

Wealth and Gender in Ontario: 1870-1925

By

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*Paper Prepared for ESRC Workshop on Wealth, Investment and Gender in the
Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Open University, Milton Keynes, UK 16-17 June
2008*

DRAFT: NOT FOR QUOTATION

ABSTRACT

Historical wealth micro-data from two regions of Ontario over the period 1870 to 1925 is used to examine the evolution of female property holding in the wake of 19th century property rights legislation. The data consists of 1,183 decedents from Wentworth County, Ontario and 1,780 decedents from Thunder Bay District, Ontario. The results reveal male wealth was greater than female wealth in both Thunder Bay District and Wentworth County but that over time the gap declined. Nevertheless, while female wealth rose continually in Wentworth County over the period 1872 to 1912, by 1912 average female wealth holding was still only 45 percent that of males compared to about 15 percent in 1872. In the Thunder Bay District, the increase in female average wealth as a percentage of male wealth was more dramatic rising from just under 10 percent in 1885 to over 70 percent by the late 1890s and then declining to approximately 60 percent by World War I with a slow recovery afterwards. It appears that improvements to the female level of wealth ownership did occur in both regions over time but the process was more gradual in the older, more established region.

Conference Research Themes Addressed

3. Gender and wealth
5. Regional variations in wealth holding

Introduction¹

Given the proliferation of female property rights legislation in nineteenth century North America, wealth by gender is an important topic. Changes in the structure of property laws during the late nineteenth century with respect to female property ownership that enabled more females to own property may have started to have some effect by the early twentieth century. Baskerville (1999) writes that an often-overlooked nineteenth century trend is that "On their own account, women were becoming significant actors in various economic and financial sectors." On the other hand, Chambers (1997) using the records of legal cases maintains that the legacy of the property law reforms in Victorian Ontario was mixed though these laws were better than none at all. Essentially, the married women property legislation was not very successful in fostering wealth accumulation by women because it did not legally recognize the economic value of domestic labour and there was still scope for coercion by husbands when it came to female property holding.

The question of interest is whether female property holding did grow in the wake of property rights legislation. In addition, were female property holding increases continuous over time or were there interruptions to the process? Moreover, was the increase in female property holding a uniform trend irrespective of geography or were there regional differences? Historical wealth micro-data from two regions of Ontario over the period 1870 to 1925 are used to examine these questions. The data consists of 1,183 decedents from Wentworth County, Ontario of which 444 are census-linked probated decedents for Wentworth County Ontario for the years 1872, 1882, 1892 and 1902. This data is augmented by new data collection efforts for Wentworth County that add 277 probated decedents for 1907 and 332 for the year 1912 as well as expand the 1892 and 1902 decedent totals. As well, there are 1,780 probated decedents from the Thunder Bay District in northern Ontario collected annually for the years 1885 to 1925.

¹ The financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in conducting this research is gratefully acknowledged. The assistance of the English Social Research Council support for the Milton-Keynes Conference is also acknowledged.

These data span the post-Confederation era as well as the wheat boom era, which reached its zenith during the period 1907-1913.

The Evolution of Female Property Holding

The economic role of women in the 19th century is a major research theme in economic history and scholarship. Marjorie Cohen (1988) has argued that women's labour was ultimately directly related to the accumulation of capital in 19th century Ontario as women's unpaid labour on farm land "freed" men to participate in market wage earning opportunities. Bettina Bradbury (1979) examined how women in urban areas supplemented family incomes by entering the labour force.

More recently, the direct economic role of women in asset ownership is being studied in an effort to understand the evolution and impact of female property rights. Ontario and British North America generally lagged the United States in female property rights legislation. Starting from the 1850s, most American states passed legislation which allowed married women ownership and control over real and personal property they had brought into the marriage.² Prior to this, such property had been essentially considered a gift to the husband. Subsequently, women acquired the right to dispose of property acquired during marriage by way of inheritance and ultimately to acquire, own and dispose of property independently. One impact of these laws in the United States was an increase in the percentage of female testators in probate records. For example, in Bucks County Pennsylvania, the proportion of testators who were female rose from 17 percent in the 1790s to 38.5 percent one hundred years later.³

The changes in female property rights do appear to be reflected by the growing incidence of female estates in the Ontario probate records used in this paper. In the Thunder Bay District, the average percentage of male probated decedents declined from 85 percent during 1885-1906 to 77 percent for 1914-1920 and 74 percent for 1921-25, indicating increased female property owning.⁴ In Wentworth County, the period from

² Shammas et. al., p. 83.

³ Shammas et al., p. 119.

⁴ For other treatment of female property holding in the 19th century, see Inwood and Ingram, "The Impact", Baskerville, "Women and investment", L. Chambers, *Married Women and the Law of Property in Victorian Ontario*,

1872 to 1912 saw a decline in the percentage of male probated decedents from 88 percent in 1872 to 63 percent by 1912.

In Ontario, The Married Women's Real Estate Act (1873)⁵ allowed married women to dispose of real estate as if *feme sole*.⁶ The Married Woman's Property Act (1884)⁷ enabled a married woman to dispose of, by will, any real or personal property as her separate property in the same manner as if *feme sole* without any intervention of a trustee.⁸ Essentially, before 1884, any property that women brought into a marriage essentially became her husband's property while after 1884 a woman could maintain her own separate ownership.⁹ Chambers (1997) conducts an analysis of the impact of the married women property legislation using legal records and generally concludes it was not very successful in fostering wealth accumulation by women because it did not legally recognize the economic value of domestic labour and there was still scope for coercion by husbands when it came to female property holding.

While there is a substantial literature on historical wealth determinants and inequality in North America, the variables focused on include occupation, ethnic origin, birthplace, urbanization and age and relatively little research considers gender based wealth differences.¹⁰ Using probate records, assessment rolls and census records, Baskerville (1999) examines the wealth holding of women in Victoria and Hamilton in the wake of property rights legislation in the 1880s and finds that women in both cities were gaining autonomy in land markets and other economic affairs though women in Victoria appeared to have made greater gains. As an explanation for these differences,

(Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, University of Toronto Press, 1997) and Green and Owen (2003).

⁵ Statutes of Ontario, 36 Vict., Cap. 18.

⁶ That is, as if an unmarried woman. A married woman, on the other hand, was termed a "feme covert" or covered woman because her legal interests were "covered" by those of her husband. See Shammass et al., p.25.

