, “have not any other facilities just at that time in the Industrial Home to look after them.”<sup>67</sup> While some girls may have been willing to leave, McElhaney could offer only one guaranteed place of shelter in his own home. As well, as mentioned earlier, organisations like the Sally Ann believed that redemption came through a willingness to accept God and, if the rescued girl refused this, she was often turned out.

Whether McElhaney desired conversion or simply wanted to rescue some of the young women, he eventually abandoned his hope for the type of rescue work. “My wife and my workers,” he testified, “found it very difficult to get these girls away under any circumstances because they were surrounded with luxury and thought they were having a good time.”<sup>68</sup> For McElhaney and others like him, the use of drugs, alcohol and false luxuries persuaded this weaker sex that they were having a good time. What McElhaney chose not to recognise was the strong social bond between prostitutes which may have become even stronger when good meaning citizens like himself threatened their livelihood and invaded their world, for what could he offer in return? For many of these girls, the brothels had become a form of family. One prostitute said to McElhaney, “If we come out what is going to happen to us? Nobody cares.”<sup>69</sup> Despite his apparent desire to rescue the prostitutes even McElhaney was aware of the problems that awaited them beyond the segregated district: “They know the minute they come out, unless they come to us or they go to some religious organisation, that they are branded.”<sup>70</sup>

While a subculture of prostitutes was recreated in Point Douglas, it did not isolate them away from the city all together. Point Douglas was an anomalous zone in the centre of Winnipeg that followed a different set of cultural rules to the rest of the city, and the reputation of this neighbourhood attracted hundreds of sightseers each day. The socially constructed spaces marked off between the general citizenry of Winnipeg and the prostitutes were often transgressed mainly because of the public's fascination in touring the district after reading about events there. The public interest in prostitutes, despite their marginalised status, meant that a complex relationship evolved between the two groups. Informing this relationship was not just the volatile and hyperbolic language of moral reformers, but also the physical realities of the lives of the prostitutes. When the city decided to move the brothels west of the city limits in 1883, it was reported that spring would be the best season to do it, as winter was "denounced as cruel to begin such an attack at a season when the frail ones driven from their boudoirs would be subjected to the vigors of a Manitoba winter in quarters much less comfortable."<sup>71</sup> When the prostitutes on Thomas Street were raided in 1904 and their homes shut down, there was a public outcry over the fact that such action was taken in the middle of January. Through an article titled "These Women Need our Help," it was clear that the city and some members of the general public were worried for the safety of those prostitutes now without a home: "Many of these women are so hard up that they will be starving in a few days unless help comes from some respectable quarter."<sup>72</sup> Describing groups of girls sleeping in livery stables on "just straw" and wearing little clothing, the newspaper reflected on their pitiful state: "Among the passengers [on trams] can be noticed women with painted faces bearing the signs of years of dissipation, they are the women driven

out from their haunts who are passing the time by walking up and down the streets for want of something better to do.”<sup>73</sup>

While this suggests a certain amount of public concern about the physical safety of prostitutes, the belligerent and aggressive behaviour of the prostitutes was more often a common complaint in Winnipeg newspapers. One of the earliest objections was how dangerous the hacks and buggies driven by the prostitutes were as they barrelled down city streets at alarming speed. The prostitutes often took delight in scaring pedestrians off the road: “Lucy Ward and Fanny Hood, a couple of harlots from Ella Lewis’s bagnio, got drunk Saturday afternoon and having the horse and cutter took an airing on Main Street, behaving themselves very badly under the combined influence of their inherent wickedness and forty rod whiskey.”<sup>74</sup> Since women were banned from hotel barrooms and saloons, buggies were used by the prostitutes for open drinking binges: “Eva Groves, a bad egg from Mrs. Taylor’s bagnio, went out for a drive Wednesday afternoon and succeeded in getting pretty drunk. Down by the fort she fell out of the buggy but was not hurt.”<sup>75</sup> In an editorial in 1875, the *Free Press* described the problem, stating that “the spectacle of ‘flashy’ women driving through the streets from one saloon to another are not conducive to good morals or the fair reputation of the city.”<sup>76</sup> Cultural commentators like the *Free Press* were not amused by the antics and often editorialised on what the city should do with them, declaring that “it is bad enough that these demireps should be harbored at all without having them flaunt their brazen effrontery in the faces of respectable people on our most populous thoroughfares.”<sup>77</sup>

Nothing incited the public more, however, than the aggressive confrontations between prostitutes and middle-class women in public spaces. In March of 1881, “two

harlots from the woman Glenmore's bagnio" entered a store on Main Street whereupon they approached a group of women and began to verbally assault them.<sup>78</sup> So enraged was the storeowner by the "gross insults" of the prostitutes that he immediately called for the police. Once the newspapers caught hold of the story, a backlash against the prostitutes and their keeper Lottie Glenmore began in the editorial sections of the newspaper. "This sort of thing is becoming too bad," complained the *Free Press*, "if these disreputable wenches don't know how to behave themselves they ought to be taught a lesson by the police that will tame their exuberant effrontery."<sup>79</sup> Further, the *Free Press* stated that it had not been the first time that respectable ladies "have been insulted in the same way by these vermin."<sup>80</sup> The police tried tracking down the two prostitutes the following day, but they had "skipped out to avoid the consequences of their impudence."<sup>81</sup>

Lottie Glenmore, their keeper, was blamed for not being able to control her prostitutes, yet Glenmore's reputation as being the "most brazen virago on the prairie"<sup>82</sup> meant that she herself often got in trouble. A few months after the store incident, Glenmore was arrested for having hurled insults at a funeral procession passing by her brothel. Such lack of respect for the dead was considered even more abhorrent than her apparent lack of regard for the living. She and four of her prostitutes, Mary Lovejoy, Bridget Stanley, Sally Montague, and Kate DuFrost, were arrested for "badly and offensively behaving while a funeral was passing."<sup>83</sup> Hoping that paying a hefty fine of \$50 for her "outrages of decency" would finally teach her a lesson, the *Free Press* remarked that "she will probably begin to understand that it will be cheaper to behave herself properly."<sup>84</sup> Ironically, when Glenmore's house burnt down in May of the following year, a group of prostitutes, along with Glenmore, "appeared to bear their

troubles with an easy nonchalance and several of them amused themselves in cracking jokes with the gaping crowd on the subject of their forlorn condition.”<sup>85</sup>

While sometimes certain events were amusing to both the public and the prostitutes, angry confrontations were much more commonplace. In 1882 two prostitutes, Blanche Sheppard and Jennie Parker “went into the post-office and commenced showing off their smartness as harlots will persist in doing occasionally.”<sup>86</sup> Chief Murray happened to enter the post office and when the prostitutes became “too fresh” to him and to others “he ordered them out.”<sup>87</sup> Escorting them home, Chief Murray then raided their brothel kept by Lucy Ward. Observed the *Free Press*, “The people who inhabit these houses might as well understand that when they come into town it is necessary that they be particular in their conduct otherwise there is trouble in store for them.”<sup>88</sup> And in 1897 the African American keeper Olga Ross and Gertrude Gardner, a prostitute who worked for her, were charged \$40 and \$20 respectively, for “molesting people passing in the street.”<sup>89</sup>

Such belligerent public actions by the prostitutes meant that a continual array of letters of complaint were being sent both to city council and the newspapers by men and women tired of the women’s lack of social decency. At the heart of most complaints was the overt sexuality of these women displayed every time they transgressed into defined respectable spaces such as stores and post offices. Such public appearances were compared with the spread of diseases such as leprosy, not only highly contagious but physically repelling as well. Reverend Silcox in his campaigns against the red light district in 1883 compared them with the small pox and declared that like that disease they must be driven from the city. The writer of an article simply entitled “The Social Evil”,

described prostitution as a “deadly sore” which was “steadily extending its putrid surface over the fair face of the city.”<sup>90</sup>

The sexuality of prostitutes, therefore, was increasingly believed to be a contagious contaminant to all citizens, especially the city’s youth. Like a disease, the prostitutes needed to be isolated and wiped out before they spread their depraved sexuality further into the respectable parts of the city infecting other women. “Get you gone”, wrote one writer, “and give place to honester women.”<sup>91</sup> Some men, like a father who wrote a letter to the *Free Press*, hoped that those young women who caught the disease died quickly from it rather than spend years being eaten away by it. The father wrote, “I would much rather follow a daughter to the cemetery and hear the clods of the valley rattle down on her coffin than to find her in one of them brothels, so would any man with the good of mankind in his heart.”<sup>92</sup>

That a prostitute’s sexuality was equated with disease and ultimately death clearly illustrates how society believed it to be an abnormal presence in the urban body. Vaccinations against it took place through the establishment of homes, societies, associations, and so on, where middle class men and women could observe and treat the victims, as well as provide guidance and offer preventative measures through spreading the gospel. Their self-assertive actions and their aggressive transgressions into respectable parts of urban spaces demonstrated perhaps that the prostitutes were aware of the public’s fear and revulsion over the parasitical status of their bodies and their trade. As Fingard suggests, such notorious women had to resort to deviant behaviour in order to survive or else they would be continual victims to harassment and police action: “They used the street as their forum and their battleground.”<sup>93</sup> Concurrs Walkowitz, “seasoned

prostitutes were capable of independent and assertive behavior rarely found among women of their own social class.”<sup>94</sup> The battle lines prostitutes forged were not always between the general public and themselves. Sometimes it occurred between police and certain prostitutes who did not meekly accept their arrest or punishment: “Emily Patrick, a young woman who has made her acquaintance in the police court...was again before the court on a charge of vagrancy.” Patrick was well known for her “passionate disposition” and on this particular day “while waiting for the opening of court the young woman, on being asked a question by Clerk Aird, made an assault on that officer.”<sup>95</sup> Assaults on officers were frequent and sometimes extended to street confrontations like the one that took place between Betsey Parisien, who upon arrest gathered up stones and “broke a number of holes in A. McAllister’s windows.”<sup>96</sup>

