I always said that we didn’t need a union there because we were treated so well. It was a nice place . . . I had nice friends. . . . Plus we were fairly well paid. A lot of today’s troubles come from unions.

Management had the whole picture; they knew the situation best.¹

*These retrospective observations* of former workers at a Peterborough clock factory reflect common characterizations of this workplace by women who once assembled the minute, inner workings of the famous Westclox alarm clocks and watches. Their positive memories of Westclox and the view that workers there owed their managers “respect” were repeated by many other former workers in interviews. Their collective characterization of Westclox must be analyzed in the context of the operation of paternalism in the Westclox plant for a period of over thirty years. Within this small Ontario manufacturing city, no other factory with hundreds of employees could claim as effective a management strategy, or as loyal and respectful a workforce. While this cannot be measured ‘objectively’ through statistics such as workplace longevity, it can be measured subjectively through the way in which former Westclox workers construct their memories, endorsing the familial metaphor promoted by the company.²

It is my intention to examine the rise and decline of paternalism in this factory, exploring both managerial intentions and worker responses to paternalism, with special emphasis on women’s understanding of the workplace hierarchy. A long chronology of varied paternalisms, based on the axes of race, class, and gender, has been documented in North American labour history.³ As recent studies have argued, we need to pay close attention to historical specificity in our analyses of industrial paternalism;
local studies like this one may thus provide clues to the common processes creating consent in the workplace, and to the seemingly tenacious persistence of class and gender inequalities in the workplace.

Attention to the material context and economic pressures, as well as the ideological mechanisms sustaining paternalism, is essential if we are to address these broader questions. Westclox’s initial success in this ethnically homogeneous, small Ontario city emerged from its overlapping strategies of nineteenth-century paternalism and twentieth-century welfare capitalism, made possible by the distinct material and cultural conditions in this workplace, industry, and locale. Secondly, paternalism was a managerial strategy that embodied a gender ideology of male dominance; its operation was intertwined with and aided by a gender hierarchy found in family, wider community, and the workplace, which ultimately supported women’s secondary status as daughters in the Westclox family.

Finally, women’s own memories of work at the Westclox illuminate the way in which workers understood, utilized, negotiated, and eventually repudiated paternalism; their recollections suggest a more complex relationship between manager and worker than mere rebellion against, or sycophantic acceptance of, the company’s aims. In trying to map out workers’ responses to paternalism, oral history is especially useful as a means of probing the subjective areas of experience and feeling.4 (See Appendix A for a description of the interviews.) The structure of memory and the emphasis, tone, and language of interviews provide insight into how experience and ideology shaped the outlook and choices of women workers, and thus how accommodation operated in the factory. If we are to comprehend working-class support for the economic status quo, and attempt to theorize about consent in the workplace,5 then we must also listen to the voices of the workers who embraced or at least tolerated paternalism as part of their daily efforts to survive the difficulties of wage labour.

Paternalism and Welfare Capitalism

Often applied to nineteenth-century industrial experiments, the term paternalism conjures up images of a single entrepreneur who “ruled his works and his workers directly from some large baronial home over-
looking the industrial village.” Drawing on previous forms of deference within the church, the community, or especially the household, the factory owner attempted to incorporate these social relations into the factory regime. British and American historians have explored the way in which an employer, playing a visible role on the factory premises, tried to create the feeling of an ‘organic community,’ often by equating the factory with an actual or imagined family. Paternalism was intended to avoid labour unrest, preserve managerial authority, and satisfy a patriarchian sense of philanthropy. Paternalism has also been designated a form of patriarchy, for it sustained a hierarchical system in which older men dominated younger men, women, and children; it was premised on a conception of “mutual rights and duties connected to the unequal relations of authority . . . found in the household.” Despite these common patterns in paternalist experiments, there was also considerable diversity; recent American studies have shown how paternalism was shaped by the material and cultural factors conditioning production and profit in the industry, by distinct local, cultural, and political contexts.

The twentieth century supposedly inaugurated a ‘professionalization’ of paternalism with the introduction of welfare plans and a trained workforce of welfare and personnel specialists. Replacing the fatherly factory head was the corporate practice of organized, efficient welfare capitalism, which still contained some of the basic principles of paternalism: the familial metaphor, the endeavour to create a company culture of consensus, deference, and accommodation, attempts to maintain a loyal, long-lasting, and of course, un-unionized workforce. American historians have debated the success of welfare capitalism with workers in the twentieth century, as well as its chronology of rise and decline; while many see this strategy as a ‘top down’ attempt to shape and control the workforce, more recent interpretations present welfare capitalism as a negotiated relationship between Capital and Labour. Canadian case studies, while few in number, have argued that some Canadian businesses in the early and mid-twentieth century achieved a limited measure of success with welfare capitalist strategies to “manufacture consent” in the workplace. Welfare capitalism, they also caution, usually offered workers the “velvet glove,” combining coercion with the ‘carrot’ of welfare benefits; moreover, many of these benefits offered little of real material “substance.”
to improve workers’ lives. Unfortunately, some discussions of Canadian welfare capitalism have either concentrated on the picture from perspective of the employers or assumed Canadian business strategies followed a trajectory similar to that of American welfarism, moving in a linear manner from scientific management to welfarism to a postwar labour/capital contract. In actual fact, companies followed a number of distinct paths to and from welfare capitalism, which were not “happenstance” as much as reflective of varying regional, industrial, and political influences. Some of these Canadian experiments failed amidst the Depression, while others, such as Westclox, persisted throughout the thirties and forties, and even beyond. Moreover, more than one managerial strategy could be attempted at the same time: in the Westclox case, the introduction of welfare capitalism and modern personnel management did not preclude the persistence of some nineteenth-century forms of paternalism: the two existed together.

In examining the operation of paternalism (a term I use to include both traditional paternalism and organized welfare capitalism), two interlocking power relationships must be highlighted. First, paternalism was a relationship premised on fundamentally unequal economic relations, though there were also possibilities of negotiation and bargaining embedded in these power relations. To see paternalism as only a form of clever managerial social control is to simplify its operation and render the workers in such a system passive, malleable, and without agency. While the labour movement was understandably suspicious of welfare capitalism, some workers were sympathetic to it, and their outlook cannot be dismissed as simply ‘false consciousness.’ Not only does this obscure the multi-layered and contradictory nature of consciousness (for consent and class consciousness may well coexist) but it also overlooks the fact that struggle between groups with unequal power may proceed on many levels, and that “class conflict may involve those with power avoiding confrontation with those without it,” and those without power bargaining in sporadic, informal, even unconscious ways.

Nonetheless, the subtle but powerful process of ideological hegemony sustaining paternalism must still be highlighted. In order to interpret their workplace experiences, workers inevitably drew on the ideological resources at their disposal, and the dominant ideology — experienced as
lived, habitual practice, interwoven throughout the culture, discerned as ‘common sense’ — justified existing corporate leadership and the ‘natural’ existence of gender and class stratification. 23 One manifestation of the ideological hegemony of those with social and economic power, paternalism encouraged consent to economic hierarchy as an inevitable part of daily life: in a Gramscian sense, it successfully “universalized ruling class interest with community interest.” 24

Paternalism was also a power relationship based on notions of gender difference and structures of gender inequality. Feminist historians have argued persuasively that we need to understand the ways in which the family and the workplace were interlocking hierarchies of dominance and negotiation, with class and gender constructed simultaneously. 25 Nineteenth-century paternalism, argues Judy Lown, did not simply draw superficially on familial metaphors; rather, male dominance was an “organizing principle” 26 of paternalist workplace relations. Similarly, the Westclox example demonstrates the centrality of gender ideology to paternalism, and consequently, the need for a feminist analysis of the material and ideological processes behind its operation.

