RESEARCH REPORTS/ NOTE DE RECHERCHE

French Canadian Immigrants in the New England Cotton Industry:

A Socioeconimic Profile

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I

DESPITE THE GROWING INTEREST shown recently in the history of the immigration and settlement of French Canadians in New England, the research on this important chapter of North American history is still at an early stage.[1] This statement is especially justified in view of the enormous magnitude of this immigration and of the exceptionally long time-period it encompassed. Among the various students that have analyzed that movement, perhaps no other had rendered a greater scientific service than Ralph Vicero.[2] Through a skillful utilization of impressionistic sources and quantitative data, Vicero has provided a basic picture of the magnitude of the movement and of its impact on New England society. Equally important, he has made it possible to gain a clear understanding of the various stages through which that movement evolved. Subsequent studies dealing with specific time-periods, or with particular localities, have greatly benefitted from the solid starting point which Vicero's work represents. Vicero's study, however, ends with the closing of the nineteenth century. No comparable study has yet been attempted of the period from 1900 to 1929 — a period during which the immigration movement of French Canadians underwent important changes owing to critical transformations occurring in the socioeconomic contexts of both New England and Quebec.

This paper is an attempt to begin such an analysis. We shall try to single out and analyze some of the salient characteristics of the foreign-born French Canadian labour force in the New England cotton industry during the early

[1] For a recent discussion of the state of the research on this subject see Gerard J. Brault, "État présent des études sur les centres Franco-Américains de la Nouvelle-Angleterre", in Claire Quintal and André Vachon, eds., *Situation de la recherche sur la franco-américanie* (Québec 1980).

[2] Ralph Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England, 1840-1900", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1968.

Bruno Ramirez, "French Canadian Immigrants in the New England Cotton Industry: A Socioeconomic Profile," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 11 (Spring 1983), 125-142.

1900s. To the extent that these traits are directly related to immigration, they shed considerable light on the character of the population movement of French Canadians to New England in the early twentieth century. The cotton industry attracted the largest proportion of French Canadian immigrants. The choice of the time-period rests on a mixture of analytical criteria and circumstantial factors. From an analytical viewpoint, in fact, the first decade of the twentieth century reflects clearly the transformations that had occurred in the emigration movement from Canada to the United States. It also demonstrates the changes which were taking place in the cotton industry and in the composition of that sector's workforce. While these two latter aspects have been addressed by some authors, very little is known about how those changes affected the pattern of French Canadian immigration to New England, and in particular, those immigrants' relationship to the cotton industry.

The circumstantial factor mentioned above was the extensive investigation done in 1908-09 by the Immigration Commission in an attempt to ascertain the impact of immigration on United States society.[3] Despite the controversy that the Immigration Commission has generated among immigration analysts and historians, its 41 volumes of findings remain an extremely important source of empirical data that no immigration historian can afford to ignore. Its investigators gathered data on the economic and social conditions of the major immigrant groups. Moreover, they specifically studied the industrial sectors where the immigrant workforce was particularly concentrated. Thus, the Commission devoted one volume of its Reports to the textile industry, with separate studies of cotton manufacturing and silk manufacturing.

Our study is based primarily on the data pertaining to the immigrant work force in the cotton industry. The Commission Report gives separate data for the various North Atlantic localities, which include primarily the New England States, and to a lesser extent New York and Pennsylvania. Besides the great variety of socioeconomic information provided, the Report is exceedingly valuable because of the large number of workers covered by the inquiry. According to our estimates, about 40 per cent of the active workforce in cotton manufacturing was covered by this investigation. The Commission gathered information from about 13,000 foreign-born French Canadian workers. Moreover, separate data were given for specific New England cotton manufacturing communities, such as Lowell, Fall River, New Bedford, and Manchester.

The information gathered from individual cotton workers is complemented by a set of data covering households in which the head of the house was engaged in cotton manufacturing. Although here the sample is much smaller than that used for cotton employees, the household-based data add an important dimension on the working and living conditions which characterized the cotton industry's immigrant labour force.