As a keeper so eloquently expressed, “even a fallen women had many a bitter hour of suffering and vain regrets for days that are gone.”<sup>97</sup> Despite such regrets, for some prostitution became a long-term career. For still more women, prostitution was a life full of debt, alcoholism, drug addiction and physical abuse. As Backhouse states in her study of Irish prostitutes in Toronto, “for some women prostitution in Toronto served as a ticket to public exposure, police harassment and downward social mobility.”<sup>98</sup> As part of a criminal underclass, prostitutes were often victims of unfortunate circumstances brought about by both their own design and by the realities of their poverty. Observes Walkowitz, “Exploitive behavior existed between prostitutes and their customers...Drunken brawls and petty thefts between women and their clients were frequent occurrences.”<sup>99</sup> Mabel Avery was a well-known prostitute in Winnipeg who found herself arrested numerous times, not just on charges of being a prostitute, but on

frequent charges of theft. A woman “well known in police court circles”, Avery moved around the city, living in rented rooms on Fort Street as well as boarding in Ella Lewis’s brothel. She would take men to hotel rooms where she traded her sexual service for a bit of money, and after stole from them while they slept. On a Thursday evening in October, 1882, Avery watched while a Mr. Kennedy removed \$500 from his pockets and placed them under the mattress. When he awoke the next morning, Kennedy found “the woman and the money gone and the door of the room locked. He broke it open and after a couple of days search discovered Miss Avery in Ella Lewis’s bagnio and had her arrested.”<sup>100</sup>

Avery was often arrested on charges of larceny similar to those described above. However, just a few months before she robbed Kennedy, Avery herself had been a victim of a similar crime. On September 5, 1882, Avery brought a charge of larceny against Robert Doyle. The previous week Doyle, accompanied by a man named Wright, “went on a time and wound up the day’s fun by going in company with the complainant [Avery] and one Bella Graham to several houses of questionable repute in the western part of the city.”<sup>101</sup> They stayed all night with the two women and in the morning took off along with two of Avery’s valises and two of her wraps. Doyle and Wright were committed to trial before a higher court.

Interestingly, while Doyle and Wright were passed over to the Assize courts in October, Avery, charged with the same crime, served only a few days. Well known to the police, Avery’s sentence of a few days at hard labour<sup>102</sup> was a routine punishment applied to recidivist prostitutes. Within a month she was arrested again, this time charged with drunkenness. Her frustration at being arrested was expressed in her actions in court: “once within the ward she became transformed into a veritable fury; seizing a chair she

dashed it at the windows shivering the panes of glass into atoms.”<sup>103</sup> Avery’s anger expressed in such violent action suggests that life for many prostitutes was neither financially secure nor emotionally stable. As Andrew Davies observed of female scuttlers<sup>104</sup> in Victorian Manchester, “Violent or disorderly women who failed to display supposedly innate feminine virtues such as gentleness, were frequently assumed to be entirely lacking in womanly qualities and were thus characterised as sexually degraded.”<sup>105</sup> Both a perpetrator of various criminal offences and a victim of them as well, Avery, like so many other disorderly prostitutes, occupied an unenviable position in a criminal underclass defined both by her actions and society’s designation of her as sexually deviant.

Nellie Dunn also found herself trapped in a similar ambiguous situation. Dunn was a prostitute who arrived in Winnipeg from Toronto in 1886 along with Pearl Gould and Lou Williams, both of whom became well known brothel keepers in the city. Dunn became acquainted with John Wagner and, according to various reports, he was “madly infatuated with Nellie”<sup>106</sup> and would not leave her alone. This harassment often resulted in angry confrontations between the two on Winnipeg’s public streets and eventually forced Dunn to leave Winnipeg. She moved to Huron City, North Dakota, where a group of brothels had recently been established on the border. Her acquaintance Pearl Gould who had left Winnipeg earlier in the year owned one of them. But Dunn could not escape Wagner. Leaving his wife and family in Emerson where he resided, he tracked Dunn to Huron City, a mile and half away. Wagner offered Dunn both money and a brothel of her own. When she refused, Wagner’s anger erupted into a violent confrontation on October 18, 1892. Drunk on whiskey and carrying a gun, Wagner made his way to the brothel

where Dunn was lodging. Yelling at her to let him inside, he pounded angrily at the door, verbally threatening Dunn's life. Fearing for her safety, Dunn grabbed her gun and shot Wagner through the front door of the brothel, killing him. Dunn was arrested for murder. However, the evidence of the gun shot through the front door of the brothel and the testimony of the other prostitutes who were with her and who feared for their own lives played in her favour and she was set free.<sup>107</sup>

However, Dunn could not escape the social stigma attached to a woman who had shot and killed a man. Newspapers, fascinated with her story began to report on her character and background as they grappled to understand why she chose shoot a man. She was declared a bigamist when the papers that ran stories on her notorious past, discovered two marriages – one to a man in Toronto and one to a man from Morris, Manitoba. Her family, sought out by one paper, was described as well bred. Her parents were dead, but she had a brother and a sister who said that they had continually and without success tried to rescue their older sister from her life of shame.<sup>108</sup> Papers also suggested that, while Dunn was very beautiful and remarkably intelligent, she was mentally unbalanced. According to reports, she accused her friend Pearl Gould of poisoning her on one occasion.<sup>109</sup> The two women were also known to fight with each constantly. Rumours about Dunn grew even more bizarre, including one that claimed she had been attacked and killed by an angry mob in Grand Forks.<sup>110</sup> These rumours in the press followed Dunn everywhere and made it difficult for her to establish any sort of living or place of residence. The press effectively vilified her, painting the portrait of a woman who worked in the sex trade not because she wanted to, or because she needed to, but because of an unnatural deviancy inherent in her own person. She was not only, therefore,

irredeemable, but a social pariah. In 1893 Dunn arrived once more in Winnipeg and settled back with the prostitutes out on the western limits of the city.<sup>111</sup> While she could never escape the label of murderer, the red light district offered Dunn a kind of peace and anonymity through the acceptance of her peers.

There are similar stories of other women caught up in unusual circumstances who faced terrible ordeals followed by vilification in the press. One such woman was Christina McPherson. She was only sixteen when she witnessed the brutal murder of man in a house in Point Douglas where she rented a room. The owners of the house, David Welsh and Rosa Muirrie, were American and known criminals who flirted at times with the sex trade. The papers described McPherson as an “orphan” whom Welsh and Muirrie took in. One night McPherson witnessed Welsh murder John Cameron in a violent struggle.<sup>112</sup> As a consequence, McPherson was dubbed as being part of “murder notoriety” by the press and public alike, even though she was simply a witness to the murder. The press was not surprised when a few months later McPherson was said to be “going from bad to worse.”<sup>113</sup> Because of her notoriety and perhaps her inability to escape its social stigma, McPherson had taken up residence with a number of young men. The press also discovered that McPherson was not an “orphan” and, indeed, her mother and father had apparently tried desperately to save her from her shameful life. However, reported the *Daily Times*, “The girl, it is said, had no desire to live with her parents but clings to the life of she is leading.”<sup>114</sup> To make matters even more shameful, despite it all, “she was a refined and good looking girl.”<sup>115</sup>

Adjutant McElhaney’s observation that girls were marked even if they freely abandoned their life of prostitution appeared to contradict society’s desire to help reclaim

them to decent lives. Indeed, the prostitutes' defiant actions towards the public, press and reformers alike confused many. Such confusion meant that, at times, the public either branded the women as "brazen harlots" who deliberately defied Victorian conventions and needed to be punished, or as "pale soiled doves", victims to drugs, crime, and alcohol who needed to be saved from cruel brothel keepers. The press, through the vilification of some of the more notorious prostitutes in Winnipeg, served to widen the social barrier between the prostitutes and the Winnipeg public, reinforcing the need to have these women bound to the marginal spaces in which they lived and worked.

Aware of society's confusion and apparent disregard and hostility for the well being of women who were openly sexual, some prostitutes recognised the importance of the autonomy their segregation offered them. Others found themselves wrapped up in this subculture because of their colour or nationality; unable to escape the cultural stigma attached to them because of the profound prejudices of the dominant white middle-class culture. Some girls were lured into prostitution through family pathology or through recruitment. Others found financial freedom, a chance to avoid a life of drudgery and poverty and for a few, perhaps, an alternative lifestyle to the traditional, oppressive path expected of them as women. For still others, the sex trade was a means by which they could feed an addiction to drugs and alcohol. Strong social networks emerged within this marginal status regardless of the motives the women had for entering the trade. For some girls it was the bond of a family that they could not find elsewhere. When keeper Lila Anderson testified at the Royal Commission, she spoke of the feelings many of the women had when they moved to Point Douglas: "We were taking our chances all the way. We had no protection from anybody, you know, we were taking our chances."<sup>116</sup>

Once established in Point Douglas, the prostitutes never moved again and the chances they had taken paid off. Occupying an autonomous space in the heart of Winnipeg, the women finally found a neighbourhood where they could work and live in a somewhat peaceful conjunction with a city that had struggled so long to not only eradicate them but to understand them as well.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> *Daily Times (DT)*, February 20, 1885.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York, Prostitution and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: Norton, 1992), 65.
- <sup>6</sup> Judith K. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 194.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Andree Levesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1930* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 117.
- <sup>11</sup> Sherene Razack, "Race, Space and Prostitution: The Making of a Bourgeois Subject", *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 10, no.2 (1998), 347.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 363.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 359.
- <sup>14</sup> *Manitoba Free Press (MFP)*, March 10, 1881.
- <sup>15</sup> Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM, 1881 Census for Winnipeg, Ward 2, Family 276, 279, 299, 301 and Ward 4, Family 85 and 241; 1891 Census for Winnipeg, Ward 3C, Family 191-197; 1901 Census for Winnipeg, Ward 3, Family 44-50, 52, 54.
- <sup>16</sup> Starr's story was reported in the *DT*, March 19 and 20, 1883 and the *WFP*, March 21, 1883.
- <sup>17</sup> *DT*, March 20, 1883; *MFP*, March 21, 1883.
- <sup>18</sup> *DT*, March 5, 1885.
- <sup>19</sup> Razack, "Race Space and Prostitution", 348.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.