Establishing the ‘Westclox Way’ in Canada

The Western Clock Company was established in 1895 by entrepreneur F.W. Matthiessen, who located his first clock factory near his zinc smelter in LaSalle, Illinois. Variously known as the Western Clock Co., Westclox, and after a number of mergers and takeovers, as General Time Instruments, the enterprise remained a family company until the 1930s when it expanded considerably and was listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Westclox built a Canadian branch plant in Peterborough in 1923 that grew alongside the American parent company: in 1926, it employed 180, by the late 1930s approximately 400, and during World War II, its payroll hit an all-time high of 800. Although male employees outnumbered women in the company’s infancy, women soon became a majority of about 60 percent (and during the war years their numbers, as well as their percentage of the workforce, rose even higher). Protected by the Imperial tariff in the 1930s, the company maintained fairly good health even in the Depression, and business grew during World War II, when both clock and
munitions work proved extremely profitable. In the immediate postwar period, sales remained strong, but signs of trouble were apparent by the mid-1950s: consumer sales were sagging, despite attempts to move into new fields such as computer and missile timing devices. New plants in Mexico and the Virgin Islands, and the transfer of business from the flagship LaSalle factory to Georgia by the early 1960s offered the writing on the wall: the corporation was relocating its large plants into low-wage areas of the United States and elsewhere. Despite a takeover by new management, the Canadian Westclox closed in the 1970s.

Until the 1960s, however, Westclox was seen as a stable Peterborough employer that had a “complete manufacturing operation,” including design, industrial engineering, and accounting as well as assembly. One person dominates the history the Canadian Westclox: its general manager, later president, J.H. Vernor. Until his retirement in 1953, Vernor was a guiding force of company personnel policy, though company administration was also strongly influenced by the American parent, which trained many Canadian administrators in managerial exchange programs. Vernor saw himself in the terms familiar to paternalist enterprise: as the concerned but disciplinarian father. He was referred to in the community as “Mr. Westclox,” a term he actually promoted. In their recollections, employees repeat this nickname, and some clearly adopted, at some level, the familial analogy of Vernor watching over his employees ‘like a father.’ One even mused that because Vernor was childless himself, he invested inordinate interest and energy in his surrogate children, his employees.

Indeed, it is revealing that many employees have constructed their memories of the company around a narrative theme that stresses the rise and decline of the family — like an epic saga — at Westclox that roughly (though not completely accurately) coincides with the company’s financial success and decline. In this narrative theme, the ‘family’ and the business enterprise have merged, their fate tied to the story of a man whose health and spirit went downhill along with the factory: the economic vigour of the factory and workers’ job security clearly help to shape the collective script of their stories. In this script, Vernor, the young, dashing executive, popular with most of his employees, ages rapidly in the postwar years as the closely knit family becomes more troubled, stressed, and less cohesive and congenial. In some oral accounts, unionization in
1952 symbolized the inauguration of a new era and the rejection of the older family, along with its father. “The union broke Vernor’s heart — Westclox was his family” commented one employee.32

It was not simply Vernor’s use of the familial metaphor, however, that kept Westclox from unionizing until relatively late, prevented any strikes, and produced a paternalistic workplace. First of all, paternalism was necessarily constructed on the edifice of unequal economic power: material constraints should not be minimized in the paternalist equation, for they provided the essential backdrop for the factory’s authority structure. As Patrick Joyce notes, “power relations are a precondition for [paternalism] . . . vulnerability sows the seeds of deference.”33 The Westclox factory was quite tightly controlled by managerial prerogative: until after World War II, a number of managers and foreman were influential in hiring, firing, and in assigning work duties. Hiring, remembers some former workers, seemed personal and arbitrary: one worker remembers Vernor talking to him briefly, “making a few scratchy notes,” then saying “you’re hired.”34 In 1945 a separate personnel department was set up at the urging of the parent company, which feared that its unorganized workforce would be stirred by the wave of unionization sweeping North America. Even after this, Vernor and other managers took a personal interest in hiring, with recommendations of family and friends carrying weight in their decisions. As a former manager put it, “there were names that immediately boded well for you, but others that meant instant disaster . . . forget this talk about nepotism . . . it was just a form of reference.”35

Securing jobs for kin, keeping a job during the Depression, choosing where one wanted to work within the factory: these were the economic pressures that employees had to consider when interacting with their superiors. Because jobs were often secured through family, women also developed a sense of ‘debt’ to their employer, particularly during the Depression; as Joy Parr argues in her case study, workers felt “they owed their jobs to their patrons.”36 During the worst of the Depression, the factory reduced the work week and instituted job sharing in order to keep people at least partially employed, a measure that accentuated a sense of obligation to the company. Indeed, in comparison to often-cited American example, the Depression could actually give paternalism a new lease on life.

The regulation of the work process also provided clues to the operation
of paternalism. At first glance, the work process, especially for the women, appeared tightly controlled. Although some skilled men, like the tool and die makers, exercised considerable authority over their work conditions, women were primarily assigned to repetitive jobs in assembly line work that were often compensated through piece work or production targets. In the office, women’s work was closely supervised and their polite demeanour noted when it came to promotions and raises, which were individually assigned, as no clear job posting system existed until the 1950s.

The ‘blue-collar’ women at Westclox worked on an assembly line characteristic of the new ‘mass industries’ of the twentieth century, in which a carefully engineered, continuous flow work process produced mass goods for a growing consumer market. Women’s work was characterized by machine pacing of the job, by “indirect assembly” (as opposed to direct servicing of machines), and by the extensive use of some kind of piece work or incentive pay. Moreover, some of the assembly line work at the plant was extremely fine work, for which women were given finger dexterity and eyesight tests (though it was also claimed that dexterity and careful attention to detail were inherently female attributes). Within this fairly rigid structure, however, there existed a small degree of flexibility that assisted the company’s efforts to “manufacture consent” by mitigating the inherent alienation of wage labour. For one thing, the range of jobs (however monotonous each one was) was greater here than in local factories like the textile mill, and management allowed women some mobility within the factory. Even more important was the degree of autonomy and respect built into the system of supervision. When former women workers describe why they stayed at Westclox they often emphasize the atmosphere, nature of supervision, and flexibility on the shop floor. Supervision and the practice of paternalism interacted on one another, with the paternalist philosophy of the company creating the precise shape of authority relations in the workplace. Women, for example, might be allowed to ‘sneak out’ a few minutes early to catch their train home for the weekend, workplace joking and socializing were given fairly elastic boundaries, and the continuous-flow assembly work, though seen as taxing and difficult, was not continually and arbitrarily pushed to its limit with speed-ups — at least not in the early years before Westclox’s financial problems became visible.
Foremen were also trained to listen and mediate, rather than reject complaints, and especially not to embarrass or humiliate women workers. Almost every female interviewee commented positively on the manner in which their male foremen dealt with conflict and grievances. “We were taken aside, never embarrassed in front of others on the line,” remembers one woman. “I learned never to dismiss a complaint,” recalls a former manager, “J.H. [Vernor] once took a strip off me for brushing off a complaint . . . I listened, even if the complaint didn’t seem justified.” Some women claimed to prefer this conciliatory method to later union practices, as the latter tended to be more confrontational, drawing attention to the griever as “the union was always looking for an issue to hold over the company’s head.” While an analysis of women’s work culture indicates that they had their own code of behaviour and sense of solidarity that was not simply equated with company interest, Westclox’s labour relations were still compared very favourably to shop floor relations in other factories. Westclox’s “laissez-faire supervision” thus tended to “mystify labour/capital relations”; it was construed by women workers as evidence of the company’s familial style of management.