[3] United States Senate, Immigration Commission. *Immigrants in Industries*. Senate Doc. 633, 61st Cong., 2d Sess., 1911. (Hereafter referred to as *I.C.*)

Before proceeding with our analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics of the French Canadian cotton workers in New England, a few words should be said on the general context marking the cotton industry during the Progressive Era, as well as on the immigration movement of French Canadians to the New England region. Although New England was still the major region of cotton manufacturing in the country, its position was being increasingly challenged by the southern states. Tables I and II show clearly how this trend of interregional competition had become well established by the turn of the century (this trend would reach a critical stage during the 1920s).

Table I

Number of cotton spindles in United States (in millions), by groups of states, 1880 to 1908.

	1880	1890	1900	1905	1908
New England States	8.6	10.8	12.8	13.9	15.5
Southern States*	.5	1.6	4.3	7.5	10.4
All other States	1.6	1.8	1.9	1.8	2.1
Total	10.7	14.2	19.0	23.2	28.0

*The Southern States here included are Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Arkansas included with all other States in 1908.

SOURCE: United States Senate. *Report on the Conditions of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States.* (Washington 1910), I, 19

Table II

Average number of males and of females 16 years of age and over and of children under 16 employed in the cotton industry, 1880 to 1905, by geographical divisions.

Division	Males 16 years and over				Females 16 years and over			
	1880	1890	1900	1905	1880[a]	1890[a]	1900	1905
New England States	45,521	63,749	78,217	76,483	62,554	73,445	73,258	70,113
Middle States	8,919	11,580	14,473	13,875	13,185	16,240	16,056	15,213
Southern States	4,633	12,517	40,528	54,621	7,587	15,083	32,528	37,918
Western States	612	991	1,136	739	1,213	1,839	1,867	1,467
Total	59,085	88,837	134,354	145,718	84,539	106,607	123,709	124,711

Division	Children under 16 years				Total			
	1880[b]	1890[b]	1900	1905	1880	1890	1900	1905
New England States	17,704	10,165	10,819	9,385	125,779	147,359	162,294	155,981
Middle States	6,014	4,021	4,314	2,783	28,118	31,841	34,843	31,871
Southern States	4,007	8,815	24,438	27,571	16,317	36,415	97,494	120,110
Western States	505	431	295	290	2,330	3,261	3,298	2,496
Total	28,320	23,432	39,868	40,029	172,544	218,876	297,929	310,458

[a] In 1880 and 1890 females 15 years and over

[b] In 1880 and 1890 males under 16 and females under 15 years

Source: *Ibid.*, 28.

The growing importance of southern cotton manufacturing has been analyzed in detail in several studies.[4] The main factor behind the rapid expansion was the lower labour costs that southern manufacturers were able to impose on their local work force. This development created increasing pressures on northern cotton industrialists to lower their production costs either by resisting wage demands or by introducing new techniques of production and of labour management. Another option for northern cotton manufacturers was to resort increasingly to new sources of labour power on which they could impose lower wages and working standards. These sources were provided by the new immigration that began to flow into the United States from southern and eastern Europe in the 1890s. By the first decade of the twentieth century, Portuguese, Poles, Greeks, and Italians had become a substantial component of the work force in the New England cotton industry, and almost invariably they occupied the lowest rungs in the occupational structure of the industry. This change in the sources of supply of immigrant labour was accompanied by another trend, less dramatic than the previous one, but still significant for its implication for the cotton industry's labour market. This was the decline of the female component of the industry's work force, and conversely, the increase in the proportion of male workers.

The impact of these developments on the influx of French Canadians to New England and on their relationship with the cotton industry was considerable. The available statistical data do not permit us to explore this question as thoroughly as we wish. A number of important indications, however, flow from the data provided by the Immigration Commission. These data, complemented by census statistics and other available sources, permit us to advance a number of hypotheses on the changing character of the immigration movement from Quebec, and on the relationship of French Canadian workers to the New England cotton industry.