- 
- <sup>21</sup> Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 75.
- <sup>22</sup> PAM, 1901 Census for Winnipeg, Ward 3, Family 44-50, 52, 54.
- <sup>23</sup> *MFP*, March 20, 1883.
- <sup>24</sup> See *MFP*, March 23, March 26, April 8, 1885.
- <sup>25</sup> PAM, 1901 Census for Winnipeg, Ward 3, Family 44-50, 52, 54.
- <sup>26</sup> Women who owned property had earned the right to vote in civic elections by 1907.
- <sup>27</sup> *MFP*, December 4, 1910.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1989), 105.
- <sup>30</sup> Razack, "Race, Space and Prostitution", 346.
- <sup>31</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 201.
- <sup>32</sup> *MFP*, June 17, 1881
- <sup>33</sup> Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life*, 91.
- <sup>34</sup> *MFP*, October 11, 1882; March 30, 1883; May 25, 1885
- <sup>35</sup> Razack, "Race, Space and Prostitution", 350.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.
- <sup>37</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: The Osgoode Society, 1991), 256.
- <sup>38</sup> *MFP.*, April 25, 1881
- <sup>39</sup> Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life*, 99.
- <sup>40</sup> PAM, 1881 Census for Winnipeg, Ward 2, Family 276, 279, 299, 301 and Ward 4, Family 85 and 241; 1891 Census for Winnipeg, Ward 3C, Family 191-197; 1901 Census for Winnipeg, Ward 3, Family 44-50, 52, 54.
- <sup>41</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 196.

---

<sup>42</sup> Gilfoylfe, *City of Eros*, 70.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Tax assessment rolls indicate this from 1893 through to 1906. City of Winnipeg Archives (CWA), Tax Assessment Rolls, Ward 3.

<sup>45</sup> Tax Assessment rolls indicate such ownership continued from 1893 through to 1906.

<sup>46</sup> CWA, Tax Assessment Rolls, 1904, Ward 3, rolls 304-323.

<sup>47</sup> CWA, Tax Assessment Rolls 1891, Ward 3, rolls 326 and 1423.

<sup>48</sup> Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 253.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>50</sup> *MFP*, November 25, 1909.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Manitoba Legislative Library (MLL), Royal Commission on Social Vice in Winnipeg, Book 1, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Book 3, 65.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> James Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971), 47.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Book 4, 374.

<sup>58</sup> Rumours spread through Winnipeg that Beaman was McRae's brother-in-law and that the whole McRae family benefited from the real estate transaction. However, no evidence of the relationship was found to substantiate the rumours.

<sup>59</sup> For a list of Beaman's transactions see the Royal Commission, Book 4, 392.

<sup>60</sup> MLL, Royal Commission, Book 2, 81.

<sup>61</sup> For a list of all the restrictions see Royal Commission, Book 2, 146 and Book 3, 232.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Book 5, 15.

---

<sup>63</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 112.

<sup>64</sup> MLL, Royal Commission, Book 5, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *MFP* March 15, 1883.

<sup>72</sup> *WT*, January 14, 1904.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> *MFP*, March 7, 1881.

<sup>75</sup> *MFP*, April 8, 1881.

<sup>76</sup> *MFP*, June 8, 1875.

<sup>77</sup> *MFP*, March 7, 1881

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> *MFP*, March 8, 1881.

<sup>82</sup> *MFP*, March 9, 1881.

<sup>83</sup> *MFP*, May 25, 1881.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> *MFP*, May 6, 1882

---

<sup>86</sup> *MFP*, November 6, 1882.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Winnipeg Tribune (WT)*, July 16, 1897

<sup>90</sup> *MFP*, March 15, 1883

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *MFP*, November 11, 1910

<sup>93</sup> Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life*, 105.

<sup>94</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 20.

<sup>95</sup> *WT*, May 4, 1893.

<sup>96</sup> *MFP*, January 27, 1881. Interestingly McAllister's shop was the same one where two prostitutes harassed female customers.

<sup>97</sup> *DT*, April 9, 1883.

<sup>98</sup> Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 244.

<sup>99</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitutes and Victorian Society*, 199.

<sup>100</sup> *MFP*, October 24, 1882.

<sup>101</sup> *MFP*, September 5, 1882.

<sup>102</sup> Hard labour often meant that the women had to scrub the floors of the police station all day.

<sup>103</sup> *MFP*, November 5, 1882.

<sup>104</sup> Scuttler was a gang member.

<sup>105</sup> Andrew Davies, " 'These Viragoes Are No Less Cruel Than The Lads': Young Women and Gang Violence in Late Victorian Manchester and Salford", *Journal of Criminology* 39, no. 1, (1999), 74.

<sup>106</sup> *WT*, October 20, 1882

---

<sup>107</sup> The murder was reported in the *WT*, October 19, October 20 and November 1, 1892.

<sup>108</sup> *WT*, October 20, 1892.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, October 19, 1892.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, February 24, 1893.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, April 8, 1893.

<sup>112</sup> The murder was reported in the *DT*, October 27, 1884 and the *MFP*, October 27, 28 and November 1, 1884.

<sup>113</sup> *DT*, June 3, 1885

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *MLL*, Royal Commission, Book 2, 83.

## Chapter 5

It has turned a certain portion of our goodly city into a reeking inferno – a veritable hell.  
- Rev. R.P. Bowles of Grace Methodist Church, *Winnipeg Tribune*, November 16, 1903

In 1883, the same year that the Women's Christian Union was formed, a group of men led by the Reverend J. Silcox of Knox Presbyterian Church approached Winnipeg's City Council. Like the WCU, they were concerned about the threat a certain class of unfortunate young women was posing to the youth of their city. However, unlike the WCU, their target was not the single wayward girl, but rather the brothels and prostitutes situated in the centre of downtown Winnipeg. On April 9, 1883, a petition signed by twenty-three male leaders of the city's Anglo-Protestant elite, including Silcox, Rev. Charles Bruce Pitblado, Rev. George Bryce and Charles Edward Hamilton, then Attorney General of Manitoba, demanded that city officials drive out the brazen women who were gnawing away at the moral backbone of their city's culture. The petition, written by the Rev. Silcox, spoke plainly: "We the undersigned, citizens and ratepayers [...] beg leave to represent to your worship body that a serious scandal exists, in the houses of ill-fame so openly and wantonly conducted in this city." <sup>1</sup>

Angry at the nightly disturbances brothels were causing, as well as the effect such houses had on both moral values and property values, these prominent men placed the failure to eradicate the business of prostitution squarely on the shoulders of the police. "A promise was made" by Winnipeg police to clear the houses from the city, Silcox angrily wrote and "the promise now seems forgotten." Further, Silcox complained, "it is in the

interests of morality and common decency that extreme measures should be taken against these offenders.”

The complainants did not limit their comments to just one angry petition to City Council. Conducting interviews with various newspapers in the city, they effectively stirred up public sentiment against the houses of ill fame. In an interview with the *Daily Times*, Silcox described the brothels as a plague on the city and stated that “we drove the small pox out and we can do the same with this plague.”<sup>2</sup> What erupted from this first anti-vice campaign in Winnipeg was a fiery debate between religious and civic leaders on how to solve the problem of the brothels and the prostitutes. The main disagreement in this debate was the question of whether to segregate the brothels or eradicate them. This conflict would dominate the political landscape on and off for the next forty years as the two male-dominated groups battled for leadership of the city.

Between 1883 and 1910 the question of whether segregating prostitutes would be effective, was, as Artibise suggests, “the only one important issue that caused any serious conflict within the ruling commercial elite of Winnipeg.”<sup>3</sup> Civic and religious leaders came head to head on the issue on three important occasions and the decisions about what to do with the brazen effrontery of those “women of easy virtue” was never ever fully agreed upon or ever clearly resolved. At the heart of the debates, which occurred in 1883, 1903 and 1908-10, was an ideological concern for the moral well being of the honest, hard-working citizens of Winnipeg. Religious leaders continually preached about the failure of civic authorities to protect families and especially their children from the “evil” invading their city. At the same time, civic authorities criticised the religious leaders for interfering and not allowing the city do its job in policing prostitution.

Speeches and sermons, often given to all male audiences by male religious and civic leaders, also mark an important change in the power within the bourgeois class. In asserting their authority to lead the city in moral reform, men, whether elected officials or in the pulpit, essentially froze women out of the public debate. As a result, a series of metaphors and symbols emerged to explain prostitution, female sexuality and the spaces they inhabited. As Smith-Rosenberg observed, “the physical body symbolised the social body and physical and social disorder stood for social discord and danger.”<sup>4</sup> Bourgeois men found the bodies of prostitutes and the coincident sexual disorder they wrought aroused, as Smith-Rosenberg argued, “the quintessential symbol of social danger and disorder.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, their campaign to regulate the bodies of prostitutes, by implication claimed the right to control the sexuality of all women and men.<sup>6</sup>

The debates over the designation and creation of deviant or sexually dangerous spaces, like the red light district, involved an important cultural process in which groups of men struggled to understand and define the sexual expectations of their citizenry and the neighbourhoods they lived in. It also culturally marked off a social space intended for prostitutes, their disreputable customers and all of the social ills associated with the business of prostitution, such as gambling, drinking and physical violence. In his study of New York, Timothy Gilfoyle observed that “these neighbourhoods and their socially defined ‘illegitimate’ activities embodied what critics labelled the “negative vitality” of the city.”<sup>7</sup> Expectations for acceptable sexual behaviour within them framed much of the debate over segregation. The sometimes extreme arguments and actions of male reformers, police officers and customers reveal the complex gender struggle that ensued

as men fought to retain a hold over what they saw as a primarily male preserve – prostitution.

When the first debate over the segregation began in the early months of 1883, Rev. Silcox had only recently formed the Ministerial Association, an organisation of Protestant clergymen. The Association and Silcox's work in the anticipated the evangelical reform movement that would ignite nationally by the time of the second prostitution debate in 1903. However, in 1883 the presence of the prostitutes on Colony Street, Notre Dame Avenue, and Main Street in downtown Winnipeg was seen more as a public nuisance than anything else. But the proximity of the prostitutes were too close to the newly built Manitoba College for Silcox and others who oversaw the functions of the all male institution. As one anonymous man stated, "these women were in the habit of walking the streets and enticing young men into their rooms."<sup>8</sup> The Ministerial Association sincerely believed that the solution was to simply drive the prostitutes out of the city. Prostitutes were irredeemable in their eyes and their eradication from the city would protect society from their public and wanton sexuality. Silcox and his followers blamed the transient worker and the single working-class man for the demand for such pleasure establishments. Rev. J.E. Starr concurred, "Young men who are strangers here have no place to visit and thus being removed from the restraints of society, they allow themselves to be led rapidly on the road to ruin."<sup>9</sup>

From the 1880s to 1910, single young men were a conspicuous part of the mass migration into Canada and especially Winnipeg. Not only was their presence publicly obvious, they were often considered a dangerous element within a growing pool of ethnically diverse immigrants. In *Strangers at our Gates*, published in 1910, J.S.