⁷ Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1887, Cap. 132.

⁸ Howell, 1895, p. 55.

⁹ For a detailed account of women's property law in nineteenth century Canada, see Backhouse (1988). For an examination of marriage contracts and aspects of property law in Quebec, see Hamilton (1999).

¹⁰ See for example Atack and Bateman (1981), Pope (1989), Steckel (1990), Galenson (1991), Haines and Goodman (1991), Herscovici (1993, 1998), Ferrie (1994, 1995, 1999), Gregson (1996) and Di Matteo (1997, 1998), Conley and Galenson (1998), Walker (2000), Steckel and Moehling (2001).

Baskerville suggests that Victoria's frontier nature may have allowed for greater independence on the part of women.

Inwood and Ingram (2000) look at the holdings of single, married and widowed women in Guelph during the period 1871 and 1891 and see significant increases in property holding by women. Inwood and Van Sligtenhorst (2004) examine the propensity of women in Guelph to hold real estate before the property rights changes of 1873 with those after the changes of 1884 using assessment rolls, census manuscripts, wills, mortgages and property transfers over the period 1853 to 1913. While they find that women substantially increased their share of women's property, they still lagged men. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that the property rights legislation was instrumental in the rise of female property ownership. The property rights legislation made female property ownership socially acceptable and "helped legitimize the idea of property ownership by married women and to persuade both men and women of its respectability." (Inwood & Van Sligtenhorst: 187).

The impact of female property rights legislation has also been studied from a British perspective. The 1870 Married Women's Property Act in Britain gave women married after 1870 the right to own and control personal property and Combs (2004) links wealth-holding data to census information to assess the impact of this legal change. Combs finds that women married after 1870 shifted their wealth-holding away from real estate and towards personal property and that women married after 1870 owned a larger share of household wealth than women married before the Act.

There is also British evidence suggesting that the increases in female property holding after 1870 were part of a long-term trend that predated the property rights legislation. For example, Green and Owens (2003) examine the lists of fund holders at the Bank of England and find that the evidence contradicts the view of women as being at the margins of property ownership. The proportion of female investors in government securities rose from 34.7 percent in 1810 to 47.2 percent in 1840 suggesting that by 1840, nearly half of public creditors were women.

The Data: Context, Sources, Construction

The wealth data are for two regions of Ontario – Wentworth County, at the head of Lake Ontario and Thunder Bay District at the head of Lake Superior. The time frame is from 1870 to 1925, spanning the era of Canadian history known as the Wheat boom. The Canadian wheat boom era is ascribed to the years 1896 (when wheat prices began to rise) to 1914.¹¹ Studies of the impact of the wheat boom on Canadian development focused on per capita income growth, and by extension, the relevance of staple exports in Canadian economic growth. Chambers and Gordon argued that the contribution of the wheat boom to per capita income growth in Canada was small.¹² Counter arguments to this view revised the impact estimate upward by moving from a narrow to a broader economic interpretive framework.¹³ Revised GNP estimates assembled by M.C. Urquhart show the period 1901-11 to be one of substantial growth.¹⁴

While distant from the Prairies, the Hamilton-Wentworth region was affected by the boom period. Wentworth County comprised the city of Hamilton and the town of Dundas plus the adjoining rural townships of East and West Flamborough, Beverly, Ancaster, Glanford, Binbrook and Saltfleet. Relative to the Thunder Bay District, Wentworth County has a much older history of permanent European settlement dating from the late eighteenth century and by the latter half of the nineteenth century was undergoing a process of urbanization and industrialization. Hamilton and Dundas both aspired to be regional centres but by 1850 Hamilton emerged the winner and proceeded to dominate its hinterland. Hamilton's prominence as a commercial and later as an

¹¹ For an overview of the wheat boom, see Pomfret, *Economic development*, pp. 182-211. See also Norrie (1975).

¹² Chambers and Gordon, "*Primary products and economic growth*".

¹³ The expanded analysis includes the impact of tariffs, the value of immigrant capital and the impact on wages. See Lewis, "*Canadian wheat boom*," Lewis, "*Farm settlement*", Caves, "*Export-led growth*".

¹⁴ Urquhart concludes, "...the evidence of our data supports most strongly the presumption that the growth and many of the changes in the Canadian economy were a consequence of the settlement of the Prairies." Urquhart, "*New estimates*", p. 61; See also Green and Urquhart (1987) and Urquhart (1993).

industrial centre was the result of its strategic position at the head of Lake Ontario. This enabled it to reap the benefits of being a transshipment point. In this sense, Hamilton was similar to the Lakehead cities of Fort William and Port Arthur in the Thunder Bay District. With the development of the Prairie wheat economy, Hamilton acquired an industrial sector that emphasized iron and steel products. The population of Wentworth County was 57,599 in 1871 and by 1911 had grown to 111,706 and went on to reach 153,567 in 1921.

The transcontinental railroad and the settlement of the Prairies had an even more dramatic impact on the economy of northwestern Ontario¹⁵ and the Thunder Bay District. The European settlement of the Thunder Bay District began during the fur trade when it was home to Fort William, the inland headquarters of the Northwest Company of Montreal. The decline of the fur trade led to the region's marginalization but the opening of the canal at Sault Ste. Marie witnessed the region's evolution from "barrier" to "zone of transit" to a region with its own economic opportunities.¹⁶ In the 1870s, there was a mining boom and a growing timber trade. The coming of the transcontinental railway in the 1880s linked the region to the Prairie wheat economy and central Canada. The Thunder Bay District was positioned between the Prairie wheat economy, from which it would benefit by having its major metropolitan centre serve as entrepot, and central Canada, where it was part of Canada's wealthiest province.

The northwestern portion of the province, along with the Thunder Bay District, was directly tied to the Prairie Wheat Boom via the grain port function of the twin cities of Fort William and Port Arthur known collectively as the "Lakehead".¹⁷ Moreover, a portion of the economy was rooted in local manufacturing development, resource extraction and agricultural development.¹⁸ The growth of grain elevator storage capacity

¹⁵ Northwestern Ontario consists of the Districts of Kenora, Rainy River and Thunder Bay .

¹⁶ Arthur, *Thunder Bay District, "Beyond Superior"*.

¹⁷ Di Matteo, "*Economic development of the Lakehead*", *Evidence on Lakehead*, "*Booming sector*".