The decline in the inflow of French Canadians to the United States after 1900 is quite clear. Quantitative studies based on both Canadian and American census data, while disagreeing on the exact figures and on the methods of measurement employed, agree in viewing the late 1880s to early 1890s as the period during which the immigration movement from Quebec peaked. This trend was also reflected in the movement to the major region of destination, New England. According to the leading United States demographic study on the subject, while the Canadian-born residing in New England increased by 351,745 between 1870 and 1900, between 1900 and 1910 their number increased by only 15,049, and it actually decreased by 49,983 during the following decade.[5] Of course, as has been pointed out by most analysts, these

[4] See, among others, Jack Blicksilver, *Cotton Manufacturing in the Southeast: An Historical Analysis* (Atlanta 1959); Melvin Thomas Copeland, *The Cotton Manufacturing Industry of the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1923).

[5] Leon E. Truesdell, *The Canadian Born in the United States* (New Haven 1943), Table 9. See also, Gilles Paquet, "L'émigration des Canadiens français vers la Nouvelle-Angleterre, 1870-1910: prises de vue quantitatives," *Recherches Sociographiques*, 5

figures do not take into account the movements of French Canadians across the border during the inter-census years. One should notice, however, that such movements were not exclusive of the post-1900 years, but occurred also during the nineteenth century, and therefore they should not invalidate the post-1900 decline. Actually, some of the data presented below suggest that as far as French Canadian cotton workers in New England are concerned, the extent of the back-and-forth movement after 1900 was remarkably limited.

One of the tasks of the social historian concerned with this topic is trying to establish the relationship between the decline in the inflow of French Canadians to New England and the transformations occurring in that region's cotton industry to which we briefly referred above. We hope that the socioeconomic profile of French Canadian cotton workers will shed some light on this important historical problem.

II

AN IMPORTANT ASPECT in the study of a given immigrant labour force is their occupation prior to emigrating. This information indicates the degree of change that immigrant workers underwent in their transition from one work experience to another. In the case of French Canadian immigrant workers employed in the cotton industry of New England, the change was considerable, especially for men; some of the socioeconomic implications flowing from this transition will be discussed at various points in the following text. Of the 3,191 French Canadian male cotton workers included in this particular sample, only 5.9 per cent were employed in textile manufacturing before coming to the United States. The overwhelming majority of them, 65.8 per cent, had been engaged in some form of agriculture (farmers or farm labourers). Of the remaining 28.3 per cent in the sample, only 6 per cent held an occupation in manufacturing at the time of leaving Quebec, the rest were engaged in occupations such as general labour, hand trades, domestic service, and trade.[6] These data, thus, give us a very clear sense of the degree of occupational change that French Canadian workers experienced as they entered the cotton industry of New England. For the majority of them it was a transition from a rural, non-industrial work context to one of the most important industrial and urban regions of North America, representing also one of the most ethnically-diversified social environments.

If one looks at the French Canadian female cotton workers, the picture is somewhat different. While the largest group came from a farm-related occupation (46.2 per cent), it is a proportion that contrasts significantly with that of their male counterparts. Perhaps more significant is the fact that 22 per cent of them had been employed in textile manufacturing at the time of leaving

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(1964), and Ralph Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England, 1840-1900," Table 13.

[6] *I.C.*, X, 363.

Quebec, as against only 5.9 per cent of their male counterparts. One must add to this a small proportion that had been engaged in manufacturing (3.7 per cent) and another group representing 9 per cent of the sample who had been engaged in sewing, embroidering, or lace making — artisanal activities which had some affinity with textile production.[7] One can thus conclude that although the majority of female French Canadian workers were new to the cotton industry, for an important minority of them employment in the New England cotton industry meant continuing in an occupation which they held at the time of emigrating.

The relation between length of residence in the United States and employment in cotton manufacturing is an aspect which helps to characterize further the experience of French Canadian workers. The Immigration Commission's data do not provide the occupational history of the workers surveyed, but by breaking down the large sample of workers by years of residence, one can establish the degree to which the French Canadian labour in the cotton industry was composed of recently-arrived workers or, conversely, of people who had long resided in the United States.