Managers were encouraged to deal with men under them in a somewhat different manner, with an eye to creating a feeling of male partnership, even though the workers knew this to be something of an illusion. In one meeting a foreman was severely “chewed out” by a manager in front of his peers, a humiliating experience. His response was to pull a different kind of rank on the manager — that of moral superiority and reference to the comradeship preached by the company. “I might be a farmer’s son and you a university grad,” he replied, “but you can’t treat me that way, and if you do, I’m quitting.” The manager backed down, and the foreman’s tactics were applauded by his colleagues, who had absorbed the Westclox message that class differences could not, at least, be flaunted, and that all workers deserved respect. As Gerald Zahavi argues, workers’ loyalty could not be extracted without a price; in return for accepting the company paternalism, male workers manipulated the company’s rhetoric to secure working conditions they wanted.

While styles of supervision were important to workers, material rewards were also part of the paternalist bargain: Westclox’s early attempts to establish good pay and benefits compared to other industries
in Peterborough helped create an informal peace treaty with labour. By paying one or two cents more an hour than other factories and providing paid vacations, the company hoped to procure better-educated workers, increase productivity, and secure a stable workforce. Because this was not a one-company town, Westclox management felt it had to compete for skilled male labour, but they also extended this strategy to include female workers. When J.H. Vernor first established female wage rates that were one or two cents more than the larger Canadian General Electric, claims a former manager, a prominent GE manager “stormed up the hill” to demand a rollback. Vernor argued that, in order to recruit a workforce from scratch, Westclox needed some tangible economic inducements. The company also persuaded community members of the superiority of its white-collar work. When looking for new secretarial help, the personnel manager would call the head commercial teacher at the local high school and ask him to send over the top three or four women in the graduating class for interviews: the teacher obliged. The company’s investment in welfare capitalist policies was clearly motivated by a desire to avoid unionization, but to young women seeking jobs in the thirties and forties, this goal did not worry them. Time and again, women remember the sense of competition for the few openings at Westclox. One woman climbed the hill day after day to ask if there was a position; another, lacking a family member there, babysat for a foreman and persuaded him to speak for her.

While many companies assumed women were not interested in these material benefits, women did consider these part of the allure of employment at Westclox. On top of paid vacations, available after five years of service (one of the most attractive benefits), there was also a group insurance plan, instituted from the beginning, which the employer paid. From the 1930s on, employees could also contribute to a jointly paid sick leave plan, but a pension plan didn’t appear until 1940. There were also a number of less costly benefits, though ones that the company loudly advertised, such as a cafeteria with cheap hot meals, tennis courts on the grounds, and an infirmary.

Compared to those at other large Ontario companies, these were good, but by no means outstanding benefits. A 1927 study done for the Ontario government on the physical, recreational, and financial benefits offered by businesses revealed that many companies offered cheaper benefits like
recreation and cafeterias, while fewer offered more costly employer-paid vacations, sickness insurance, pension plans, and so on. Later analyses of welfare plans by the Canadian Manufacturing Association in the 1930s indicated that, in comparison to large enterprises such as Imperial Oil, Westclox was now lagging behind. Still, it is important to compare Westclox to other Peterborough industries; in contrast to the low wages and no benefits offered by the large woollen mill, the longer work week at Quaker Oats, and the notoriously authoritarian management style at CGE, Westclox “looked great” to prospective workers. Even after monetary rewards improved elsewhere by the 1950s, Westclox could ride on its existing reputation, aided by its public relations campaign, already successful in the community.

While many of the benefits offered by the company were standard ingredients of welfare capitalism, an important element of the company’s paternalism was the personal and discretionary way that benefits were imparted: nineteenth-century paternalism thus overlapped with twentieth-century welfarism. In a confidential survey returned to the Ontario Department of Labour in 1927, the company revealed that in “deserving cases, money was sometimes lent on the quiet for house buying,” but at the same time the survey recorded that “Vernor hates anything paternal.” While understanding the pejorative connotation of the word, he was still willing to apply its principles.

Until a union contract of 1952 there was no official bereavement leave and pay; before that, management created, on an ad hoc basis, similar benefits for some employees. One long-time blue-collar employee, whom Vernor knew well, remembered the situation when her father died. Not only was she was given time off, but Vernor lent the family his car for the funeral and when he came to pay his respects, he shook hands and discreetly left a $20 bill behind — a personal contribution to funeral expenses that families sometimes found hard to meet. While most women report similar instances of sympathetic paternalism, a former secretary noted that when her mother died, the company sent for her at the funeral home to come and finish some special typing only she had done in the past; paternalism, in other words, was arbitrarily applied.

These discretionary benefits were important for they reinforced ties of loyalty and obligation between boss and worker, sometimes so
successfully that workers began to interpret legal rights as personal gifts. Even after a sick benefits plan was introduced, Vernor told woman office worker to “let him know if she needed time off because there was sickness in the family” so he could arrange it, an incident then translated as evidence of his flexibility and concern. Another blue-collar employee praised Vernor for his concern with the personal safety of his female employees who had to be taxied home after midnight shifts during the war years. Although she was very vaguely aware that this was required by law, she primarily saw Vernor’s hand in it: “the taxi driver had to wait until we were in the door . . . and if he didn’t, we were supposed to notify Mr. Vernor about [it].”

While many Canadian managers claim that the company’s benefit schemes emerged from the personal and ‘fatherly’ concern of the Matthiessen family for their employees, Westclox’s paternalism evolved as a more complex amalgam of corporate planning and worker responses. The company’s paternalism was also aided by the social structure of this small city in which management’s prestige was confirmed by their prominent social status in the ‘town below’ the factory on the hill. More than one interviewee pointed to the elite family connections or important community stature that certain managers (or their wives) enjoyed, thus reinforcing patterns of paternalism already forged at work.

**Women and Men in the Westclox “Family”**

When former workers offered positive interpretations of company paternalism, most did not employ a language of worker deference as much as they used familial metaphors that were intimately connected to the sexual division of labour in the plant, and to notions of female respectability and male breadwinning. Westclox promoted a sexual division of labour that was characterized by women’s exclusion from supervisory positions, apprenticeships, and heavy work in shipping and automatics, and their concentration in assembly line work and clerical work. Women’s relegation to these job ghettos was rationalized on two bases: the male breadwinner ideology and women’s ‘natural’ physical differences, especially their nimble fingers and ability to tolerate fine eye work. While a former manager claimed that the company simply “hired for the job,”
he also saw some impermeable gender boundaries: “you wouldn’t hire a man to knit would you? his fingers were too big and clumsy. . . . girls are much more adaptable to assembly work.”

Explanations for this sexual division of labour were often interwoven with descriptions of paternalism in the factory; accounts of why and how the sexual division of labour existed are characterized by a familial discourse within which women workers assume the role of daughters and maiden aunts, while men assume the role of sons. The latter role, of course, was constructed in a particularly patriarchal manner, with younger men under the control of older ones, but always with the prospect of advancing themselves into positions of power.

Westclox strongly encouraged internal advancement of its male employees into supervisory and even management positions. J.H. Vernor’s keen eye for potential foremen and managers, and his use of corporate training plans to promote them, meant that some men were offered opportunities at Westclox not available elsewhere, ensuring their indebtedness to the firm. Not only were men promoted internally, but the bonds of male solidarity were also cemented by perks like a clubhouse for foremen and managers on the Westclox property, and by men’s social events such as golf stags, poker nights, and Vernor’s annual foreman’s picnic held at his cottage on Buckhorn Lake. Here, male camaraderie was reinforced with activities like fishing derbys, horseshoes and cards, and, one assumes, drinking as well, as Vernor was not known as an abstainer. Indeed, some of the men who Vernor came to know well helped to ‘protect’ his public image by buying his scotch for him; after an impaired driving charge in 1954, while preparing for one of his cottage stags, however, Vernor’s reputation became more public. A sense of shared masculinity thus temporarily superseded class hierarchy, even though Vernor always made it clear that respect for his title should take precedence within the factory. Fraternal organizations may also have played a role in cementing these male ties: both Vernor and the (later) General Manager Cranford were active Masons, as were some of the workers on the shop floor.