¹⁸ Gross regional product in the absence of the wheat boom at the Lakehead would have been 42 per cent smaller . In addition, by 1921, there were 1,534 farms supporting a rural population of 7,397 around the Lakehead. Forestry also employed thousands, in extraction, at sawmills and at the three pulps mills either operating or under construction by 1921. See Di Matteo, "*Booming sector*", p. 611-614.

at the Lakehead from 1884-1915 was a direct consequence of the expanding wheat economy. From approximately 350,000 bushels of grain storage in 1884, capacity grew to 48.6 million bushels by 1915 with approximately 85 percent of the construction after 1900. The population of the district grew rapidly with the greatest expansion between 1901 and 1911 when the population nearly tripled to 39,496 and went on to reach 49,560 in 1921.

The primary data source is the probate records of the Ontario surrogate courts. Under the *Surrogate Courts Act, 1858* (Statutes of Canada, 22 Vict., Cap. 93, 1858) a surrogate court with the power to issue grants of probate and administration valid throughout the province was established in each Ontario county, replacing the centralized Court of Probate established in 1793. One applied for probate in the county or district where most of one's property was located. Non-residents would need to apply for probate in the district or county in which that property was situated. Probate was an institutional arrangement, which transferred property from the dead to the living. The process of probate served to grant administration over the estate of the deceased as well as to authenticate the will and provide evidence as to the character of the executor.¹⁹ In intestate cases (without a will) the application to the court for administration was made by an interested party, (usually the widow or next of kin but sometimes a creditor) and once granted, distribution of the estate was made according to law.

The data set for the Thunder Bay District was constructed from the probate records of the District of Thunder Bay Surrogate Courts for the period 1885 to 1925. Prior to the creation of the District of Thunder Bay in 1885, the few estates from the region were probated in the District of Algoma. All estates bearing application dates in the years 1885 to 1925 were examined. A total of 1,780 individuals, and data on their residence, occupation, marital status, number of children, date of death, whether they had a will and the value of the estates were recorded. Unfortunately, age at death was not

¹⁹ Howell (1880: 155).

available in the probate records.²⁰ The result is a 40-year time series with cross-sections of varying size. The first few years of the data set contain few estates whereas the later years contain approximately 100 estates per year. For example, the years 1885-1889 account for only 28 estates and 1890 to 1894 for only 42 estates, whereas 1910-1914 accounts for 348 estates, 1915-1920 accounts for 520 estates and 1921 to 1925 contains 482 estates.

The data for Wentworth County contains 444 core probated decedents for the years 1872-1902 collected previously which were then augmented with the addition of 76 decedents for 1892 and 54 for 1902 who could not be traced for the original data set but for whom data on real and personal estate and other characteristics was available from probate.²¹ This increases the total data set available for 1872 to 1902 to 574 individuals. To this was added data for all the estates probated for the years 1907 and 1912 which adds another 609 probated decedents with data on their residence, occupation, marital status, number of children, date of death, whether they had a will and the value of the estates. As is the case for the Thunder Bay District, the early years of this data set are smaller. There are 50 observations for 1872, 79 for 1882, 230 for 1892, 215 for 1902, 277 for 1907 and 332 for 1912 for a total of 1,183 observations.

Table 1 provides summary statistics for the two data sets. As one might expect from a more recently settled frontier region, the proportion of male decedents was substantially higher in the Thunder Bay District compared to Wentworth County. Average real wealth, real estate and financial assets for the Wentworth county data were 36, 23 and 38 percent higher, respectively, than the Thunder Bay District though the actual gap may not be as large given that the Wentworth county data does not currently cover the post-boom period. Wentworth county decedents were also more likely to be testate and be employed as farmers. As for marital status, the proportion of married decedents were quite similar though Wentworth County had relatively more widows and

²⁰ Data on age could theoretically be acquired by census-linkage but the potential success is limited as only three census years (1881, 1891, 1901) are available to the public for the time span covered by these data sets.

²¹ For information on the collection of the original Wentworth County Data set of 405 census-linked observations see Di Matteo and George (1992). An additional 39 decedents for 1902 were census-linked later bring the data up to 444. For 1872 and 1882, probate only provides personal estate and therefore the real estate data for these original census-linked estates was obtained from assessment rolls and therefore no additions were made to the data for these years.

widowers while Thunder Bay District had a larger share of single decedents – no doubt a reflection of the comparison of a frontier area to a more settled one. The average number of children was also larger in Wentworth County compared to the Thunder Bay District.

Evidence and Analysis

In the Thunder Bay District, over the entire period 1885 to 1925, male decedents had approximately 66 percent greater average real wealth than female (See Table 2), with an average of \$5,638 to \$3,393.²² The gap between male and female wealth fluctuated over time with the gap growing the most during the economic bust period 1914 to 1920. The decline in average wealth continued for males during the period 1921 to 1925 but female wealth actually began to recover. Growth during the boom era was more pronounced for males but the wealth decline from 1914-1920 was more pronounced for females. Between the periods 1885 to 1906 and 1914 to 1920, male average real wealth still rose by 26 percent whereas for females it fell by 53 percent. The collapse in female property holding was particularly pronounced when it came to financial asset holding and may be related to the greater propensity of women in the Thunder Bay District to hold their financial assets as moneys secured by mortgage.

Surviving widows frequently had their share of their deceased spouse's estate invested in mortgages as a directive of the will.²³ What this did in essence was directly link their financial assets to the real estate market. As a result, women in the Thunder Bay District had a proportionately larger share of their wealth invested in real estate when both direct real estate ownership and indirect ownership via mortgages is factored in. For example, during the boom period from 1907 to 1913, the ratio of average real estate to average wealth for men was 50.9 percent whereas for women it was 37.9 percent. However, when the average value of moneys secured by mortgage is treated as a “real

²² Thunder Bay District estate files were collected annually for the period 1885-1925 but small numbers particularly for the period prior to 1900 made aggregating into broad periods a more suitable approach. From 1885 to 1900, there are a total of 153 estates for the Thunder Bay District. For Wentworth County, the year 1892 alone has 154 census-linked estate files.

²³ Indeed, Baskerville argues that married women were beginning to dominate the Victoria land market and widows the Hamilton land market in the late nineteenth century. He writes that "land markets in both cities were becoming, albeit in slightly different ways, increasingly feminized during the later years of the nineteenth century." Baskerville, "Women and investment", p.198

estate” investment, the comparable figures become 69 percent for men and 74 percent for women.