Woodsworth, head of the All People's Mission in the North End of Winnipeg, reflected on the different advantages and disadvantages of the numerous single men arriving from Eastern Canada and Britain. Describing them as a decidedly "less favourable" class of immigrant, Woodsworth observed that they were not only "useless at home, they are worse than useless here."<sup>10</sup> Most of all, condemned Woodsworth, "the saloons gain most largely by their presence."<sup>11</sup> With not only a penchant towards drunkenness, these single men were thought to be attracted by gambling, crime, general vagrancy and the use of prostitutes.

In cities like Winnipeg, single men supported the growth of "pleasure" establishments such as brothels, saloons, gambling houses and pool halls all benefited by their arrival. As Artibise concluded, "Winnipeg had countless more men, a floating population, that did much to aggravate prostitution."<sup>12</sup> In her work on prostitution in the American West Anne Butler argued that prostitutes were instrumental in a culture where "a masculine ambience and a masculine workforce permeated the American frontier."<sup>13</sup> James Gray in *Red Lights on the Prairies* described this era as one "when slaking whiskey thirst and satisfying the sexual urges of the settlers combined to put a hotel bar on every second corner of all the cities and turned prostitution into a major industry."<sup>14</sup> The results frightened many members of the bourgeois class. In response, as Butler observed, they "felt the need to reaffirm old values, cherish them more dearly and impose them more stringently."<sup>15</sup> As frontier communities matured and families competed with single men for the use of spaces bourgeois male leaders began to dictate a Victorian value system that included sexual control.

Therefore, in 1883 the Ministerial Association's willingness to turn a blind eye to the fact that not just strangers to the city, but also citizens were frequenting the brothels, was caustically criticised by an anonymous alderman: "As for the opinion of the clergy on this matter, it is not much of real consequence, as they speak by the card and never reason at all."<sup>16</sup> He went on pragmatically, "So long as men are what they are and as long as women are what they are, the social evil will exist."<sup>17</sup> When it was pointed out that a number of the frequenters arrested in the house had been "mere boys", the alderman responded, "Some efforts should be made to check the course of these fast boys, either by publishing their names or giving them a short imprisonment."<sup>18</sup> Clergy, not associated with the Ministerial Association agreed with the anonymous man; Rev. Pitblado, for example, remarked, "Transgressors should be punished and the frequenters as well as the inmates [...] I do not believe justice is done when vengeance is wreaked only on the women."<sup>19</sup> However, imprisonment was an option that the police rarely used for men found in brothels.

In 1865 the Canadian Parliament passed the Contagious Diseases Act which allowed any suspicious woman or known prostitute to be arrested and given a medical examination for venereal disease. However, as historian Constance Backhouse observed, "no attempt was made to detain males who might have been affected with VD."<sup>20</sup> Two years later Parliament passed "An Act Respecting Vagrants" which not only confirmed prostitution as a criminal act and prostitutes criminals, but also gave the police the ability to charge men for violations of the act. As Backhouse explained, "In the eyes of the law, living off the avails of prostitution and frequenting brothels had been twinned with the selling of sexual services."<sup>21</sup> However, when it came to the enforcement of the law

“female prostitutes continued to be charged disproportionately to male customers,” despite the fact that in any given day “there had to be more customers than prostitutes potentially available for arrest.”<sup>22</sup> This discrimination against women was a common factor in Canadian law at this period. Says Backhouse, “Sexuality proved to be one of the broadest webs for nineteenth century legal entanglement [...] when, where and with whom women were permitted to engage sexually came under intense scrutiny.”<sup>23</sup> The need for sexual control over women by a male dominated legal system was reflected in the ways in which both the police and the judiciary handled prostitutes and not their frequenters.

While some men believed that arresting young men might slow down prostitution, it was a solution rarely used by the policing authority. As Police Chief John Murray explained to the reporter of the *Daily Times*, keepers of bawdy houses were fined \$40, while frequenters, if caught, were fined only \$10.<sup>24</sup> Many were let go simply because they claimed innocence by saying that they were unaware they had entered a bawdy house and the police could not prove otherwise. The police finally determined that the best solution would be to simply move the prostitutes beyond city limits where they would not interfere with the residents of the city and police authorities could control them and their customers with greater ease.

Consequently, in 1883 the early debate over the question of segregation offered no clear solution to the problem. Even among the clergy there seemed to be very little consensus of opinion seemed to exist. But every group agreed that, at the very least, the prostitutes needed to be moved away from the city.

Despite pressure from Rev. Silcox and his followers for more decisive action, the police encouraged the prostitutes quietly move from Colony Street. They took up residence on Nellie Street, in what is now the Wolseley district, which was then well beyond city limits. Their removal reflected the public attitude towards the Western outskirts and the flats, a marginal area well-known from press reports for its crime and general debauchery. Residents often complained to the newspapers that “night is often made hideous, [...] with drunken rowdyism, cursing, swearing, fighting, firing stones and tin cans through windows.” The brothels sometimes simply referred to as “the West Houses” soon made the western portion of the city unappealing to good moral citizens.

The result, later in 1883, was to physically move the wooden frame “houses of ill fame” even further west onto the prairie, far enough that the prostitutes could neither be seen nor heard. For the Anglo-Protestant elite the prairie was still an unsettled and wildly untamed land. Gerald Nueman in his article “Anomalous Zones” described such places, in which activities like prostitution occurred, “as a geographical area in which certain legal rules, otherwise regarded as embodying fundamental policies of the larger system, are locally suspended.”<sup>25</sup> Cultural commentators and residents generally saw the Western outskirts of Winnipeg an anomalous zone where those, whose conduct was as unsettling as the open space around them, could be sent without much consequence. As Sherene Razack argued “Race, Space and Prostitution”, such socially constituted spaces, like red light districts, involved a dialectical relationship between ideas of both space and sexuality in which “prostitution both defines the place and is defined by it.”<sup>26</sup> Like the wild prairie, the brothels and the untamed business of prostitution could conduct its shameful work without threatening the morality of the city or contaminating spaces

within it. For the Anglo-Protestant religious elite, whose main goal had been eradication, moving the brothels beyond the reaches of their congregation seemed to be a satisfactory conclusion.

For the next ten years the brothels flourished on the prairie, until the city limits expanded towards them, making their presence again a nuisance. In 1894, in agreement with the police, the brothel keepers willingly moved further west. Here, on Thomas Street<sup>27</sup>, they would remain for another ten years. By 1903, however, the population of Winnipeg had gone from 8,000 in 1881 to close to 43,000.<sup>28</sup> The brothels had also increased in number from seven in 1891 to eleven by 1903 with between ten to twenty inmates in each house.<sup>29</sup> As both the city and the red light district grew, conflict over the issue of segregation escalated once more between religious moral reformers and civic leaders.

By 1903 the reform movement was gaining momentum across Canada and the United States. As non-British immigrants poured into the country, many of them passed through Winnipeg on their way west and decided to stay.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, as the faces and languages of the people building homes and occupying neighbourhoods became more and more foreign, religious and moral reformers grew more passionate in their arguments, using the red light district as a symbol of the moral decline they saw arising from this influx of non-British residents. Reformers also found a more sympathetic audience among the Winnipeg citizenry than in 1883. As neighbourhoods quickly grew, Winnipeg expanded to Thomas Street. By 1903, crying out that the bawdy houses lowered their property; citizens began to take action against their disreputable female neighbours. Together with the religious leaders of the city, they mounted a campaign for

the eradication of the red light district that culminated in a volatile civic election in December of 1903.

During the fall leading up to the election, churches and theatres were filled to the doors with all male audiences listening to speeches which continually expounded the need for eliminating the brothels. According to one newspaper report, audiences were “far in excess of any mass meeting held in connection with city or provincial or even Dominion elections for years.”<sup>31</sup> At Grace Church in November of 1903, hundreds of men listened to the Rev. Bowles preach against the brothels. “The evil has threatened that if the laws are enforced things will be worse than ever, that it will encamp on the streets of the city, and burn it up. It is the threat of the modern Jezebel.”<sup>32</sup> Searching to replace the scarlet thread of shame with the white badge of purity, Protestant ministers all across the city begged the men of their congregations to follow the path of virtue and to vote with their consciences.

Protestant ministers also begged mothers to take their children in hand and guide them onto the paths of purity. When the debate over prostitution rose again, mothers were identified as the only ones who could prevent their children from going astray: “if mothers’ homes would treat each child’s confidence honestly and sympathetically they could lead them in the path of righteousness and purity.” The exclusion of women from reform meetings and the implied criticism of their mothering skills were intended to show women that their place was in the home. Despite their involvement as rescue officers and charity workers and their participation in earlier phases of the debate, the voice of middle-class women in the debate is barely heard over the cacophony of male voices. By the turn of the century middle-class men has claimed the debate over the red light district

to reset the political stage without the growing public presence of their mothers, wives and daughters.

Both religious reformers and civic leaders now believed that no respectable woman would take part in a debate concerning the subject of sex. As Razack observed, “Perhaps no space affirmed bourgeois respectability in the home and the middle-class man’s privileged connection to the modern state as did the places of prostitution and the bodies of prostitutes.”<sup>33</sup> Reasserting their patriarchal authority in public, middle-class men also reasserted their patriarchal place at home by attending meetings and sermons on the sanctity of the family and the purity of sexuality within it. By doing so, they effectively switched the debate over prostitution to the political domain of men only.