What role did women’s labour play in this family? As with domestic labour, women’s wage labour sustained the enterprise but was also undervalued, and did not lead to possibilities of significant advancement and power. The distinction between the paternalism directed towards
men and women was the way in which sons might prosper in the family, but women could only maintain their secondary roles. As daughters primarily interested in temporary wage work and ultimately marriage, women were assumed to be satisfied with smaller wage packets, a view many women, even some single career women, remember endorsing. The one way that women could use the company’s emphasis on internal promotion and discretionary paternalism was to advance from blue- to white-collar work, which offered better working conditions, more interesting work and higher status, if not better wages. Though this promotion ladder was truncated compared to men’s, it was appealing to some working-class women, especially those whose education had been cut short during the Depression. An idealized notion of a family wage underpinned different job options for men and women. The hiring of single women only was the policy until World War II. “My thinking,” explained one manager, using a revealing familial metaphor, “was if two girls came up, one married and one single, you should hire the latter for she had been kept, clothed by the family until then, so why not give her a job and take her off her father’s hands.” Even after the marriage bar had been disrupted by the war, a ‘maternity bar’ remained in the postwar years, becoming the new rationalization for a family wage for men and secondary salaries for women.

The one group of women who did not fit into this familial model were single, unmarried ‘career’ women who chose to pursue wage work rather than marry. Interestingly, these women are sometimes described with metaphors that suggest their role as ‘spinsters’ or maiden aunts — as determined, unusual, even eccentric women — or alternatively, as dutiful daughters, who in their own way, were also playing the appropriate familial roles by caring for aging parents. “You must talk to Susan,” I was told by one manager, “you know she was really a ‘good girl’. . . she worked all her life, lived at home and looked after her mother until she died.” This is not to say that women all placidly internalized the familial models of daughters’ temporary work and spinsters’ self-sacrifice: they saw their roles shaped by a more complex web of choices and necessities, and a few identified the discrimination involved in the existing sexual division of labour, though they also tended to see it as insurmountable reality.

Even after women were allowed to work after marriage, the pater-
nalism accorded men and women remained a feature of factory life. By rationalizing its hiring decisions and the gendered division of labour with appeals to innate sexual abilities and the male breadwinner ideal, the company incorporated gender ideology directly into its managerial strategy; these assumptions reinforced the notions that women were less concerned with autonomy and control over their work, less suited to supervise and that women’s wage work was secondary to domestic duties.

The incorporation of paternal assumptions into the dominant characterization of white-collar work was especially noteworthy: the attributes of a good white-collar worker underlined a paternal relationship between female worker and male supervisor. Good work habits — punctuality, preciseness, politeness, pleasant personality — were essentially seen as ‘female’ attributes, and as Margery Davies points out, the very language used to describe the ideal secretary — as adaptable, deferential, a good listener, and nice-looking — in fact, “cast her in a female role as office daughter/wife.”

Such assumptions both reflected and were bolstered by the prevailing gender ideology of the time. Women workers recall accepting the ‘natural’ placement of men over women on the job, and blue- as well as white-collar women spoke of the need to respect male supervisors because of their greater experience, skill, and knowledge. Women’s accommodation to the gendered hierarchy at work was reproduced not only through the daily practice of a sexual division of labour, but also through the notions of masculinity and femininity, and the gendered meanings of experience, skill, and the right to work that women absorbed from the wider cultural context. Gender ideology thus assisted the acceptance of male authority as ‘natural’ and inevitable and helped create the paternal — and patriarchal — workplace. Earlier research argued that both male and female workers were “rendered childlike” by paternalism, which also “undermined [men’s] sense of identity as breadwinners,” but this obscures paternalism’s inherent rationalization of gender divisions within the factory. As in a patriarchal family, some men could assume control, at least in theory, over women. The same was true for Westclox sons, but obviously not for its daughters.

There were other differences between the treatment of sons and daughters: one of the most important was the moral protection of women
by the company. It is often assumed that such moral paternalism — a form of industrial moral regulation — did not persist past the Progressive era, yet at Westclox quite the opposite was true.\(^6^7\) Although the image of what a respectable working girl’s social life was like did change after 1920, with activities like dancing increasingly taken for granted, anxiety about sexual morality and marriageability remained a subtext of concern at Westclox. Many veiled references to sexual respectability, to the ‘better class’ of girl who was hired in the 1930s and 1940s, especially before the company went ‘downhill’ in the 1960s, indicates how the theme of sexual propriety of the daughters was also tied into the narrative theme of family decline. Other local factories were contrasted to the Westclox: the textile mill, which employed many women, was referred to as “tough, you know, you had a tough name if you worked there. My wife lived near there, but her father wouldn’t let her get a job there.”\(^6^8\) The way that the word ‘nice’ was used made it clear that moral respectability was at issue. As one manager commented: “We hired very nice girls [at Westclox]. We were careful about that, to hire good girls, respectable girls. You could be a preacher’s daughter and work at Westclox you know.”\(^6^9\) Former workers made the same connection, implying that it drew in a more educated, and thus respectable class of women: “we took the cream of the crop . . . we even had school teachers there . . . But after the war, it was harder to find people and we had to take some we didn’t really want.”\(^7^0\)

Extremely revealing is the incident involving a woman who had already been interviewed and offered a job in the postwar period only to be phoned back and told there were no openings available; a male worker who had witnessed part of the interview had informed a manager that she was living immorally with a married man. Notwithstanding the many implications of this episode — including the masculine solidarity evidenced and how easily ‘small-town’ gossip can ruin a woman’s reputation — the message was quite clear: she was promiscuous and therefore should be denied the job. “If you hire a few like that,” one male interviewee commented, then “all the girls are tainted with the same brush.”\(^7^1\) In a similar vein, one correspondent for the in-house newspaper, Tic Talk, was told in no uncertain terms that the paper would not print a gossip item that implied a married man had been parking “up on a hill” with another woman from work: “[that] had to [be] edited out; we had to be
careful about what went in [the paper] after all, that would have caused him trouble at home [if his family had read that].”

Respectability was a particular concern of the factory patriarch, J.H. Vernor. One former worker remembers a lecture he delivered on the state of the woman’s washroom (which he had apparently inspected after hours); another recalls his admonishments on ‘ladylike’ dress. A softball story highlights well his self-designation as paternal overseer of his daughters’ decency. After one out-of-town game, some of the players went into a bar for a drink. Others, who still saw bars as a place where women were ‘picked up,’ went elsewhere. When Vernor found out, the coach was reprimanded for letting the players be seen in a bar. It was never to happen again. We had to be ladies, you see . . . he insisted on that,” explained a former team member.

The company’s attempt to champion the morality and respectability of its women workers was not entirely unwelcome with female employees in the 1930s and 1940s. This dimension of paternalism offered women, especially those in the plant, some reciprocal psychological benefits, by countering a prevailing image of the ‘tough’ factory girl, which many women workers resented. Women who worked in other heavier industries in the city like General Electric and Outboard Marine lamented that factory women were viewed as less feminine or ‘refined’: tough and rough were the two words commonly used. Apprehension about blue-collar work was symbolized in the references to cleanliness and dress: the sight of coveralls, even during the war, carried with it fears of endangered femininity. Women who worked at Westclox, on the other hand, constantly cited their clean workplace and the fact that they could wear what they wanted as evidence of their better class of employment, especially in comparison to the “dirty, dark” General Electric. Other historians have pointed to the symbolic importance of dress for working women as signs of their “orderly,” successful, or respectable character: for Westclox women, dress, cleanliness, and an impeccable reputation offered them a modicum of respectability that they felt was denied them by prevailing images of factory workers.