When the economic bust arrived in the Thunder Bay District, women were hit hard first in their real estate portfolios (as were men) but then a second time because of their dependence on mortgages as their primary financial asset. During 1907 to 1913, the ratio of the average value of moneys secured by mortgage to average wealth for women was 36.1 percent while for men it was 18.0 percent. When the decline in the real average value of mortgages came, there was a drop of 33 percent for men and 91 percent for women.

It is possible that the boom saw women extend themselves into more marginal property investments under the artificial security conveyed by rising land prices. In an attempt to see if women were less risk-averse than men, the share of wealth held as financial assets was regressed on wealth using a non-parametric technique known as LOWESS on male and female estates valued at \$100,000 or less. LOWESS is a non-parametric regression technique, which estimates a line of best-fit without assuming a specific functional form. In fitting LOWESS curves, the crucial decision involves the size of the smoothing parameter or bandwidth over which the locally weighted regressions used in the estimation process are estimated. Larger bandwidths provide greater degrees of smoothing while smaller bandwidths provide more variation in the final smoothed curve. For references on LOWESS see Cleveland (1979, 1985 and 1993).

The results are presented in Figures 1 and 2 and reveal that in Wentworth County, men and women both exhibited increasing risk aversion for wealth levels below \$5,000 but then displayed decreasing risk aversion afterwards. However, women in Wentworth County held their wealth in much riskier assets than males at all wealth levels. In the Thunder Bay District, increasing risk aversion was also displayed by both males and females for lower levels of wealth, with decreases as wealth rose, but women only began to exceed men in terms of the riskiness of their portfolios at fairly high levels of wealth.

Another factor is that the proportion of female decedents who were widows also declined during the "bust" period while the proportion that were married rose. The

wealth of widows tended to be much greater than that of married women.²⁴ Nevertheless, at least in the Thunder Bay District, the progress that female wealth and property holders had made during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was delivered a severe setback in the aftermath of the end of the wheat boom period. While a small wealth recovery begins in the 1921-25 period for women, it does not appear to have extended to men. It is also interesting that average real estate and mortgage values appear to have stabilized for women in the 1921-25 period but decline continued for men in these categories.

For Wentworth County, the evidence (See Table 3) suggests that the period of the wheat boom up to 1912 also saw growth in wealth holding, but not as exuberantly as in the Thunder Bay District which was more directly tied to the wheat economy via its transshipment role for grain after 1900. Moreover, the gap between male and female average wealth was greater than in the Thunder Bay District. For example, by 1912, average male wealth was nearly 4 times that of females. In addition, while women in Wentworth County also had a higher propensity towards mortgages than men from 1882 to 1892, this declined after 1892 and by 1912 – at the height of the wheat boom – women in Wentworth County had a much lower average share of their wealth held as mortgages compared to men. This is quite different from the evidence for the Thunder Bay District. In a manner analogous to that described by Baskerville (1999), women appear to have made relatively larger gains in the frontier region. By 1912, the real average wealth of women in Wentworth County was 3,937 dollars while women in the Thunder Bay District saw average real wealth of 7,572 dollars for the period 1907-1913.

In addition, a series of simple non-parametric regressions are run in order to more rigorously assess if wealth accumulation by women was continuous over the period 1870 to 1925 or if there were any setbacks? The non-parametric technique LOWESS is used to construct wealth-year profiles for males and females in Wentworth County and Thunder Bay District with the results presented in Figures 3-6.

²⁴ For the period 1907 -1913 in Thunder Bay District, 50.7 percent of female decedents were married and 42.3 percent were widows. For the period 1914 to 1920, 60.3 percent of female decedents were married and 29.4 percent were widows.

The results in Figures 3-6 show that male wealth was greater than female wealth in both the Thunder Bay District and Wentworth County but that over time the gap declined. Nevertheless, while female wealth rose continually in Wentworth County over the period 1872 to 1912, by 1912 the average female wealth level was still only 45 percent that of males compared to about 15 percent in 1872. In the Thunder Bay District, the increase in female average wealth as a percentage of male wealth was quite dramatic rising from just under 10 percent in 1885 to over 70 percent by the late 1890s and then declining to approximately 60 percent by World War I with a slow recovery afterwards. It appears that improvements to the female rate of property ownership did occur in both regions over time but the process was more gradual in the older, more established region and prone to setbacks in the frontier region. In Wentworth County, a 40-year period saw the continual growth of average female wealth to male wealth to the point where average female wealth represented just under half of male wealth. In Thunder Bay District, the share declined from a peak that was approaching 75 percent and settled at about two-thirds though an increase then seems to have started again after 1921.

Another explanation for some of these differences may be in the timing of wealth holding experiences between a newly settled area and a more established one. Thunder Bay District was sparsely populated prior to 1900 and population growth accelerated during the 1901-1911 period and prior to 1914, the frontier boom afforded numerous property acquisition opportunities. Wentworth County was a well established and populated region by 1900 and in southern Ontario, the 1890s began with a severe recession that severely impacted on real estate values.²⁵

Males and females in Wentworth County both see a decline in average wealth between 1892 and 1902. It may be that in the wake of this economic bust, women and men in Wentworth County revised their portfolio behaviour and were more cautious once the boom of the early twentieth century began. Indeed, in Wentworth County, relative to women, men seem to be the greater risk takers in 1912 with an average value of

²⁵ Darroch (1983) notes an increase in wealth for the Toronto area during the 1880s that was ended by the recession of 1892.

mortgages nearly 10 times that of females. Relative to women in the Thunder Bay District, the risk of acquiring real estate and investing in mortgages during a property boom may have been a lesson learned earlier by female property holders in Wentworth County.

A final useful examination of the evidence breaks the data up according to marital status. Figures 7-12 presents the data by male and female for each geographic division according to marital status. In Wentworth County, the average real wealth of married women between 1872 and 1912 rose by 293 percent while that of widows rose only 153 percent and that of single women 131 percent. By way of comparison, the average real wealth of married men actually declined 10 percent from 1872 to 1912 while that of widowers rose 53 percent and single men 98 percent. As a result, between 1872 and 1912, the ratio of female to male average wealth rose from 0.13 to 0.57 for those who were married, 0.17 to 0.28 for those whose spouse was deceased and 0.39 to 0.45 for those who were single. Wentworth County appears to have exhibited continuous and quite substantial gains especially for married women.