Rev. Silcox spoke in an even stronger voice in 1903. “The Scarlet Sin is rampant, allowed to thrive, to allure young men and old men and every home is in danger of the malaria of that foul and pestilent mass of moral rotteness.”<sup>34</sup> Young men, the future leaders of the city, also became one of the primary targets of sermons and reform speeches. The attack on male youth would, Backhouse argues, “not open up vistas for freer sexuality but to demand from men the same standard of purity which had long been applied to women.” For moral reformers, like Silcox, “eradication of prostitution, where men had long exercised their right to ‘sow a few wild oats’ would provide a promising start.” So, Silcox’s warnings that the Scarlet Sin lured men from the path of righteousness were intended to advance this greater cause, that young men should control their sexual passions. At the Holy Trinity Church the Archdeacon Fortin addressed his all-male congregation. “Young men, shun effeminacy and softness. Spend not too much time in sleep and foolish amusement [...] Young men who give their time and money to these

things must be content to swell the ranks of mediocrity.” Further, he preached “Still another [giant] is physical appetite and passion or the giant of self-indulgence. Lust is even worse than drink [...] it saps the life and ambition out of our brightest young men.”<sup>35</sup>

While young men were exhorted to control their sexual urges, the main responsibility for the expansion of the red light district was once again placed on the shoulders of police authority. The lack of law enforcement had turned a certain part of the city into a “reeking inferno, a cesspool of inequity, a source of disease, death and damnation.” Police were blamed for making it easy for young men “to do wrong.” Rev. MacMillan of St. Andrew’s Church expressed his anger over the failure of the police to arrest young men when they had been with prostitutes. “The great deterrent of dread of arrest is removed from the way of the young man void of understanding. The fear of open disgrace which otherwise might whip his silly soul into abstinence is removed and he goes gaily to his destruction.”<sup>36</sup> As the Rev. Bowles said “They [the police] had created a vice that was an open book to Winnipeg youth.”<sup>37</sup>

Young men were again identified in sermons and speeches as both the perpetrators and the victims of the growing prostitution business just as they had in 1883. But now in these public lectures a clear class line was drawn between those trying to clean up the neighbourhood and those who used the prostitutes. The preachers’ addresses, therefore, were not to accuse the young men of their congregations of using prostitutes, but rather to try to stop them from joining the swelling ranks of immoral men who were already breaking the city’s laws. Religious and reform leaders saw themselves and their congregations as models of sexual goodness. Wearing “the badge of white purity”,

religious leaders accused the police of allowing a certain class of men to 'invade' the better classes by not arresting them for frequenting brothels thereby making their unsuitability public.

Rev. Charles W. Gordon of St. Stephen's Church spoke candidly about the concerns that his class had over the possible "invasion" of immoral men into their ranks. Above all, he warned, "these men who practice this vice and who frequent houses of ill fame are received and admitted into the best society, where pure women and good men receive them on terms of equality."<sup>38</sup> The need to identify and remove these men, both by their arrest and by the destruction of the red light district, was paramount in preventing immorality from spreading even further.

The debate in 1903 was, above all, a power struggle. Shutting women allowed only middle-class men to battle for public control. For anti-segregationists, the destruction of prostitution symbolised their desire to maintain control over not just the overt sexuality of prostitutes, but also of their own wives and children, as well as the unmanly conduct of degenerate males. By gaining authority over spaces that were considered conducive to immorality and depravity, the male reformers wanted to reaffirm their patriarchal position in the city. Razack described the need to cleanse society of "degeneracy, abnormality and excess" as paramount in the desire to protect a "vigorous bourgeois body and state."<sup>39</sup> Further, she argued "the distinctions between the deviant and the respectable, the normal and the abnormal, the degenerate and the manly, all required an intense and close management of sex."<sup>40</sup>

Caught up in the fire and brimstone rhetoric of these sermons, the citizenry of Winnipeg agreed with their religious leaders. They proved it by electing Thomas Sharpe.

whom the Ministerial Association had chosen to lead their cause, into the office of Mayor in December of 1903. Sharpe had campaigned on a single issue, promising that once elected he would close down the red light district. On January 9, 1904, he fulfilled his commitment. At five o'clock in the evening, all the brothels on Thomas St. were raided and all the keepers and inmates were arrested and charged.

While the religious and reform leaders had argued for the equal treatment of the prostitutes and their male customers, remarkably no male customers were arrested. One newspaper reported that after the raid the names of the male customers were taken down and then they were told to go home. Another newspaper hinted that maybe the raid was not as much a surprise as the police had suggested and that both the prostitutes and their customers had been forewarned. Only four men - including a cook, a porter, an anonymous boarder from North Dakota and a male prostitute known as Peter Jolly - were arrested, while over a hundred women were charged with keeping a bawdy house or being an inmate of one.

Other events of the evening reported in the press also raise the possibility of a tip-off. A number of men flocked to Thomas Street to watch the raid for entertainment and then followed the hacks and buggies full of prostitutes as they made their way down Portage Avenue towards the courthouse. The *Winnipeg Tribune* reported that a "mob numbering some three thousand men" followed the women. Police eventually had to take action against the mob, as the whooping, yelling and general rowdiness impeded the policemen's job. They broke up the mob and, reported the *Tribune*, "The collection of degenerates who pursued their unmanly conduct around the front of the building [courthouse] with the tenacity of a pack of famished wolves were the objects of this

move.”<sup>41</sup> Previously, citizens had complained regularly about the noisy drunken men who filled taxis and streetcars on the way to the district and were visible all day and all night.

While Sharpe succeeded in shutting down the brothels on Thomas Street, he failed to drive the prostitutes out of the city. After the closure of their homes, the prostitutes spread into city centre, taking rooms in hotels and boarding houses for their business or conducting it openly on the street. 1908 again fed up the police and civic leaders with trying to control the prostitutes. The city and the police commission decided to offer the women their own neighbourhood.

Point Douglas was a small collection of houses, bounded like a triangle on one side by the Red River, on the other by the CPR main line station and on the third side by a mixed collection of factories and industrial plants. Unable to expand beyond an already confined space, the brothels would not interfere with any other residences either at that time or in the future. Winnipeg’s civic leaders realised that the problem of prostitution, while never fully eradicated could at least be minimised through the sacrifice of Point Douglas. By choosing the neighbourhood they consciously decided to mark off a space inside rather than outside the city in which deviancy could be visibly monitored and controlled. Thereby, other areas for expansion were secured for the peaceful settlement of law abiding citizens. The negotiations and verbal agreements between the prostitutes and civic officials created a dialectical relationship between space and power, which excluded some from community membership. As Razack had remarked concerning citizenship in a larger context, “space determines who belongs to the nation state and who does not, and consequently who has rights in the law and who does not.”<sup>42</sup>

The actions of the police and Mayor Evans outraged religious leaders. However, their protests fell on the deaf ears of a citizenry content to have the prostitutes closeted away in an obscure part of the city. Evans repeatedly defended his actions and that of the police, saying that “those who have spoken against this administration in this question have argued that the law is not being enforced but it seems to me that the thing more to be desired than the rigid enforcement of the law is the reaching of the results which the law aims to accomplish.”<sup>43</sup> Segregation had controlled the problem and would protect respectable neighbourhoods.

Regardless of their lack of public support, reformers in Winnipeg turned towards a national movement that by 1909 had gained a remarkable momentum. Canadian historian Marianna Valverde described the work of reformers at this period as “a vigorous campaign to raise the moral tone of Canadian society.”<sup>44</sup> In 1909, the National Moral Reform Council of Canada asked its secretary, the Rev. John G. Shearer to tour the vice districts in the country and along the American West Coast. So important was the subject of vice to the platform of the reform movement of Canada that, as Valverde suggests, “if it had not existed [they] would have had to invent it.”<sup>45</sup> By entering the dark spaces of corruption and degeneracy and emerging unharmed, both spiritually and physically, men like Shearer believed they were demonstrating to others their authority over those citizens living in such spaces who were unable to escape their circumstances, especially women and immigrants. As Razack argued, “once men leave the space of degeneracy, having survived it unscathed, they return to respectability.”<sup>46</sup>

When Shearer returned to Toronto, he had travelled through red light districts in a number of the major cities of Canada and the United States, including Montreal,

Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. To the horror of the local reformers in Winnipeg, Shearer declared that of all the cities he had visited, Winnipeg “has the rottenest things in regard to the question of vice to be found anywhere in Canada.”<sup>47</sup> Said Shearer of Winnipeg, “I and those who are working for the suppression of such immoral conditions have not created the cesspool but simply, for the moment, lifted the lid.”<sup>48</sup>

Once more, Winnipeg religious leaders, uncomfortable in the national spotlight, went on the attack against the sexual behaviour of women and men within these districts. Despite their embarrassment, the evangelical reformers of Winnipeg embraced Shearer’s conclusions with a powerful fervour and began another onslaught of sermons and speeches aimed to try to shut down the vice district once again. They also invited numerous American reform leaders, including B.B. Steadwell, President of the American Purity Federation to the city. In October of 1910 he addressed an all male congregation at both Broadway Methodist Church and Central Congregational Church. Preached Steadwell, “The strength of a country lies in its men. [...] I consider that it is the men who set the standard in a community. It is the men’s money that keep going the ‘hell home’. These houses would not exist without men to support them.”<sup>49</sup> The newly-formed Purity League of Winnipeg established a set of by-laws, one of which stated how much they “deeply regret that adultery as well as licentiousness among unmarried men are not offenses under the laws of Canada.”<sup>50</sup>

The shame cast on men who used prostitutes was more palpable in the sermons and speeches given in 1910 than at any other time. A.R. Farwell, a concerned citizen, declared that “In his opinion it would be a greater blessing to shoot a man through the

heart than to see him afflicted with the disease that accompanies this social evil and rot a man's body to death." Further, Farwell concluded, "the toughest problem before the citizens of Winnipeg was for a man to govern his own passions of lust and devilry."<sup>51</sup> In fact, vice was considered to be an important cause of many medical deficiencies. The Reverend Ernest Bell quoted to his congregation "statistics concerning the terrible effects, both mental and physical, of a life of vice, he showed that 25% of the surgical operations on blind, insane or other affected people were the result of immoral practices."<sup>52</sup>

As men of the pulpit thundered forth their denunciations, the province realised that only a Royal Commission could confirm the validity of Shearer's claim concerning Winnipeg's rotten condition. At the same time, the Rev. Frederic DuVal of Knox Presbyterian Church published a pamphlet offering his views on social vice in Winnipeg. Three notable features ran through all the speeches, commission evidence and writings exploring men's sexual promiscuity in Winnipeg. First, like those solutions offered in 1883 and 1903, reform leaders still believed that men needed to be treated by the law the same as prostitutes. At Grace Church on November 28, Professor Osborne believed that "the remedy for prostitution and attendant evils lay in making the men who visited the houses equally responsible with the women."<sup>53</sup> Although the police were called on time and time again by those involved in the reform movement to do something about it, they never did.