This appeal to a sense of respectability may have been shaped by ethnic homogeneity and exclusivity as well. Like the city itself, the plant was predominantly Anglo/Celtic in character. Although there was occasional
Catholic/Protestant rivalry in the plant, women were ultimately drawn together more a sense of being ‘upright’ and respectable than they were separated by religious differences. Even the religious differences that did occasionally surface had been tempered by the company’s conscious personnel strategy of hiring Catholics in proportion to their numbers in the city and opening up skilled positions “elsewhere under control of the Masons” to Catholic men. “I remember our priest saying how good [Vernor] was to East City” remembers a male worker. “He praised J.H. up and down for hiring Catholics.” By carefully attending to religious tensions, Vernor was able, again, to bolster his image as fair-minded and generous to the local community.

Company Sports and Newspapers

It was not only through the provision of material benefits and support for notions of respectability that Westclox sustained its paternalism. The company’s onsite clubhouse, tennis courts, and its careful maintenance of extensive gardens and lawns (and its advertisement of its civic awards for the best-kept industrial workplace) were all designed to create a ‘homelike’ atmosphere. Company rituals, especially those geared to Westclox children, such as picnics and Christmas parties, and those geared to long service, such as retirement dinners and the Quarter Century Club events, were also very important. Many who attended the Quarter Century Club and retirement dinners characterize these events as lavish affairs, which they see as evidence of the company’s magnanimity. One employee proudly repeated, in her interview, word for word, the acceptance poem she delivered when she received her twenty-five-year award.

Other initiatives were probably more important: one of those was the encouragement of recreation and athletics for employees. J.H. Vernor supported the creation of industrial league teams for both men and women and donated money to rent the YWCA for team sports, sometimes personally passing on the cheque through an employee. Westclox’s community name, however, was best known for its women’s softball team. Indeed, when I began to interview employees, I was repeatedly urged to seek out the women ballplayers.
Women workers were sometimes ballplayers scouted out by coaches concerned more with team needs than with manpower needs in the plant. One woman remembers that even before she finished high school “they were hot and heavy after me to play softball for them . . . but my mother put her foot down as she wanted me to finish my business training.” When another teenager was approached by the coaches before her sixteenth birthday, her parents were also consulted, a sign not only of her youth, but also of the company’s desire not to interfere with traditional family authority. One woman was recruited by her sister, already a Westclox athlete: “I went there to play in the sports. I think you’ll find a lot of the girls did the same thing. They got jobs to play softball, basketball. My sister got the job first, then Mr. Vernor, who was the president, needed another player [so I was hired].”

Women on the Westclox team practiced regularly, competed fiercely, and did well: in 1945 they were runner-up for the provincial championship. The company outfitted the women with uniforms, paid for buses to transport them across the province, and although the women were not supposed to get extra perks at work, some lateness might occasionally be accepted when they were playing for championships out of town. When one ballplayer sprained her ankle, Vernor sent a truck to pick her up every day so that she could make it to work.

Sports were meant to create a sense of company loyalty, suggesting competition with the outside, but team effort inside; they were supposed to create a loyal, disciplined and committed workforce that strove to give its best performance on and off the job. Anxious to cash in on the popularity of amateur sports in the interwar years, the company also saw sports teams as a good source of advertising: they made the Westclox name known outside of Peterborough, and reinforced a positive view of the company inside Peterborough. Nor did this end with World War II; if anything, an emphasis on sports increased in the 1940s. Contrary to the sweeping claim by one sports historian that by the mid-1920s employer-established recreational sports were disappearing, unable to compete with programs offered by radical sports groups, company sports remained an attractive option in many small towns and cities.

American historians examining company sports often assume their primary goal was to build manly “character” amongst its male employees,
especially the “middle class values of sobriety, thrift and industriousness.” Conversely, feminist analyses of women’s sports in the interwar period have been critical of the ways in which male medical and educational experts attempted to control women’s bodies, preserving traditional notions of female physical weakness, while business interests marketed women’s teams in a voyeuristic way as ‘attractive [sexualized]’ entertainment. Yet listening to women’s subjective memories of industrial sports suggests a different perspective: the actual meaning sports had for players might differ from the intentions of team promoters.

Women who played on Westclox teams enjoyed the physical competition and public visibility involved. When a woman from the Westclox basketball team remembered her exhibition game with the famous Edmonton grads, she noted how exhilarating it was to play in front of a large crowd, if only to lose to such competitive, top-notch players. Ballplayers recall with pride the spectators who filled the stands; there was no mistaking the sense of public presence articulated by one woman who told me “that [baseball diamond] at [Riverside park] belonged to us girls . . . then later, the men took it over.” “Years later,” a star player remembered nostalgically, “someone would come up to me on the street downtown and say, ‘I remember you pitching for Westclox!’”

Women’s teams drew together a “specially bonded” female community, and at Westclox united office and plant workers, who rarely socialized in other companies. Teams also became a way for married women to continue work and friendly contacts that homemaking denied them after they left the company. One woman, self-described as “ball crazy,” continued to play and tour after she left work to have children; she used to take her children to practices, and another Westclox friend looked after them. The strong identification of these women with sports may well point to a class dimension missing in the feminist analysis of Canadian sport: Veronica Strong-Boag has suggested that working-class women were perhaps “less intimidated by stereotypical assumptions” about femininity and thus uniquely placed to take advantage of new team opportunities. The early experience of many of these women playing ball in the streets and fields with brothers and friends, and their later hearty embrace of sports, indicates this to be true. Working-class women’s attitudes towards team sports also suggests that medical and educational experts were not
entirely unsuccessful in promoting a passive and delicate image of femininity: rather, the Westclox women believed they could combine ‘being ladies’ on the field (i.e., not swearing, drinking) with being excellent, competitive, assertive ballplayers. As Kate McCrone has argued for an earlier period, emancipatory possibilities for women could emerge from even the most limited and male-defined extension of women’s sports.91

To the company, of course, promotion of these teams was a form of boosterism, a means of encouraging company loyalty and keeping good workers. Some women ballplayers remained for years with the company; once established there, the existence of benefit and pension plans encouraged one’s decision to remain. And while workers who participated in sports may not have directly shared in the company’s goals, their sports playing still had a positive influence on their attitude towards their employer. Moreover, for some women, excellence in sports seemed to provide a source of personal identification that helped to overcome the limitations of the glass ceiling encountered at work: women came to identify their enjoyed sport and leisure time with their workplace; as a result, ‘the softball solution’ did aid the company’s effort to manufacture consent in the workplace.

If team sports supplied one glue to cement the Westclox family together, another was the company publication, Tic Talk. As Stuart Brandes has argued, company publications were a well-planned strategy to persuade the worker that she had a stake in the company’s success, that the company had the economic sense to run the show and also cared about their personal goals and family life.92 Westclox introduced an all-Canadian version of Tic Talk in the late 1930s, when Peterborough’s GE also inaugurated its own in-house newspaper. Although GE boasted in the Financial Post about its success in “spreading the news”93 through its paper, few GE employees seem to have read it, whereas many Westclox employees wrote for Tic Talk and remember reading it; even union activists often offered to lend me copies they had saved.

Like other in-house publications, the Westclox one attempted to create support for company objectives. Basic lessons in economics were standard fare: the hazards of running a profitable business were stressed and concepts like capital formation were made familiar with comparisons to homes and gardens; “capital formation . . . is just [the same] as
when you set up a garden, you buy the necessary tools, fertilizer. . . . It is what every company or country needs to provide jobs for *all of us* [my emphasis] in the coming years.” The Horatio Alger myth was also a staple theme, as was the company’s goodwill and connections to the community, its commitment to full employment, and especially its concern for health and safety (though accidents, it was stressed, were invariably the result of individual failings). Changes in company structure were rationalized, particularly downsizing exercises, increasingly accompanied by veiled warnings that the company was “vulnerable” because its “high costs of assembly,” especially wages, were too high. Finally, the company’s fate, it was stressed, lay in the response of “Joe Customer” to the quality of its product. Workers were simultaneously encouraged to see themselves as consumers, thus making the point that workers were the architects of their own employment fate. Indeed, the theme of consumerism ran throughout the publication; the company included ads for its own products and gossip columns abounded with notices of workers’ consumer purchases: “Ethel . . . came in all smiles this morning,” noted one writer for Tic Talk, “her hubby has given her a new radio and hi fi. Add to this the new automatic dryer she got recently and she isn’t doing badly!” That Ethel’s own wages had been used to make these purchases is not noted.