In contrast, the results for Thunder Bay District are quite mixed when broken up by marital status because of the effects of the boom/bust period. Between the 1885/1906 to 1921/1925 period, the average real wealth of married women declined by 50 percent as opposed to 45 percent for married men. Widows and single women also fared worse than widowers and single men over this period as they also reported greater declines in average wealth.²⁶ Nevertheless, while the ratios of average female to male wealth by marital status category also declined, they remained quite high and indeed higher than Wentworth County. The average ratio of female to male wealth for married individuals between 1885/1906 and 1921/25 declined from 0.62 to 0.57, that for widows to widowers declined from 1.10 to 0.79 and that for single individuals declined from 2.29 to 2.03. Thus, while women appear to have made greater gains in Thunder Bay District relative to

²⁶ The average wealth of widows in the Thunder Bay District between 1885/1906 and 1921/25 declined by 40 percent as opposed to 17 percent for widowers. The comparable result for single individuals was a 25 percent decline for women and 15 percent decline for men.

Wentworth County, these appear to have been the product of the boom and slowly eroded over time while women in Wentworth County exhibited a more gradual and sustained increase over time.

Conclusion

In the wake of female property rights legislation in nineteenth century Ontario, there was an increase in wealth holding by women as evidenced from probate wealth data for the Thunder Bay District and Wentworth County. There were, however, differences in the process between these two regions over time, especially when broken up by marital status, that suggest that property and wealth acquisition by females was not a uniform process either temporally or spatially. Moreover, while there was growth in female property ownership in Ontario in the 50 years after the first Married Women's Property Act in 1873, that period saw female wealth acquisition remain substantially below that of males.

Female wealth rose continually in Wentworth County over the period 1872 to 1912 but by 1912 average female wealth holding was still only 45 percent that of males compared to about 15 percent in 1872. In the Thunder Bay District, the increase in female average wealth as a percentage of male wealth was quite dramatic rising from just under 10 percent in 1885 to over 70 percent by the late 1890s but then declining to approximately 60 percent by 1916 with only a slow recovery afterwards. At least in the Thunder Bay District, growth in female property ownership also seems to have been accompanied by setbacks in the wake of the great boom of the early twentieth century.

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Table 1 Summary Statistics for the Two Data Sets (\$1900 Dollars)

	<i>Thunder Bay District 1885-1925</i>	<i>Wentworth County 1872-1912</i>
N	1780	1183
Percent Male	78.5	67.5
Average Wealth	5156.27	7013.53
Average Real Estate	2309.65	2848.27
Average Financial Assets	2448.75	3388.33
Percent Testate	50.0	68.5
Percent Farmer	9.3	17.8
Percent Married	54.9	54.1
Percent Widow	8.0	17.6
Percent Widower	8.5	12.7
Percent Single	28.4	15.7
Average No. of Children	1.6	2.4

Table 2 Selected Wealth Statistics by Gender in Thunder Bay District (1900 dollars)

	<i>1885-1906</i>	<i>1907-1913</i>	<i>1914-1920</i>	<i>1921-1925</i>
<i>%Male</i>	84.7	81.9	77.3	73.6
<i>%Female</i>	15.3	18.1	22.7	26.4
<i>Average Wealth</i>				
	<i>1885-1906</i>	<i>1907-1913</i>	<i>1914-1920</i>	<i>1921-1925</i>
<i>Males</i>	4,427	9,665	5,572	2,984
<i>Females</i>	4,192	7,572	1,965	2,337
<i>Average Real Estate</i>				
	<i>1885-1906</i>	<i>1907-1913</i>	<i>1914-1920</i>	<i>1921-1925</i>
<i>Males</i>	1,739	4,923	2,468	987
<i>Females</i>	2,299	2,873	1,061	1,032
<i>Average Value of Moneys Secured by Mortgage</i>				
	<i>1885-1906</i>	<i>1907-1913</i>	<i>1914-1920</i>	<i>1921-1925</i>
<i>Males</i>	460	1,741	1,166	123
<i>Females</i>	277	2,730	233	352
<i>Average Real Estate to Average Wealth</i>				
	<i>1885-1906</i>	<i>1907-1913</i>	<i>1914-1920</i>	<i>1921-1925</i>
<i>Males</i>	0.393	0.509	0.443	0.331
<i>Females</i>	0.548	0.379	0.540	0.442
<i>Average Mortgages to Average Wealth</i>				
	<i>1885-1906</i>	<i>1907-1913</i>	<i>1914-1920</i>	<i>1921-1925</i>
<i>Males</i>	0.104	0.180	0.209	0.041
<i>Females</i>	0.066	0.361	0.119	0.151

Source: Thunder Bay District Estate Files

TABLE 3 Selected Wealth Statistics by Gender in Wentworth County, Ontario, 1872-1912 (1900 Dollars)

	1872	1882	1892	1902	1907	1912
PERCENT MALE	88	78	72	68	64	63
PERCENT FEMALE	12	22	28	32	36	37
AVERAGE WEALTH(\$)						
MALES	8,032	7,148	10,691	9,835	7,019	8,814
FEMALES	1,376	1,531	2,732	2,612	4,351	3,937
AVERAGE REAL ESTATE(\$)						
MALES	3,102	3,043	5,843	3,331	2,129	3,476
FEMALES	358	475	1,323	1,107	1,547	1,406
AVERAGE MORTGAGES (\$)						
MALES		729	565	1,628	640	1,906
FEMALES		318	376	499	865	392
AVG REALEST/ AVG WEALTH						
MALES	0.386	0.426	0.547	0.355	0.303	0.394
FEMALES	0.26	0.31	0.484	0.424	0.355	0.357
AVG MORTGAGES/ AVG WEALTH						
MALES		0.102	0.053	0.173	0.091	0.216
FEMALES		0.208	0.138	0.191	0.199	0.099

Source: Wentworth County Estate Files

Note: For 1872, separate categories for financial assets were not available, only aggregates for personal property.