When the 1910 Royal Commission was established to investigate the legality of the passive segregation policy, the Chief of Police, John C. McRae, and Constable William Leach, head of the Morality department, were asked again and again why they

were not arresting the men along with the prostitutes. Both Leach and McCrae suggested that their hands were tied. "It has been the subject of conversation for many years as to the arrest of such persons and we have been advised that we ought not to arrest persons unless it has been established that they are habitual frequenters, otherwise you would have to commit perjury against men of whom you know nothing."<sup>54</sup>

Leach and McCrae indicated also that while they could arrest those men considered habitual frequenters, "no self-respecting officer wants to say that he believes that [the man] is a frequenter."<sup>55</sup> Another reason for McCrae and Leach's reluctance to arrest men was that the law disabled them from arresting any man that simply walked out of a bawdy house, unless there was proof he had actually paid for the services of a prostitute. When asked, hypothetically, if a male frequenter, known to have visited the houses more than once, was found in the bedroom of a prostitute could he then be arrested, Leach testified, no, "it would not be sufficient from past experiences."<sup>56</sup> Also the two men testified that violent assaults against officers earlier in the year had discouraged confrontation. The police had established a series of pickets outside brothels in Point Douglas in order to record names of men going in and out. Beyond the problem of men giving false names, constables had been brutally assaulted on this picket line and, as McCrae stated at the Commission, the idea was quickly abandoned as a result.<sup>57</sup>

The brutality of the men attending the bawdy houses is the second notable feature of the 1910 debates. The evidence given at the commission constructs a view of the red light district in Point Douglas that was unavailable in either 1883 or 1903. John Mitchell, a builder and millwright who had lived in Point Douglas, gave evidence concerning the change in his neighbourhood when the prostitutes moved in. "The men began to flock

around in automobiles and cabs of all descriptions.”<sup>58</sup> Another resident, J.W. Battershill, complained not only of the orgies and noise but also of the “many hundreds of curiosity seekers and sightseers.”<sup>59</sup> Dr. McIntyre of the Purity League of Winnipeg observed that anywhere between 200 and 600 men visited the vice district daily.<sup>60</sup>

Whether the numbers of the men who visited the neighbourhood were inflated or not, Chief McCrae was reluctant to make any conclusions in attempting to determine the type of men who visited brothels. However, when asked how the rapid growth of the city affected the morality question, McCrae testified that the arrival of single young men was a serious problem. “Well from the congregation here of persons from any parts of the world and from all over the continent, chiefly young men, and a great many young men, [...] they are congregated here to a greater degree in Winnipeg. There are more here than in the Eastern Cities. That increases the difficulty of settling the question of social vice.”<sup>61</sup> When asked if unmarried young men contributed to the difficulty, McCrae answered yes. When he asked if he thought it would ever change, McCrae answered, “never.”<sup>62</sup>

More than ten residents of Point Douglas also testified at the Commission, and there appeared to be a consensus of opinion regarding the violent characteristics of the men who had invaded their neighbourhood. First, good proportions of them were drunk. Brothels were common places to acquire alcohol, no matter what the age of the man. A streetcar conductor, T. G. Packer, upset by the numbers of young drunken men boarding his car, wrote to city council complaining that, “rigs and vehicles are continually visiting that neighbourhood and a great supply of liquors are left for what purpose one does not have to ask.”<sup>63</sup> Further, argued Packer, intoxicated young men often found themselves

penniless, robbed of their money not only by prostitutes, but also by other male customers. Said Packer, "Our police or officials or authorities should stop this crime of lust and theft that is conducted in those Dens of Vice."<sup>64</sup> When Battershill was asked during his testimony at the Commission whether he had seen any drunkenness evident in the neighbourhood, he answered: "Lots of drunkenness." Further, he testified, "I have seen boys of 16 years of age going into those houses and be thrown out in an hour as drunk as a lord, into a ditch."<sup>65</sup> While men were continually inebriated in the district they also exposed themselves in public. John Murray testified that he had seen "lots of men drunk and showing their person on the street."<sup>66</sup> And John Mitchell stated, "I have seen men exposing their person, right before our house, and Mr. Mutch's house, right across the street."<sup>67</sup>

Sexual assaults on women who were not prostitutes, but who continued to live in Point Douglas after the prostitute's arrival, were frequent and often brutal. Murray testified that men had approached his wife in her back yard and his two young daughters, when sitting on their front porch, had been offered money to perform "improper conduct."<sup>68</sup> Other men testified that their wives and daughters had been approached on the street. "As to my daughters, they have been frequently insulted passing to and fro to Higgins Street to get on the car."<sup>69</sup> As well, there was testimony included the horrors of strange men walking straight into their houses. "We have been very much annoyed," testified Battershill, "by drunken men coming there and asking for prostitutes, time and gain we have had one man in particular walk right into the dining room when we were having dinner."<sup>70</sup> Thornton Simmons, a plumber who still lived in the district testified, "I myself have seen a couple of young girls accosted there, by I suppose, they would call

themselves, men.”<sup>71</sup> Finally, Mr. Hossock declared that Point Douglas had become a place “where a man cannot have his wife and family there without having them assaulted by every rowdy that like to come along.”<sup>72</sup>

Two former female residents, Mrs. Morefield and Mrs. Bradley, also gave evidence at the inquiry. Their direct contact with men who had come into the district in search of prostitutes was very disturbing. Mrs. Morefield, whose husband worked at the nearby Ogilivie Flour Mills, testified, “I myself have run into the arms of men – fools I might call them – and it has not been nice at all.”<sup>73</sup> Mrs. Bradley’s testimony was even more horrifying. Having moved to Point Douglas only a few months before the prostitutes arrived she and her husband, a machinist at a carriage and buggy factory, as well as their four children, were reluctant to move. In the middle of April of 1910, three men walked straight into her home where she was alone with one of her children. Initially believing them to be delivering her newspaper she quickly discovered they were there for more ominous purposes. “I went in through the front room, and as I went into the front room a man caught hold of my dress and he said, ‘don’t be scared,’ and he said to the other two, ‘I say, come in, it’s all right.’”<sup>74</sup> While the other two men came and sat down on her couch, Mrs. Bradley was asked to lie down on the floor. “The one who was holding my dress got off the chair and tore my waist from the shoulder, and tore my skirt from the waist.”<sup>75</sup> She does not tell further what they did, but it appeared that she had been raped. Mrs. Bradley testified that after the incident “they put dollar bills on the table, a two-dollar bill was on the top, there were six or seven dollar bills, they also wanted drinks.”<sup>76</sup> When the men started at her again, she managed to escape from the house and look for help. The police, however did nothing, and reported that they had

never heard of the incident. Mrs. Bradley testified that she had to go and stay in a hospital for a period of time as a result of the incident and was unable to follow up on her report. In the end the police admitted that while a report had been given “nothing could be done.” In fact, one officer said to her “you can’t expect the police at your door all the time.”<sup>77</sup> Mrs. Bradley faced other attempts of men trying to get into her house, breaking in her back doors and wandering around in her back yard and exposing themselves to her children.

Beyond worrying about the sexual safety of their wives, the issue of children, particularly young boys, living in the neighbourhood as witness to the corruption going on around them was of grave concern for both the residents and the reform leaders and was the third notable feature of the debates of 1910. Of his children going outdoors in the evenings, Murray said “We cannot allow our children to come through the locality at night. We are scared of them being molested by drunken men.”<sup>78</sup> Father Cherrier, the parish minister for the Point Douglas neighbourhood also testified to this concern. “The moral impression was that it was a very undesirable neighbourhood and that the children would be greatly exposed, as children very often go in that direction and cannot always be followed by parents, and I have warned my people against the danger of the neighbourhood.”<sup>79</sup> Reform leaders like J.S. Woodsworth, who took numerous surveys of the district, testified, “my work to a very large extent was among the children. We felt that the influence there was very demoralizing.”<sup>80</sup>

As in 1903, mothers and the effect their teachings had on their children became part of the blame for errant young men and women. An overwhelming concern for Winnipeg’s youth prompted the Reverend Frederic DuVal to publish a pamphlet entitled

“The Problem of Social Vice in Winnipeg.” By 1910 DuVal was the leading voice in the anti-segregation movement and a prominent member of Winnipeg’s elite. His pamphlet, which explored the medical, legal and theological implications of prostitution on the lives of Winnipeg’s youth, was directed, in particular, towards the young men of the city.