As far as the male component of the French Canadian work force, of the 6,547 contained in the sample, well over half of them (3,838 or 58.6 per cent) had resided in the United States fifteen years or more. On the other hand, the workers who had resided in the United States for less than five years were only 927, or 14.1 per cent. The full breakdown is given in Chart I. Keeping in mind that these data were taken during the 1908-09 period, one may conclude that the bulk of these workers had immigrated into the United States in the pre-1900 years.

One may also deduce from these figures that after 1900, the volume of entry of French Canadian immigrants in the New England cotton industry had declined considerably compared to what it had been in the pre-1900 period. This decline becomes more significant when compared with an opposite trend occurring among "new immigrants" entering the New England cotton industry during the same period. Of the 3,470 Portuguese workers surveyed, for instance, only 14.3 per cent had resided in the country fifteen years and over. The majority of them, 75.2 per cent, had resided in the United States less than ten years.[8] A somewhat similar trend could be observed among the two other major groups of "new" immigrants, the Poles and the Greeks.

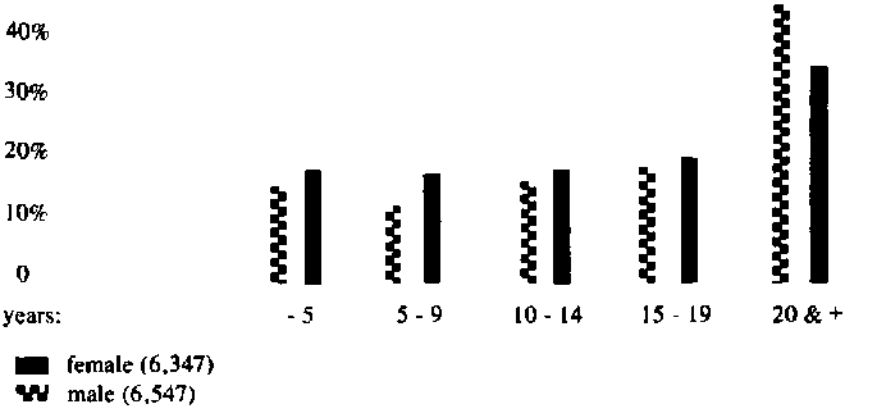
These data give a sense of the aggregate "turnover" in the immigrant labour force of the New England cotton industry during the Progressive Era. Although French Canadian workers continued to be a major component of that industry's work force, access to the industry continued in the face of increasing competition from recently arrived immigrant workers.

This process of labour force recomposition raises two important questions which will be discussed more systematically later in this text. One is the

[7] *Ibid.*, 364.
[8] *Ibid.*, 358.

Chart I

Foreign-born French Canadian cotton employees, by years of residence and by sex, 1908.