Tic Talk also promoted a vision of Westclox as a family, and in doing so, reinforced certain images of women’s and men’s gendered work and family roles: for instance, women’s domestic and mothering duties were lauded approvingly, while biographies of long-time employees often confirmed their status as ‘good family men.’ Family ties were often mentioned as a theme underlying plant relationships; as Father’s Day approached one year the editor urged everyone to have a very special “Westclox Fathers Day” celebration because so many kids had “followed their dads into the plant.” During the war, sections of the company were encouraged to adopt Westclox boys overseas, sending them collective presents. In turn, their letters of thanks were reprinted for the employees (largely female) to read: in one, addressed “Dear Mother,” the soldier notes how much the Westclox present meant: “You know it was being a kid on Christmas morning . . . it was like receiving my first toy.”

Nowhere are distinct gender roles more clearly accented than in the
extensive gossip columns sent in by worker-writers. The births, deaths, and marriages columns were obviously meant to reinforce a sense of community and overcome the impersonal alienation of factory life. But it was the mating and dating game that clearly drew most reader interest. Here, the dominant social prejudices of the period are replicated with little or no critical comment. Women are supposedly consumed with mating impulses and bliss is achieved when a diamond ring appears. Especially after the war years, women come close to being man hunters: “She may not be in the RCMP, but she got her man!”

Once mated, a woman was then “out of circulation,” no longer fair game for other interested bachelors. Male reporters were almost as concerned with romance, ridiculing fellow workers who were smitten with the “love bug” and would soon lose their manly independence to the trap of marriage. Particular relish is shown for in-house romances, which then become a focus for further teasing. Once official, engagements are followed by a number of rituals: departmental showers, parties, and a public gift giving. With marriage, it is assumed that “women will now retire to take up another job, homemaking,” while men will continue to work at the plant. Few references to married working women are made, save for one reporter who notes that the married women are easily noticed by their “weary faces,” a rare comment on the double day. Until the 1960s, one image of the family is made to seem natural and inevitable in these columns: the nuclear, home-owning, mother-at-home, father-at-work family.

The sexes are bound together by dating and mating, and ultimately, “marriage comes highly recommended,” but at the same time, men and women are oceans apart in character and ability — an implicit justification for a division of labour. Women are concerned with beauty and appearance, men with technical knowledge and physical strength. Women’s ‘known’ love of shopping is mentioned frequently, while fishing and hunting are clearly pursuits which preoccupy male departments. Cars are a man’s joy, but women are “the plague of our highways.”

While car ownership is clearly offering some women new independence by the 1940s, depictions of women’s car trips and vacations often carried a punchline describing mishaps or teasing about the potential perils of female independence.
Through Feminist Eyes

Tic Talk’s use of graphics and pictures also exhibited the familial theme: not only were company events showing workers and managers happily playing together profiled, but many employees sent in their own pictures of family and fellow Westclox friends. Again, the contrast with the GE publication is stark: while GE pictures were often posed for plant photographers, the Westclox ones were submitted by the workers themselves. Pictures are off-centre, sometimes ill-focused and completely home-grown: it is this lack of professionalism, ironically, that characterized Tic Talk’s success, for a feeling of active involvement in the publication, rather than company manipulation, was created, consciously or not, by this ‘family album’ approach.

Although Tic Talk columns were occasionally edited, they were also the product of shop floor banter that many workers clearly enjoyed. One of the ways in which workers cope with the workplace, Louise Lamphere argues, is to create their own social networks that celebrate life rituals, offer mutual support, and break down the anonymity of the factory. These social networks may be particularly important to women because they reproduce care-giving roles learned in the family and because women’s wage work, which is characterized by little control and autonomy, needs a strong antidote of sociability on the shop floor. By integrating these social networks into its own publication, Westclox was able to promote the image of a humane workplace, concerned with workers’ lives outside the factory. While the company calculated this as a means of securing worker satisfaction and loyalty, workers participated for different reasons: to alleviate boredom, engage in daily gossip (surely one of the most important social staples of our lives), connect with other people. Women who are asked in interviews about the conditions of work often quickly move into discussions of these social networks; the connection in their memories says much about the way in which women wanted to ‘socialize’ the workplace to make it as livable and human as possible. At the same time, by participating in the company magazine, by endorsing images of male breadwinner and female dependent, male competence and female technical scatterbrain, workers were also legitimizing the division of labour and the existing hierarchy in the factory and in the household. While trying to make the workplace livable, they were unconsciously reproducing its gendered hierarchy.
Conclusion: Paternalism in Decline

Westclox’s paternalism was, from the very beginning, part of a conscious strategy to avoid unionization, but the company was ultimately unable to defeat a powerful postwar trend, and in 1952, after more than one union attempt, the plant chose the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE) as their bargaining agent. Still, the office workers consistently resisted unionization, the plant never went on strike, and the union was considered ‘moderate’ by others in the vicinity.

Plant workers became sympathetic to unionization when they saw the material benefits of paternalism seriously eroding. As other major Peterborough plants secured good benefit packages, Westclox’s former generosity began to look deficient. Once the gap between the promise of paternalism and the reality became quite wide, disappointment set in, perhaps even more strongly because of previously raised hopes of fair dealing on the company’s part. Unionization was perceived as a necessary (and by some, even unfortunate) last resort to defend the benefits initiated by the company in earlier decades. Finally, as the parent company restructured and eventually threatened to move (to low-wage Nova Scotia), the union was seen as a means of protection in the face of the company’s disintegration.

Unionization was an indication that the negotiated partnership and paternalist bargain fostered in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, had begun to erode. As Gerald Zahavi points out, workers tried to use paternalism for their own ends, extracting certain economic and moral obligations from the employer in return for their loyalty. Women and men at the Westclox plant used the rhetoric of paternalism, and obtained their own rewards, as much as possible, from the company. Men could benefit from a degree of autonomy on the shop floor, hope of upward mobility, a sense of masculine privilege and camaraderie, and reinforced identification with the image of the male breadwinner. Women could also try to use paternalism to make their workplace more human, less confrontational and flexible, to provide mobility within female job ghettos, and also to reinforce a sense of dignity secured through their status as moral working women.
For some individuals, like the favoured softball players, there were other sources of pride and compensation. Thus, even if paternalism seemed to symbolize deference to one’s employer, a more negotiated accommodation was involved. While the paternalist bargain meant acquiescence, at least to some extent, to economic inequality, and acceptance of a gendered hierarchy at work, a distinct notion of *dignity owed* to workers and the respectability of their aspirations and lives — though differently defined for men and women — was promoted and defended by the workers.