Figure 1

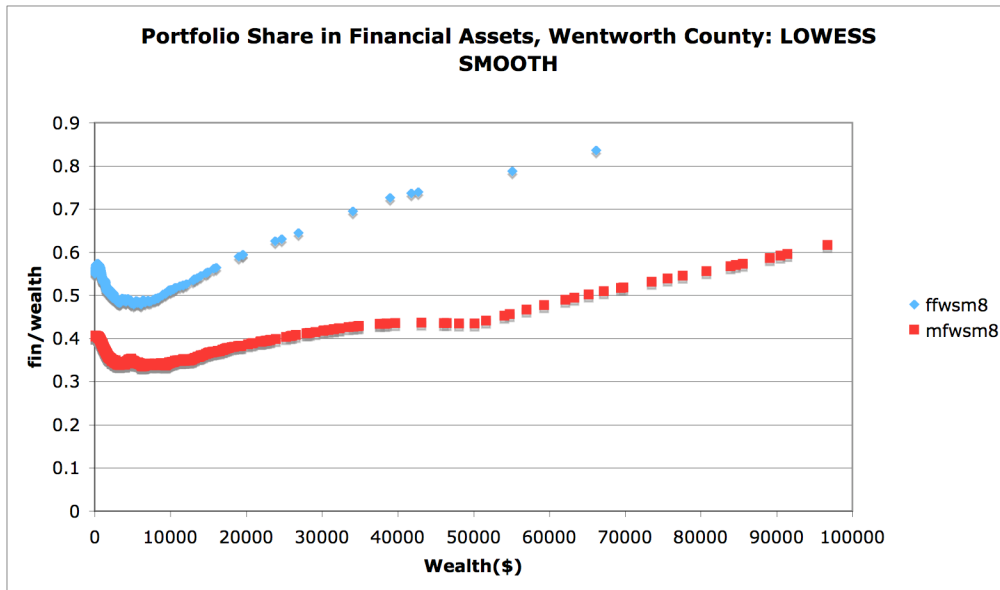


Figure 2

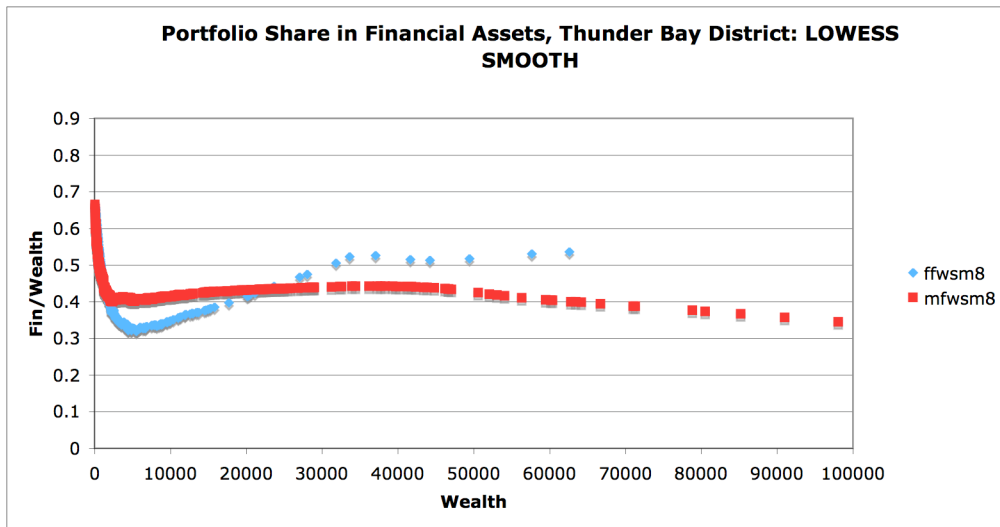


Figure 3

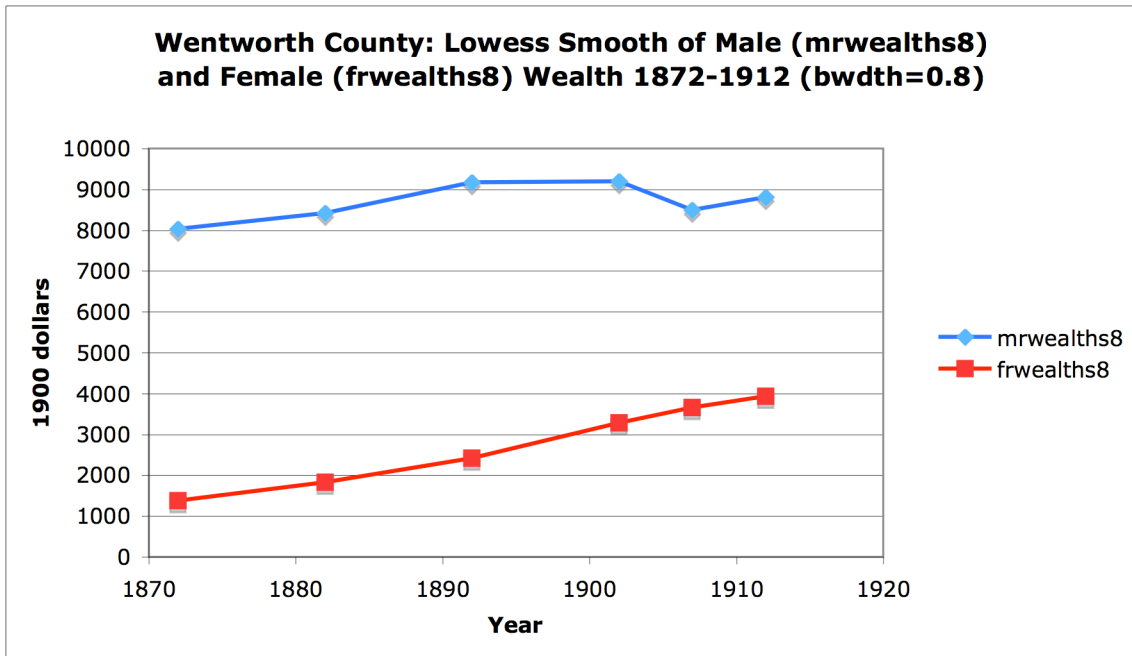