While girls needed to remain pure and virtuous, the need for boys to be educated along similar lines was considered more urgent. “We are discussing sound policy, not only for the present, but for men as yet unborn.”<sup>81</sup>

DuVal’s thirty page pamphlet explored all aspects of social vice such as the faults of segregation policies enacted in Berlin and New York but his main focus was on the vice in Winnipeg. “It was reported to me that young men and even young women drove by there out of curiosity [...] and so got their imaginations soiled.”<sup>82</sup> Over a thousand mothers and sisters signed a petition praying for “the abolishing of that resort [...] in which boys were being led to shameful destruction.”<sup>83</sup> Just as the poorer districts of the city needed to be cleansed of various social vices, so too did the men who occupied those lower class neighbourhoods. “We ought to labour to help men up and out of an unworthy past into noble ventures of self-improvement.”<sup>84</sup>

DuVal also sought to abolish the belief that the social evil was necessary for single young unmarried men lacking a female partner. “It is an entirely erroneous and unfounded statement that when, for various causes, marriage has not taken place, it is necessary to provide a substitute for physiological reasons.”<sup>85</sup> Further, DuVal wrote, “The horrible *furor sexualis* that possesses some is a pathological condition due principally to the use of aphrodisiacs, indulgence in vulgar imaginations and cultivation of lust.”<sup>86</sup> He and his followers believed that when medicine, law and religion were

united together in the training of a child's life, control would be successfully established by adulthood. Otherwise "excited lust has little conscience to which moral suasion can appeal."<sup>87</sup>

While the discourse surrounding the debates in 1909 and 1910, especially on the need for sexual control among young men, was far more dramatic in tone and language than in 1883 or 1903, the reform movement failed to close down the brothels in Point Douglas. In the civic election of that year, Mayor Evans was returned and the passive segregation policy remained intact. After this period, the issue of prostitution never reached the heated heights it had between 1883 and 1910. World War One marked an important passage in which the business of prostitution changed. Stronger uses of the Contagious Diseases Acts regarding VD because of the threat to the health of soldiers along with the increasing control of the sex trade by male pimps impacted and changed the business. Rhonda Hinthner's article on the district post-1910 shows the changes that occurred as pimps became more visible in the sex trade and exerted stronger control over it.<sup>88</sup>

Like sexually deviant men, sexually deviant women were used to shape modern ideas on the appropriate roles of men and women in their culture and in their day to day lives. However, while both prostitutes and bourgeois women attempted to assert their own voices in the debate over segregation they were culturally and socially victims of the limitations of their gender. As Walkowitz argued, "Although they [women] tried to set the standards of sexual conduct, they did not control the instruments of state that would ultimately enforce these norms."<sup>89</sup> When the debates over prostitution reached fevered heights in 1883, 1903 and 1908-10, the systematic shutting out of women from mass

meetings, church sermons and council meetings was an important means by which male religious and civic leaders established their authority over the broader issue of sexual conduct. Negotiating with the prostitutes, male leaders, at the same time, decided that while their presence could be tolerated, prostitutes must be limited in visibility and movement within the city. Ironically, prostitutes were removed from the urban landscape, living landlocked in a small community directly in the centre of it.

By establishing themselves as the authoritative voices on prostitution, as Razack argues, male leaders used prostitutes to assert their dominance over many social and cultural issues like sexual control, gender, race and class.<sup>90</sup> It gave civic leaders the impetus to try to control the sexuality of other men, especially the single young transient worker whose uncontrollable nature was also linked to a marked degree of violence against prostitutes and those mistaken as prostitutes. Therefore, the social relations between concepts of space, sexual danger and respectability were integrally related to prostitutes and the need for a close management of sex. Male leaders, both religious and civic, used prostitution as a means of regulating both private and public space thereby affirming their patriarchal position within both spheres.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> City of Winnipeg Archives (CWA), City Council Communications, No. 3212: April 9, 1883.
- <sup>2</sup> *Daily Times (DT)*, April 9, 1883
- <sup>3</sup> Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (Montreal and Kingston: University of McGill Press, 1975), 246
- <sup>4</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 48.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 181
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> Timothy Gilfoyle, "Policing Sexuality." In *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 301.
- <sup>8</sup> *DT*, April 6, 1883.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, April 9, 1883.
- <sup>10</sup> J. S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates* (Winnipeg: Younh People's Forward Movement Department of the Methodist Church, 1909; reprint by Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 49. (page citations are to the reprint edition)
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Artibise, *Winnipeg*, 250.
- <sup>13</sup> Anne Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-1890* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 1.
- <sup>14</sup> James Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies* (Toronto: Macmillan and Company, 1971), 5.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.
- <sup>16</sup> *DT*, April 6, 1883
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

- 
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., April 9, 1883.
- <sup>20</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth - Century Canada* (Toronto: Osgoode Society, 1991), 235.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 236.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 237.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.,. 327
- <sup>24</sup> *DT*, April 9, 1883.
- <sup>25</sup> Gerald Nueman, "Anomalous Zones", *Stanford Law Review* 48, (1991), 1201.
- <sup>26</sup> Sherene Razack, "Race, Space and Prostitution: The Making of a Bourgeois Subject", *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 10, no.2 (1998), 356.
- <sup>27</sup> Now Minto Street.
- <sup>28</sup> For a complete chart of the population growth in Winnipeg between 1871 and 1921 see Table 7 in : Artibise, *Winnipeg*, 132.
- <sup>29</sup> Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM),1891 Census, Ward 3, Pages 39-41; CWA, 1904 Tax Assessment Roll, Ward 3, Rolls 304-323.
- <sup>30</sup> According to Alan Artibise over half a million immigrants passed through Winnipeg between 1891 and 1911.
- <sup>31</sup> *Winnipeg Tribune (WT)* , November 18, 1903.
- <sup>32</sup> *Manitoba Free Press (MFP)*, November 16, 1903.
- <sup>33</sup> Razack, "Race Space and Prostitution," 361.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> *MFP*, November 16, 1903.
- <sup>36</sup> *WT*, November 16, 1903.
- <sup>37</sup> *MFP*, November 19, 1903.
- <sup>38</sup> *WT*, November 16, 1903.
- <sup>39</sup> Razack, "Race Space and Prostitution," 361.

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *WT*, January 9, 1904.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>43</sup> *MFP*, December 7, 1910.

<sup>44</sup> Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Valverde, *Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 79.

<sup>46</sup> Razack, "Race, Space, and Prostitution", 357.

<sup>47</sup> *The Evening Telegram*, November 12, 1910

<sup>48</sup> *WT*, November 19, 1910.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., October 3, 1910

<sup>50</sup> *MFP*, October 4, 1910.

<sup>51</sup> *Winnipeg Telegraph*, October 3, 1910.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *MFP*, November 21, 1910.

<sup>54</sup> Manitoba Legislative Library (MLL), Royal Commission on Social Vice in Winnipeg 1910, Evidence Book 1, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Book 6, 41.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Book 3, 215.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Book 1, 43-45.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Book 6, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Book 6, 14.

<sup>60</sup> *MFP*, October 4, 1910. Seargent McElhany of the Salvation Army made a similar observation.

---

<sup>61</sup> MLL, Royal Commission, Book 1, 52-53.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> CWA, City Council Communications, No.8718: October 1, 1909.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> MLL, Royal Commission, Book 6, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Book 8, 600.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Book 6, 38.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Book 8, 610.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 611.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 612.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Book 6, 24.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>81</sup> MLL, Reverend Frederic DuVal *The Problem of Social Vice in Winnipeg* (Prepared by the Moral and Social Reform Committee, 1910), 9.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 13.

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>88</sup> Rhonda Hither, "The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg: The Culture of Prostitution in the Point Douglas Segregated District, 1909-1912", *Manitoba History*, No. 41 (Spring/Summer 2001), 11.

<sup>89</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 7.

<sup>90</sup> Razack, "Race, Space and Prostitution", 357.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

It is a subject which I do not wish to discuss at any further length, and you will, therefore, please excuse me.

-Winnipeg brothel keeper, *Daily Times*, April, 1883

To the chagrin of moral reformers, the 1910 Royal Commission failed to change the views of city leaders and law officials regarding prostitution. The leaders of the city by that time felt they had a firm handle on the problem. Judge Hugh Amos Robson who presided over the Commission concluded that no grafting had occurred between police and prostitutes and that everything had been done legally and above board. However, after the ruling in 1910 prostitution continued to be an issue and Point Douglas a point of contention between civic and religious leaders. The debates between them never reached the heated heights of those between 1883 and 1910. Nor would the prostitutes be shut down and re-segregated along with such spectacular news coverage. But, right up to the present time, Point Douglas and the surrounding neighbourhood has been classified by police and city officials as a problem area with a large concentration of prostitutes still conducting business there.

As early as the 1870s the problem of prostitution in Winnipeg alarmed and frightened many citizens. Métis and native women, Winnipeg's first street prostitutes, suffered greatly not only because of their ethnicity and social dislocation, but also

because of their position as women. Alcoholism, unemployment and social prejudice were common reasons for Métis and native women to turn to prostitution. For many it was simply a way to stay alive. As seen in the cases of Marie Trottier and the Thomas sisters, rape and abortion among prostitutes was not an unfamiliar aspect of the business. Receiving fair treatment from the judiciary, however, was complicated not only because of their position as Métis women in a growing white society, but because of the social stigma attached to those who exchanged sex for money, food or alcohol. The fact that Winnipeg's dominant Anglo-Protestant classes regarded prostitutes not only as an inferior class, but also as women of the lowest character, contributed to their inability to receive fair treatment at hands of an all male judiciary. The identification of the flats, both in downtown Winnipeg and on the outskirts of the city, as a marginal space full of crime and corruption, reinforced prostitutes' social dislocation in the city and branded them as outsiders, disenfranchised from the city and the people who lived there.

By the 1880s, young white women became increasingly more visible in Winnipeg as the city grew and the demand for cheap labour grew along with it. Working in factories, hotels, and restaurants, and as domestic servants in middle class homes, more and more single young women left their family circle to set out on their own. Winnipeg's bourgeois classes were worried for the safety of these young women who lived alone and walked the city streets unchaperoned. Single men, who were arriving in search of work, as well as the arrival of "suspect" European immigrants, seemed to increase the sexual vulnerability of single girls on their own. The newspaper stories of Feigi Getzel and Bertha Johnston encapsulated the fears growing over the rapid commercialisation of the city. Unscrupulous and immoral characters in the shape of the Braunstein's, Mother

McKenzie, her son Tosh and daughter Sis, were used to highlight the sexual dangers lurking in the city for innocent girls like Getzel and Johnston. Then again, when it became clear that some girls such as Johnston, were not quite as innocent as they first appeared, the bourgeois class, in particular female members of it, had to determine the realities of life facing single working girls alone and adrift in the city and how best to deal with those realities.

Bourgeois women opened rescue homes and shelters initially to provide a safe family atmosphere where single working women of good character could come in the evenings to keep each other company away from the dangers of the streets. The Women's Christian Union Home was one of the first homes established for such a purpose and the female members believed they were lending a motherly hand to girls they described as "unfortunates." When it became clear that many coming to the home were, in fact, pregnant, the WCU began to change their idea about who fit under the label of unfortunate. The large number of unwed pregnant girls forced the WCU to change their mission for the Home forcing them to re-evaluate whom they were helping. As they redefined their vision of the unfortunate, they also established a class hierarchy where girls who engaged in consensual sex were separated from those who sold their sexual services for money. By doing so, they solidified and followed through with the notion that prostitutes were beyond their help, irredeemable and morally unstable, ostracising them further from WCUH's help. Between these two classes there existed the shadowy figures of the casual prostitute, those girls who sold their bodies from time to time. This group seemed, to bourgeois women, to resemble too closely their working-class sisters. Their difficulty in identifying the casual prostitute was due, in part, by the WCU's failure

to understand why some girls might be forced to choose such an avenue now and then. Low wages, the sexual misconduct of employers and the social disadvantages working women faced were not understood or, if they were, not acknowledged by the WCU or the larger bourgeois society as reasons for women of good character to suddenly go astray.