The resilience of paternalism at Westclox, well into the twentieth century, is explained by the specific material and local conditions in which the factory was embedded, the economic pressures encouraging conformity in the workplace, and the influence of powerful, dominant ideologies that offered a meaningful rationale for the ‘natural’ hierarchy and justice of paternalism. For many years, Westclox successfully synthesized favourable local and international economic conditions with a policy of moderate benefits and discretionary paternalism. Unlike the local textile firms employing women, the clock factory was able to pay slightly higher wages and remain competitive. As an astute executor of Westclox’s management strategy, J.H. Vernor’s apparently charismatic and convincing role as patriarch should also be noted. Westclox’s overlapping tactics of nineteenth-century paternalism and twentieth-century welfarism were also likely aided by Peterborough’s overwhelming ethnic homogeneity, and by the size of the city, with its ‘small-town’ atmosphere. The spatial proximity of worker and manager in some neighbourhoods and churches, close knowledge of family networks within the city, and a stable social hierarchy bolstered the ideological hegemony operating within the factory, creating the illusion of an ‘organic community’ in which class and community interest were one and the same. Earlier work has suggested that class consciousness could be “reinforced by the community solidarity of small towns,” but the Westclox example suggests that the social relations of small cities might also inhibit class conflict. Furthermore, Peterborough’s distinct labour history, in particular the failure of an industrial strike in textiles in 1937, and the inability of industrial unions to make significant inroads until the later 1940s, also meant that workers did not have at hand institutional or ideological alternatives to the paternalist bargain.

Finally, the resilience of paternalism must also be explained by the
ideological creation of consent. Already existing, dominant notions of ‘natural’ economic hierarchy and inevitable gender differences were diffused through daily workplace practices, company symbols, and rituals. Gender was not peripheral, but rather central to this ideological hegemony. Paternalism was sustained by its assimilation and reproduction of a gender ideology that reinforced an image of female transience and marriageability, male independence and camaraderie, female obedience, and male authority. The workplace hierarchy was fused with gender roles supposedly found in the household and given strong sanction by society.

A familial language justified both the gendered division of labour in the plant and the paternal placement of male managers over female workers; notions of sexual difference explained why males might go from being sons to fathers, while women remained forever daughters.

However, decent benefits and wages were always part of the ‘deal’ that the company fashioned with its workers. If the company let down its part of the bargain, workers felt justified in shifting their allegiance as well. Significantly, when the company called for a rollback in wages in 1969, it targeted only the women workers. When the union appeared to waver on the issue, one female union executive had to write an indignant letter to the union negotiator warning him that women workers were upset about reported ‘secret negotiations’ between the (male) union and management, and that women would not tolerate union leaders making a backroom deal to sell the women out. When the General Time Empire began to fold in Canada, Westclox women were first asked to pay the price and become even more dependent on the ‘father’ with lower wages. The fact that women refused indicates that the paternalist bargain, while appealing, always had its limits.

Appendix: A Note on Methodology

This article is part of a much larger study of working women in Peterborough from 1920 to 1960. While government documents, newspapers, and manuscript collections have been used as research tools, I have also used oral histories of former workers and managers as a basis for my conclusions. This was particularly important in the Westclox case, as the company denied me access to any of their records.
From the larger sample of Peterborough interviews, those with former Westclox employees number twenty-nine: twenty-one of these were with female white- and blue-collar workers, and the remaining were male managers, workers, and foremen. While the blue-collar women made up roughly two-thirds of the female group, it is difficult to precisely characterize women by occupation as there was quite a bit of movement from the factory floor into the office.

The interviews were usually two or more hours in length and were sometimes followed by phone conversations to clarify issues. The interview sample was a ‘snowball’ sample; many of the women and men were referred to me or called me after an article in the local newspaper described my research. Some responded to flyers posted in the local library and museum, or were referred by family, neighbours, or members of the labour movement who eventually heard of my work.

All of the women interviewed began work at Westclox in a twenty-year period between 1933 and 1953; 50 percent began before World War II and 50 percent began after 1940. Approximately half, again, were ‘long-time’ employees, working at Westclox over ten years, with the other half shorter-term employees, working under ten years (with about one-quarter of the women very short-term employees, working approximately three to four years). The majority of the men were longer-term employees.

This sample thus favours longer-term employees, although Westclox also claimed that it was particularly successful in keeping workers and offered some statistics to prove this. The observations of the longer-term employees were also important, for these workers often periodized the history of the company: many referred to the ‘early years,’ which usually meant the period up to the immediate postwar years, and the ‘later years,’ which meant the period from the 1950s, and especially the 1960s, on.

Notes

1 Westclox Interviews #18, Feb. 1990, and #1, July 1989. I have deliberately chosen one quote from a blue-collar worker and one from a white-collar worker.

2 Without access to company records (which I have been denied), I cannot produce such statistics, though by reading articles and biographies in the company’s in-house publication, I could get a sense of how many employees were rewarded.
for long service. At one company dinner, a manager claimed that 40 percent of those employed in 1931 were still with the company twenty-five years later. Oral history can measure people’s perceptions that there were many people who stayed with the company for a long period of time. Conclusions about the nature of people’s memories of Westclox were reached after comparing Westclox interviews to those with workers from other companies in the city, particularly the three other largest businesses at this time.


5 As Ava Baron points out, in working-class history “while women’s resistance has been documented, their ‘consent’ to oppression, like that of men, remains undertheorized.” See Ava Baron, “Gender and Labor History: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future,” in *Work Engendered*, ed. Baron, 16.


8 Judy Lown, “Not So Much a Factory, More a Form of Patriarchy: Gender and Class During Industrialization” in *Gender, Class and Work*, ed. Eva Gamarnikow (London, 1985). Lown argues that “paternalism is only one of many and varying forms of legitimation that holders of patriarchal power adopt” (35–36).


10 See Philip Scranton’s distinction between “formal, familial and fraternal” paternalism in the textile industry alone in “Varieties of Paternalism.” The local context is also stressed in works such as Hall, *Like a Family*, and Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*.


12 Brandes and Couvares suggest that workers were suspicious of welfarism, but Brody claims it was having some successes until the Depression revealed its inherent problems. Sanford Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1890–1945* (New York, 1985), suggests that interest in welfare capitalism was waning by the late 1920s.


16 Margaret McCallum has offered a useful view of welfare capitalism drawn from *Industrial Canada* and the Labour Gazette, but her article does not intend to analyze workers’ reactions to this managerial strategy.

18 McCallum, “Corporate Welfarism in Canada,” 47.

19 As Michael Earle pointed out to me, in Sydney, the meagre attempts to attempt paternalist strategies at dosco (e.g., setting up things like Works Councils) did flounder with the Depression, thus replicating the pattern that some American labour historians have pointed to.


22 Recent writing has shied away from the very word ‘ideology,’ influenced by poststructuralist critiques of the concept and understandably wary of a very traditional Marxist categorization of ‘false’ or illusory ideology mystifying the ‘true’ picture of society. Instead of jettisoning the concept, it may be useful to use it, in a Gramscian and feminist manner, as one means of understanding how class and gender inequalities become ‘naturalized’ and universalized, in the workplace and in larger society.


24 Carl Boggs, The Two Revolutions: Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism (Boston, 1984), 160.

25 For workplace studies incorporating this perspective, see, for example, Mary Blewett, Men, Women and Work: Class, Gender and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry (Champaign, 11, 1988); Patricia Cooper, Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories (Urbana, 11, 1987); Cynthia Cockburn, Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change (London, 1983); Parr, The Gender of Breadwinners.

26 Lown, “Not So Much a Factory,” 34.


28 Although financial and production management was guided by others, including long-time manager, Newfoundland-born Herbert Cranford.

30 Of the interviews with blue- and white-collar workers, about half made reference to the congenial, family atmosphere. Others, while they did not describe the workplace in familial terms, made observations such as: “Westclox was a wonderful place to work when I started. . . . Management and employees got on so well; I could hardly wait to get back to work the next day”: Westclox Interview #22, July 1989. A minority certainly saw this simply as a job like any other; these were more often shorter-term employees.


32 Quote from Interview #2, June 1989. Although this was a manager speaking, similar observations were made by other white- and blue-collar employees, though they did not describe the situation quite so tragically.

33 Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, 94.

34 Westclox Interview #9, 10 April 1991.


37 Miriam Glucksmann argues that women were the primary — and crucial — workforce in many mass-production industries making food and small appliances; this resulted not from a de-skilling process, but rather from the initial, conscious decision of management to hire cheaper female labour. See Miriam Glucksmann, *Women Assemble: Women Workers and the New Industries in Inter-war Britain* (London, 1990).