Figure 4

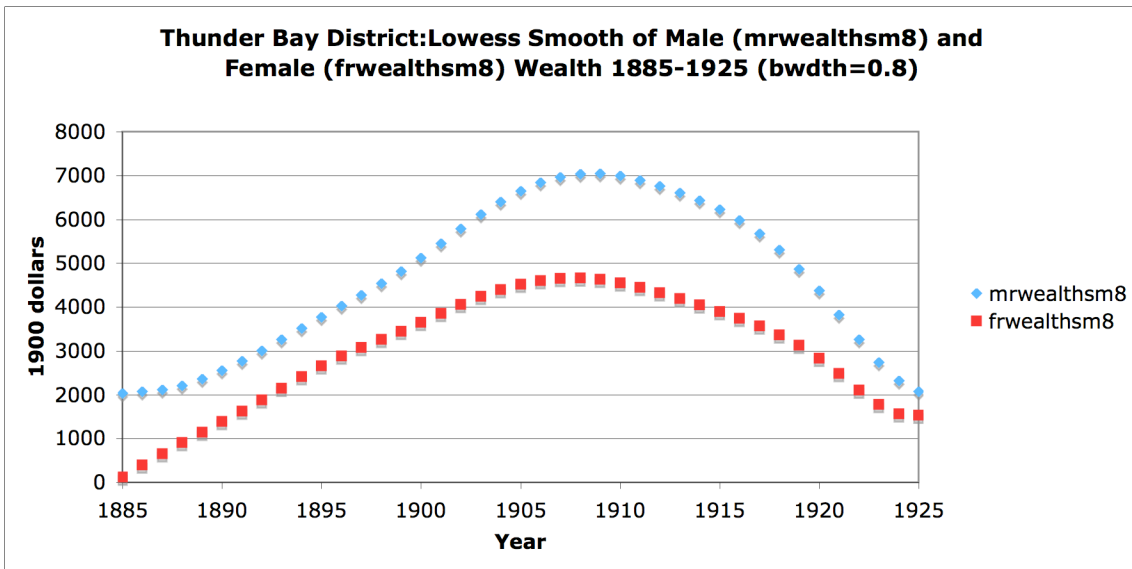
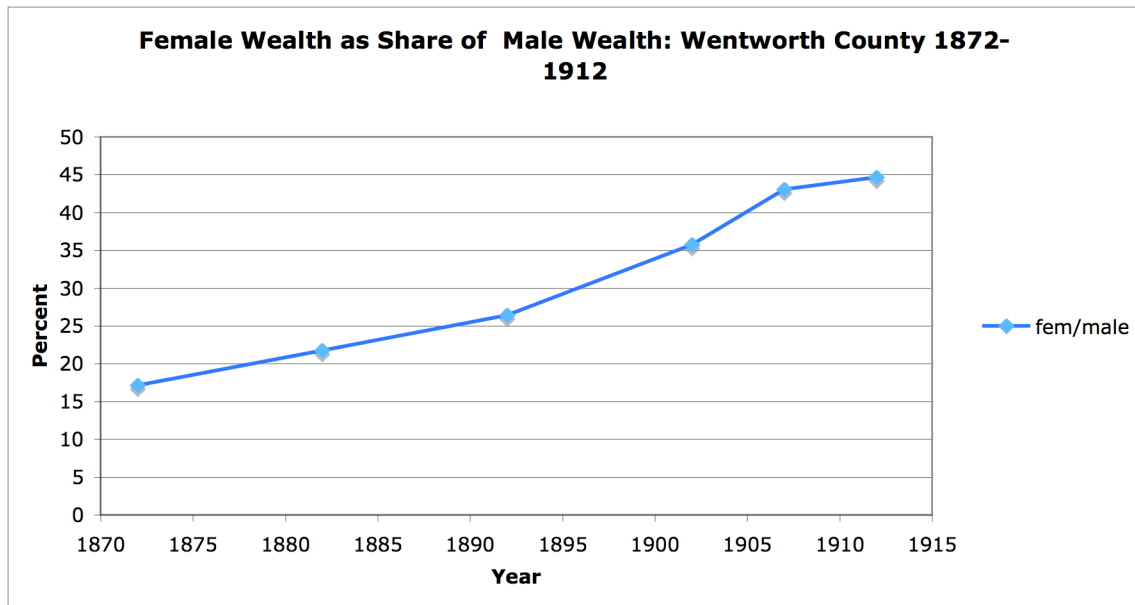
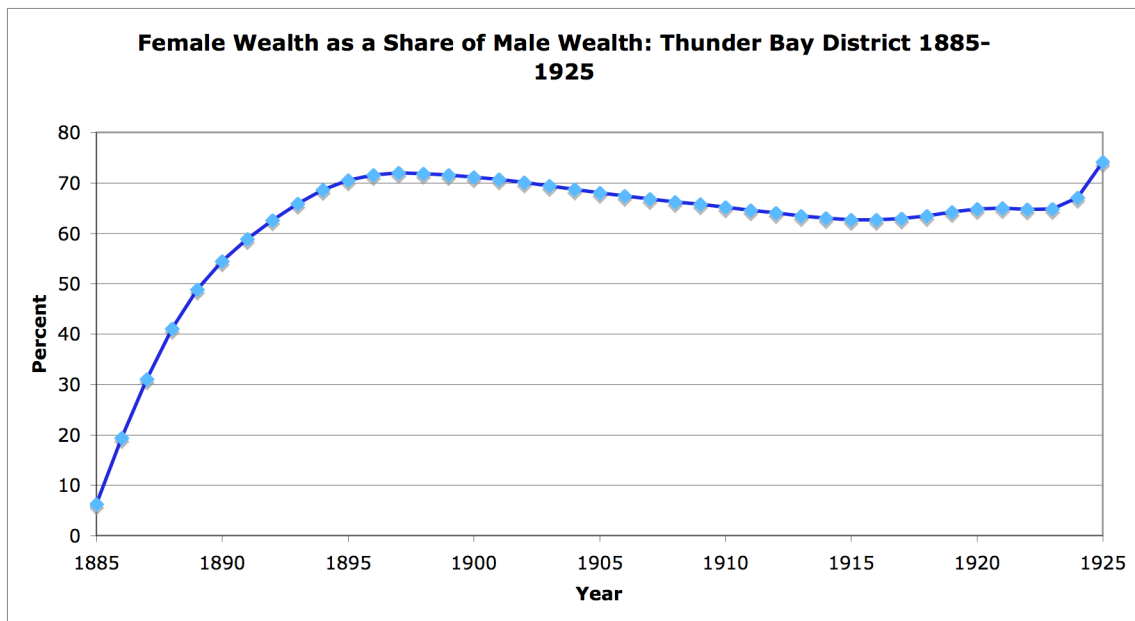