Adapted from *I.C. Reports*, X, 358

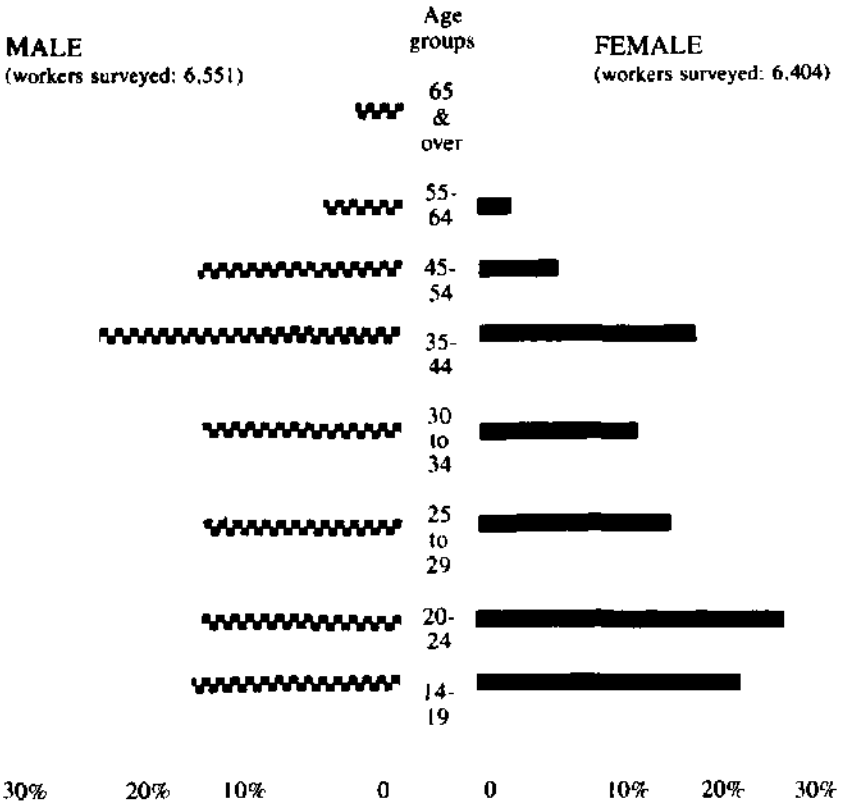
question of the industry's attractiveness to French Canadian workers: was the industry as attractive for those arriving in New England after 1900 as it had been for those arriving in the pre-1900 years? The other question concerns the degree of occupational stratification along ethnic lines occurring as a result of this recomposition: what was the occupational status of French Canadian cotton workers, in terms of earning power and job classification, compared to other groups of immigrants?

One aspect which helps us to characterize further the immigrant French Canadian work force in the New England cotton industry is the age structure and the conjugal condition of the working population. Among the French Canadian men and women employed in the cotton industry important differences were noticeable in terms of their respective age distribution. As Chart II shows, women were far more numerous than men in the 14-to-24 age bracket, representing 47 per cent of their sex group, whereas the men of that age bracket represented only 28 per cent of their sex group.

When one looks more closely at the age distribution among the two sex groups, one can notice that men were fairly equally distributed among the various 14-to-34 age brackets. Their number peaks in the 35-to-44 age bracket, and then, from 45-to-65, it declines gradually. These data imply that, as far as male French Canadian workers were concerned, age was not a major factor determining their mode of entry in the cotton industry. In the case of women, on the other hand, the age distribution appears to be less uniform, and it shows a more complex relationship between the age and the affiliation to the cotton industry. One can notice an important concentration in the 14-to-24 age brackets, followed by a sharp decline in the 25-to-34 brackets. Their number then

Chart II

Age distribution of foreign-born French Canadian cotton workers, by sex, 1908.



Adapted from *I.C. Reports*, X, 412-14

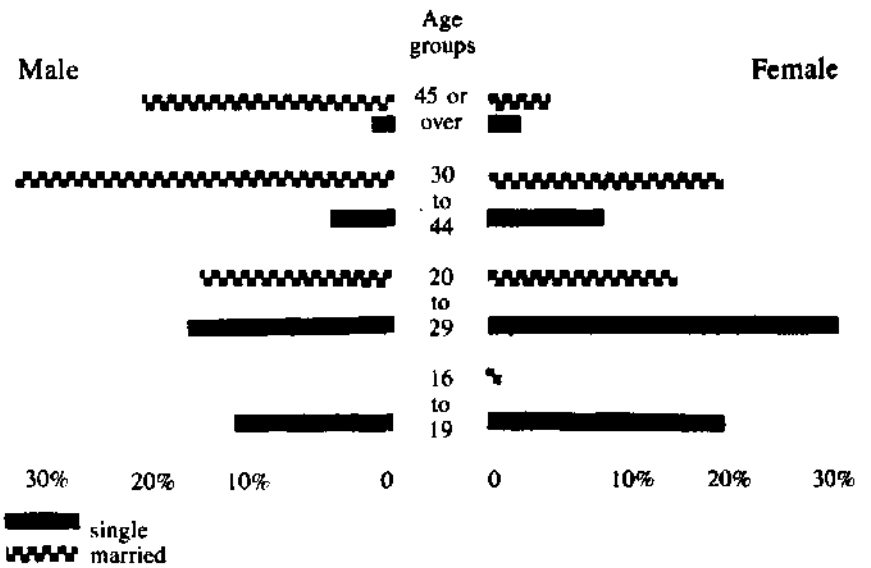
rises significantly in the 35-to-45, and then goes on to decline gradually in the following age brackets. Women's affiliation to the cotton industry in terms of age was clearly related to life-cycle functions such as family historian, Tamara Hareven, has observed in her microanalysis of French Canadian cotton workers in Manchester, N.H.[9] For women, in fact, marriage and child-bearing crucially affected their affiliation with the industry. The sharp decline from the 24-to-34 age bracket may in fact be interpreted as a switch of their primary function from wage-earning to child-bearing and -rearing. Their subsequent increase in the 35-to-45 age bracket may be viewed as a re-entry in the workplace once those basic family-cycle functions had been performed.