However, there were a few reform groups who did identify several of the problems working class women faced. The Women's Christian Temperance Union targeted an all-male and sexually discriminatory judicial and prison system. As well, the WCTU believed that alcohol contributed to recidivism among prostitutes. However, the opening schedule of their home, combined with a belief that giving up drink was the only way for a woman to find salvation from her wayward life, failed to make the Door of Hope a viable refuge for prostitutes in need. The Salvation Army's Rescue Home, which was not a bourgeois institution, declared that they would help prostitutes and other victims of a fallen lifestyle. However, due to the strong religious foundation of the Rescue Home, many women were turned away because of their unwillingness to convert. This unwillingness was real as well as imagined. The doctrine of the Salvation Army, articulated by its founder General Booth, believed that many women, especially prostitutes, had gone too far into their sinful existence to ever be lead out of it by the spiritual guidance of Army officers. Therefore, the Army was predisposed to believe that prostitutes were beyond their help. Partnered with bourgeois institutions like the WCUH, the Army was influenced by their characterisation of the unfortunate, as well as criticised by them for not helping those girls they cast aside.

The casual prostitute was a shadowy figure, both metaphorically and in reality. Stories told in Winnipeg newspapers appear to indicate that meagre wages was a key

motive behind many young women's move into the business. The arrest records for Winnipeg within a ten-year time span do not help to identify the casual prostitute. While single women not working in brothels were charged with vagrancy, the numbers remain low in comparison with the brothel keepers and more professional prostitutes arrested on a more consistent basis. This does not mean that casual prostitution did not exist, but rather, it shows how difficult it was to identify them both then and now. By the 1900s, it was easier for many of the organisations to change the focus of their work to the respectable white-collar female worker. The Young Women's Christian Association and other groups severed any ties with groups that might have helped casual prostitutes off the street. This, in turn, gave way to an increased focus by bourgeois society on those prostitutes easily identified the professional ones who lived in brothels.

In 1883 a group of brothels was firmly established in downtown Winnipeg. By this date their presence was causing considerable trouble. The women involved in the business became the focus of many debates and unofficial city segregation policies. But these women were not passive participants in their own history. Their ethnicity and social dislocation were important factors in their lives and in creating a subculture in which they and their business flourished. Many of the prostitutes were American by birth with close to one third African American. Such a large concentration of American prostitutes suggests that such women were already involved in the business by the time they moved to Winnipeg.

Many factors were involved in forcing some women into prostitution. Family pathology played a part, as sisters and mothers and daughters often worked together. Some prostitutes were forced to take their children to prison with them introducing them

to the prison system at a young age. Newspaper stories indicate that for some women prostitution was a choice because of their desperate circumstances. Financial need, alcohol and drug addiction, along with a predilection for crime, were all-important factors shaping a woman's propensity to turn to the business. For some women prostitution offered its own personal and financial awards. An alternative to the oppressive role of wife and mother, brothel keeping could be economically satisfying. Madams commanded attention to their business and were key players in negotiations over segregation. Strong social networks not unlike families emerged within this marginal position, regardless of the motives the women had for entering the trade. For some girls it was a chance to have a family they could not find elsewhere.

Prostitutes were quite aware of their socially marginal position within the city. Confrontations in public between residents and prostitutes were not uncommon. Testing the limits of their boundaries, they crossed over into respectable spaces and confronted residents shopping in stores. In some cases they hurled insults at passers by, including the occasional funeral procession. Recognising that they would never be part of the respectable classes, they actively participated in the designation of their own space, in particular, Point Douglas. Occupying a space in the heart of Winnipeg, the women finally found a neighbourhood where they could live in a somewhat peaceful conjunction with the city while maintaining control, albeit a limited control, over different aspects of their business.

The negotiations for the neighbourhood of Point Douglas marked the end of a forty year long debate between city leaders, police officials, prostitutes and religious and moral reformers. In 1883, due to their visibility and proximity to Manitoba College,

questions over what to do with the prostitutes were raised. From that point forward male leaders began a series of discussions that involved questions of appropriate sexual behaviour between men and women. Young single men, in particular, were targeted as one of the key contributors to the ongoing growth of prostitution in the city.

Understanding that the question of segregation was as much about control over public space as it was over sexuality substantiates the claim that prostitution was the biggest issue causing the most conflict among the ruling elite in Winnipeg. Culturally marking off a social space in the city as degenerate, civic leaders asserted their voices of authority both publicly and privately by claiming victory with the establishment of Point Douglas as an “unofficial” red light district. Here, they believed, the socially deviant would be cordoned off freeing the rest of the city from their dangerous behaviour.

The move to Point Douglas had a significant impact in marking off the space as sexually dangerous and, as Gilfoyle said, an area of “negative vitality.” Choosing to be socially excluded from the rest of the city prostitutes believed that they had secured for themselves a measure of protection for their business. City leaders, however, realised that by segregating prostitutes they could, to a limited extent, segregate some of the other social ills of the city. This cultural marking off of a social space created a subculture of the marginal - brothel keepers, prostitutes and their disreputable customers. Prostitution along with gambling, drinking and physical violence characterised the neighbourhood in 1910 and continues to characterise the area over ninety years later.

Most significantly, city leaders recognised that they could not enforce sexual control over a whole city. Consequently they exploited prostitutes to their political advantage. For these men, prostitutes became cultural representations of the sexual

corruption of a modern city. Only their bourgeois sense of morality, they argued, could solve the problem and restore order. Segregation was the most efficient means by which the Anglo-Protestant elite could assert their cultural superiority and moral sensibility over a growing modern city.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

#### Archival Collections:

##### Manitoba. Legislative Library:

Royal Commission on Social Vice in Winnipeg, 1910. Books 1-10

##### Manitoba. Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM):

1871 Red River Census

1881 Winnipeg Census

1891 Winnipeg Census

1901 Winnipeg Census

Minnie Julia Beatrice Campbell Collection

Police Court Record Book for the City of Winnipeg

Women's Christian Union Collection

Women's Christian Temperance Union Collection

##### National Archives:

Immigration Records for the Girls' Home of Welcome

Salvation Army Heritage Centre Papers from Major David Pitcher

##### Winnipeg. City of Winnipeg Archives (CWA):

City Council Communications

City Council Minutes

Tax Assessment Rolls, 1891-1905, Ward 3 and 1908-1912, Ward 5.

### Published Sources:

DuVal, Reverend Frederic B. *The Problem of Social Vice in Winnipeg*. Prepared by the Moral and Social Reform Committee, 1910.

Newspapers:

*Winnipeg Daily Times*  
*Winnipeg Daily Tribune*  
*Manitoba Free Press*  
*Winnipeg Telegram*

Woodsworth, J. S.. *Strangers Within Our Gates*. Winnipeg: Young People's Forward Movement Department of the Methodist Church, 1909; reprint by Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975.

**Secondary Sources:**

Artibise, Alan F.J. *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975.

Backhouse, Constance. *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth - Century Canada*. Toronto: The Osgoode Society, 1991.

Backhouse, Constance. "Nineteenth- Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society." *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 18 (November, 1985): 387-423.

Baldwin, Peter. "Antiprostitution Reform and the Use of Public Space in Hartford, Connecticut, 1878-1914." *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 6, (September, 1997): 709-739.

Butler, Anne M. *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-90*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

Davies, Andrew. "'These Viragoes Are No Less Cruel Than The Lads': Young Women, Gang Violence in Late Victorian Manchester and Salford." *British Journal of Criminology* 39, no.1 (1999): 72-89.

Dubinsky, Karen and Adam Givertz. "'It was Only a Matter of Passion': Masculinity and Sexual Danger." In *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*, ed. Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan & Nancy M. Forestell, 65-79. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Ens, Gerhard J.. *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

- Fingard, Judith. *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*. Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1989.
- Gilfoyle, Timothy J. "Policing Sexuality." In *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Gilfoyle, Timothy J. *City of Eros: New York, Prostitution and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*. New York: Norton, 1992.
- Gray, James. *Red Lights on the Prairies*. Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1971.
- Hinther, Rhonda L. "The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg: The Culture of Prostitution in the Point Douglas Segregated District, 1909-1912." *Manitoba History* 41 (Spring/Summer 2001): 2-13.
- Hubbard, Phil. "Red-Light districts and Toleration Zones: geographies of female street prostitution in England and Wales." *Area* 29, no.2 (1997): 129- 140.
- Kunzel, Regina. *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalisation of Social Work, 1890-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Levesque, Andree. *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991.
- Leslie, Genevieve. "Domestic Service in Canada." In *Women At Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, Bonnie Shepard. Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1974.
- McLaren, John. "Recalculating the Wages of Sin: The Social and Legal Construction of Prostitution in Canada, 1850-1920." Canadian Legal History Project, 1992.
- McPherson, Kathryn, Cecilia Morgan and Nancy M. Forestell, ed. *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne. *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Nilsen, Deborah. "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920," *In her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in British Columbia*, ed. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess: Victoria: Camosun College, 1980.
- Razack, Sherene. "Race, Space, and Prostitution: The Making of a Bourgeois Subject." *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 10, no. 2 (1998): 338-376.

- Rosen, Ruth. "Go West Young Woman? Prostitution on the Frontier." *Reviews in American History* 14, no. 1 (March, 1986): 91-96.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.
- Strange, Carolyn. *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.
- Valverde, Mariana. *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991.
- Walkowitz, Judith K. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Walkowitz, Judith K. *City of Dreadful Delights: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Whitehead, Judy. "Bodies Clean and Unclean: Prostitution, Sanitary Legislation and Respectable Femininity in Colonial North India." *Gender and History* 7, no. 1 (1995): 41-63.