Figure 5



Source: Figure 1

Figure 6



Source: Figure 2

Figure 7

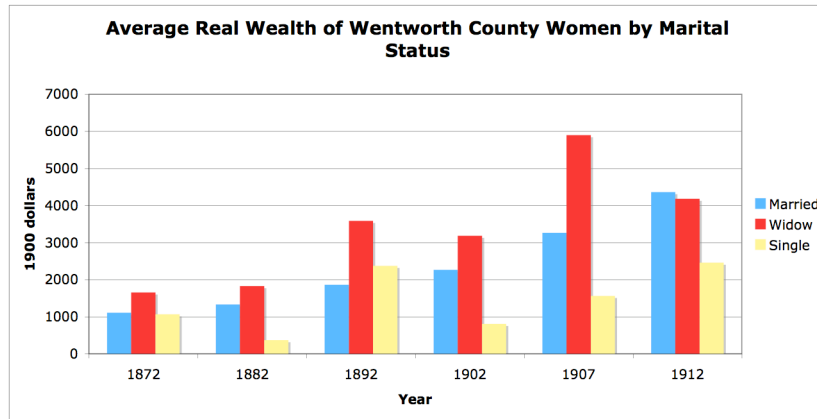


Figure 8

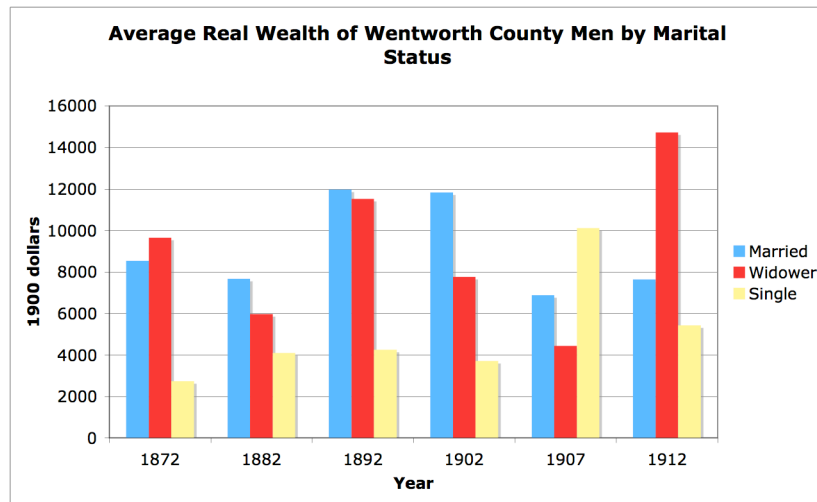


Figure 9

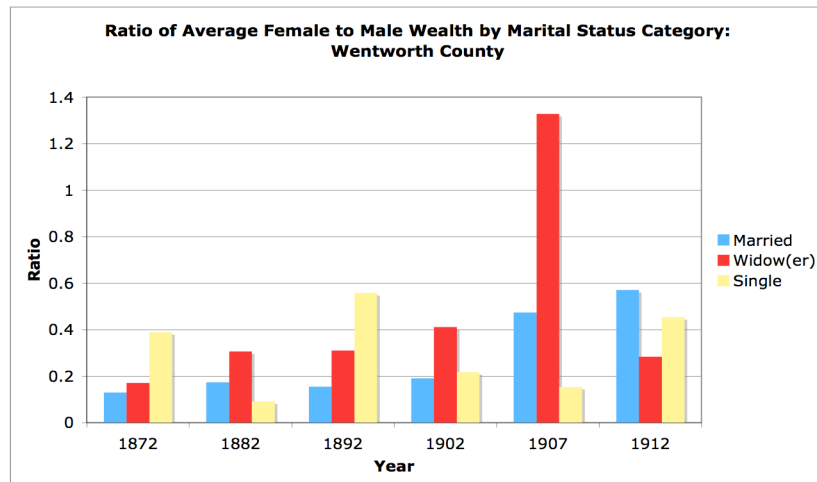


Figure 10

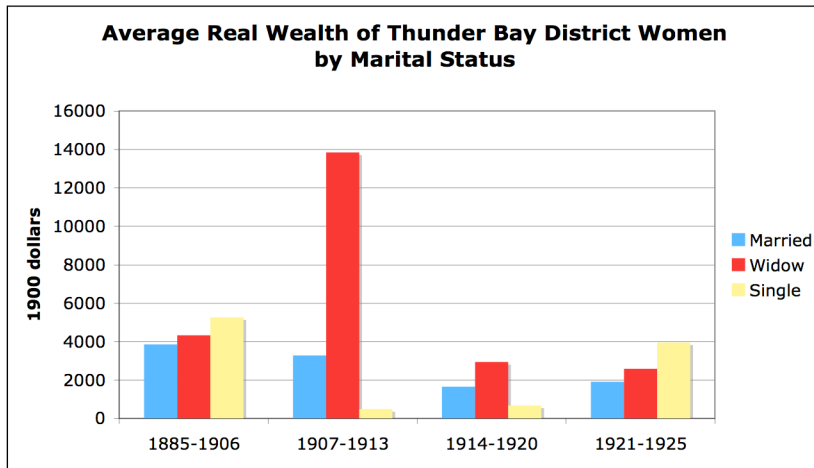


Figure 11

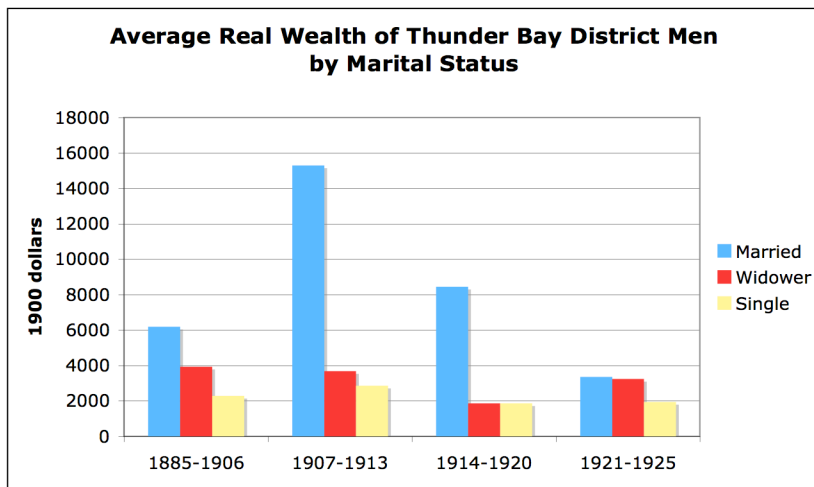


Figure 12