[9] Tamara Hareven, "Family and Work Patterns of Immigrant Laborers in a Planned

The relationship beween age, life-cycle functions, and affiliation with the industry becomes clearer when one looks at the conjugal condition of French Canadian cotton workers. (See Chart III) Here again the contrast between male and female workers is quite sharp. In the case of the female workforce, the proportion of single women surpassed by far that of married women; 58.4 per cent were in fact single as against 35.8 per cent married. Although in this case the Immigration Commission data do not provide the same age breakdown given in the previous chart, one can observe the concentration of female married workers in the 30-to-44 age bracket, whereas single female workers are concentrated in the pre-30 age brackets.

Chart III

Conjugal condition of foreign-born French Canadian cotton workers, by sex and age groups, 1908.



Adapted from *I.C. Reports*, X, 396-9

Life-cycle functions therefore had a definite impact in determining the affiliation of French Canadian women to the cotton industry. Being single, and therefore free from child-bearing and child-rearing commitments, was a crucial pre-condition for entry to the industry. At the same time, entry to the industry for married women was not precluded provided they had completed the more exacting stage of child-rearing.

Industrial Town, 1900-1930", in Richard L. Ehrlich, ed., *Immigrants in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Richmond 1977).

The conjugal condition of male French Canadian cotton workers, on the other hand, was almost the exact reverse of that of their female counterparts. The great proportion of them (63.7 per cent) were married, and the rest were single. Moreover, the single-to-married ratio followed a fairly uniform course, reversing itself progressively as one moves into the older age brackets. The affiliation of male French Canadian workers with the cotton industry appears to have been more stable than that experienced by their female counterparts. Unlike the women, male workers' conjugal condition was not a factor affecting their entering or leaving the industry. Although our data do not tell us how long the sampled workers had been employed in the cotton industry, a number of indications lead us to suspect that most of those workers had entered the cotton industry as a life-long occupation. This hypothesis is based on information provided by the Immigration Commission on the status that male French Canadian workers held within the industry's occupational hierarchy. An additional element, perhaps somewhat tenuous but still significant, is the degree of stability in the living condition of the male French Canadian workers surveyed in terms of their movements back and forth to Quebec, and of the measure of family separation.

Standard works on the immigration of French Canadians in the United States have consistently stressed the spatial mobility of this group of immigrants, and in particular, the practice of returning often to their hometowns or villages either to visit their families or to look after their farms or businesses. Discussion of this practice has usually been based on considerations such as the physical proximity of Quebec which greatly reduced the cost and the time of travelling, and on the impact of strong kinship ties, which intensified their desire for family reunions whenever the occasions presented themselves. That the physical proximity of the United States/Canadian border, on the one hand, and the attraction of family ties, on the other hand, acted on French Canadian immigrants greatly increasing their spatial mobility, is not disputed here. What needs to be clarified, however, is 1) the extent to which this practice occurred; 2) whether it was uniformly resorted to by French Canadian immigrants irrespective of their economic and occupational situation; and 3) whether this practice made them (to use a more precise terminology) "migrants." One additional important consideration concerns the time period during which this practice was resorted to.