39 This term is taken from Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago, 1979). Burawoy concentrates on the manufacturing of consent on the shop floor through the organization of the labour process — through game playing, lateral displacement of conflict, etc. Although some of his conclusions are useful for an analysis of the work process at Westclox, I have chosen to concentrate on other means of manufacturing consent in this paper.

40 After the company’s increasing economic problems in the 1960s, however, some long-time blue-collar employees found the atmosphere less hospitable, in part due to increasing cost cutting and speed-ups.


42 Westclox Interview #6, June 1989. It is possible that women’s own methods of conflict resolution learned in the family, or even their different sense of privacy, made them appreciate this mediated approach. This is not an ahistorical claim that women are, by nature, ‘conciliatory,’ but rather a suggestion that,
in this time period, women often learned mediating roles in the family and community. While labour historians have documented women’s different work cultures and different approaches to resistance, there is less research on women’s ‘accommodation’ in the workplace. More recent feminist literature on women’s methods of organizing have suggested that our gendered experience, as well as feminist ideology, produces different methods of organizing. See Jeri Wine and Janice Ristock, eds., *Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada* (Toronto, 1991). It is worth noting that a contemporary study of activist women draws different conclusions about the relationship between family and work than I do: see Karen Sachs, *Caring by the Hour: Women, Work and Organizing at Duke Medical Centre* (Urbana, IL, 1988).


44 *Westclox* Interview #9, 10 April 1991.

45 Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*.

46 *Westclox* Interview #2, June 1989.

47 This practice seemed to persist into the 1950s.

48 It is also important to note that the city as a whole was largely un-unionized until the later 1940s.

49 Women’s attitudes towards benefits were also shaped by their age and longevity of employment. Still, many industries made generalizations about all women workers. For example, General Electric in the United States assumed that women were interested in “sociability not security.” See Ronald Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1932–60* (Urbana, IL, 1983), 22.

50 Archives of Ontario (AO), RG 7-57, Dept. of Labour, Miss Finlay’s report, 1927. *Westclox*’s paid vacations were the most expensive and attractive of its benefits. In the 1927 study only about one-third of the companies surveyed had paid vacations.


52 It also needs to be compared to industries of other size and wealth. Companies like Imperial Oil were much larger and able to sustain expensive benefits. As Nelson points out for the United States, only the larger minority of companies ever became really involved in welfare plans; many smaller companies continued to deal with unions in a different way — with active intimidation. See Nelson, *Managers and Workers*, 116.


54 AO, RG 7-57, Dept. of Labour, File: Industrial Relations, pre-1936. It is revealing that other Peterborough industries listed in the same file indicated similar
patterns. Quaker Oats, for instance, said there “was no pension plan, but the company takes care of needy and deserving cases. No one is allowed to suffer.”

55 Westclox Interview #18, 8 Feb. 1990.
56 Westclox Interview #20, 22 Aug. 1990.
57 Ralph H. Matthiessen, claim former managers, also evidenced paternal concern for his employees. This manager cited an example, not witnessed, but rather part of oral tradition, that Matthiessen approved wage increases in the Depression, despite falling profits, as a measure of the company’s moral debt to its workforce. Interview #21, 18 July 1989.

58 Even if they didn’t actively participate in city government or social organizations, some managers were perceived as ‘well-connected,’ respected community leaders. Westclox managers in these years were less visible than GE ones in civic politics. Vernor never became openly involved, perhaps because he was American. His wife, however, was associated with appropriate charities, like the YWCA, and he was involved in fraternal organizations, as was his second-in-command, Cranford. Evidence of the ‘respect’ held for some of these managers is well illustrated in the number of times I had to turn the tape recorder off rather than reveal any fact that might be interpreted negatively.

59 Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.
60 *Peterborough Examiner*, 1 Dec. 1954.

62 Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.
63 Ibid.


From the chaperoned boarding houses of Lowell to lessons in culture at Heinz, employers utilized various tactics to create the impression that, under their tutelage, working-class women would be better able to maintain their pure character and thus become respectable and sought-after wives. On distinct programs for women, see Nelson, Managers and Workers. On nineteenth-century paternalism and the protection of women’s ‘respectability,’ see Parr, The Gender of Breadwinners, chap. 2. In Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism, Zahavi argues that Endicott Johnson defended the morality and respectability of wage-earning mothers, primarily because these women’s labour was needed in his factory — indicating the malleability of paternalism according to the needs of capital. In the context of the Peterborough labour market, married women were not a crucial necessity to the company (at least until the war years), and so the company could endorse the family wage and ignore the issue of wage-earning mothers.

Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.

Ibid.

Westclox Interview #1, 10 July 1989.

Westclox Interview #23, July 1989.

Westclox Interview #2, June 1989.

Westclox Interview #20, 22 Aug. 1990.

Westclox Interview #4, 12 Dec. 1990.


Census material from 1921 to 1941 confirms this characterization. For example, Canada, Census of 1921, vol. 1, table 28, shows those listing British racial origins to be 92% of the city’s population. Canada, Census of 1931, vol. 2, table 34, shows 91% of the population listing British racial origins; table 47 shows that 80% of the population was born in Canada and 16% born in the British Isles. Canada, Census of 1941, vol. 1, table 34, indicates that 90% listed British origins; table 45 indicates that 83% were Canadian born and 12% born in Britain. This was a stable and predominantly Anglo city.

Westclox Interview #9, 10 April 1991.

Westclox Interview #12, July 1989.


point to the commercialization of sports in this period, but this was not so visible in a smaller community. See Mark Dyreson, “The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920’s,” *Journal of Sport History* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1989): 261–81.


86 Westclox Interview #20, 22 Aug. 1990.

87 Westclox Interview #12, July 1989.

88 *Peterborough Examiner*, undated clipping, 1990. This term was used by a woman interviewed about her memories of wartime industrial softball leagues.

89 Westclox Interview #7, 20 Sept. 1990.


94 *Tic Talk*, June 1954.

95 By the 1960s these warnings were hardly veiled. In *Tic Talk*, Dec. 1966, the paper asked, “Do these names mean anything to you?” It offered names of plants
that had gone out of business in Peterborough and then concluded: “The key to job security is in your hands.”


97 At GE, interestingly, it was Mrs. Consumer who was featured in their paper. For a discussion of companies like GE that deliberately pursued promotion of consumerism amongst its workers, see John T. Cumbler, *Working-Class Community in Industrial America: Work, Leisure, and Struggle in Two Industrial Cities, 1880–1930* (Greenwood, NJ, 1979).


99 Tic Talk, June 1954.

100 Tic Talk, June 1944.


102 Tic Talk, June 1954.


105 Tic Talk, July 1966.

106 Tic Talk, Sept. 1959.

107 Tic Talk, Sept. 1959.


109 There is also an argument to be made that the experience and age cohort of women working in the plant by this time made them more sympathetic to unionization. There were probably more women with long experience in the plant and slightly more married women with dependents by the early 1950s.


111 Craig Heron and George de Zwaan, “Industrial Unionism in Eastern Ontario: Gannoque, 1918–21,” *Ontario History* 77, no. 3 (Sept. 1985): 159–82. It is important to note that many of the businesses (except for GE) in this city were, like Westclox, small enough to facilitate the cultivation of paternalism.

112 Library and Archives Canada, IUE Collection, 28-I-264, vol. 83, P. Drysdale to George Hutchens, President, Canadian IUE, 15 Sept. 1969. This issue is taken up by other women outside the factory who write to the Ontario Women’s Bureau complaining that such a rollback would be “discriminatory”: AO, RG 7, Dept. of Labour, Women’s Bureau Correspondence, Series 8, Box 1.