Recent immigration studies which have taken into account the economic conditions of the place of origin and that of destination, the occupational background of immigrants, and the patterns of emigration (for instance, individual versus chain-migration, or temporary versus permanent immigration) have helped us to conceptualize better our understanding of the multifaceted experiences that the immigration phenomenon produced. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between a "migrant" worker and an immigrant who goes to a given country with the idea of settling there. This distinction is important because the relation of these two types of workers with their respective

families, with the socioeconomy of their home-countries, and with the labour market of the host society can be sharply different.

Studies which have adopted this conceptual distinction have stressed, for instance, the fact that the migrant population was prevailingly male, and that the phenomenon of temporary migration involved a high degree of family separation. Other studies have shown that temporary migration was often related to a socioeconomic structure in the country of departure that made it possible for a migrant to change his socioeconomic status (by having access, for instance, to small land ownership) with the savings accumulated after a few years of work abroad. Finally, the migrant work force was primarily drawn to a particular sector of the labour market, where work was predominantly seasonal, unskilled, and labour intensive; railroad construction and farm labour are probably the two leading examples of this sector of the labour market.[10] These characteristics of a migrant labour force explain to a large extent the high degree of spatial mobility experienced by those people, especially in terms of travelling back and forth from their home countries to the country of destination. It is important to apply this conceptual framework to the immigration experience of French Canadians to New England in an attempt to ascertain whether the conditions described above obtained uniformly throughout the history of that immigration movement and among all the groups that made up that movement.

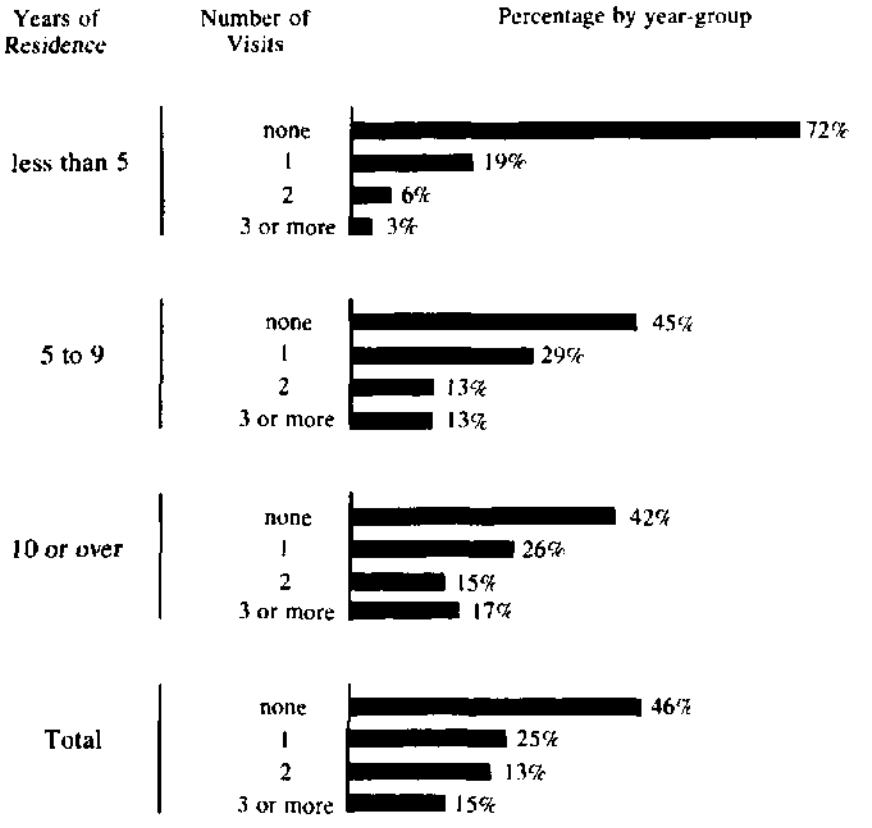
In this context the data provided by the Immigration Commission are very illuminating. The inquirers sought to determine how often foreign-born cotton workers left the United States for one or more visits abroad since the time of their first arrival in the United States. As far as the French Canadian workers employed in the New England cotton industry were concerned, a fairly large sample was used, of 5,885 male and 5,505 female, respectively. (See Chart IV) Moreover, this sample was broken down by length of residence in the United States. The experience of men and women in this respect appears to have been quite similar. Irrespective of the length of residence in the United States, 46 per cent of the men and 50 per cent of the women had made no visits abroad, while 25 per cent of the men and 23 per cent of the women had made only one visit

[10] See, for instance, Robert F. Harney, "Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930," in B. Caroli, R.F. Harney, L. Tomasi, eds., *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America* (Toronto 1978); Robert F. Harney, "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism" in *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979); Bruno Ramirez, Michael Del Balso, *The Italians of Montreal: From Sojourning to Settlement, 1900-1921* (Montreal 1980); Bruno Ramirez, "Montreal's Italians and the Socioeconomy of Settlements: Some Historical Hypotheses," *Urban History Review*, 10 (1981); Bruno Ramirez, "Immigration et rapports familiaux chez les Italiens du Québec," *Critère*, 33 (1982); Josef Barton, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950* (Cambridge 1975); John W. Briggs, *The Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930* (New Haven 1978); Donald Avery, *'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto 1979).

abroad. Those who had made two or more visits abroad were therefore a definite minority, representing 28 per cent of the male and 27 per cent of the female, respectively. As some may suspect, the propensity to make visits abroad increased in proportion to the length of residence. Thus, taking the male French Canadian cotton workers who had resided in the United States less than five years, 72 per cent of them had made no visits abroad, while among those who had resided between five and nine years, the proportion of those who had made no visits abroad declined to 45 per cent. Yet, it is significant to note that even among those who had resided the longest (ten years and more), there were still 42 per cent who had made no visit abroad, and 28 per cent who had made only one visit abroad; the remaining group who had made two or more trips abroad represented only 30 per cent.

Chart IV

Visits abroad made by foreign-born French Canadian male employees, by years of residence in the U.S., 1908.



Adapted from *I.C. Reports*, X, 406

The conclusion that one may draw from these series of data suggests that during the first half of the Progressive Era the French Canadian work force of the New England cotton industry was far from behaving as a typical migrant labour force. One may advance the hypothesis that their relation with the cotton industry was a long-term one, and this implied definite family and residential strategies which contrast sharply with those employed by migrant workers.

The Immigration Commission provides another set of data which reinforces the interpretation argued here. It gives the location (whether in the United States or abroad) of the wives of foreign-born cotton workers. The sample is therefore smaller since it only includes married male workers, yet as far as French Canadians are concerned it is a very large one. Of the 3,875 French Canadian workers surveyed, 3,810 (98.3 per cent) had their wives residing in the United States.[11] Family separation among this group of workers was therefore virtually nonexistent.

A longer period of residence and a more stable relationship with the cotton industry were factors which partially translated themselves in terms of the status held by workers within the occupational hierarchy of the industry. The Immigration Commission data permit us to gain some important insights into this aspect by providing the earning levels of the various ethnic groups of cotton workers. As Table III shows, a wage hierarchy based on ethnic origins was a striking characteristic of the cotton industry. One may easily argue, moreover, that one's position within that hierarchy depended to an important extent on the length of time a worker had been affiliated with the industry — whether in the United States or in the worker's country of origin. Thus, Scotch and English workers, who at the time of leaving their homelands were overwhelmingly employed in the textile industry, were in the highest earning brackets in the

Table III

Average weekly earnings of foreign-born cotton employees, 18 years of age or over, by sex and national origin, 1908. (selected nationality groups only)

	Number reporting complete data		Average earnings per week	
	M	F	M	F
Native-born of native father				
White	2,854	2,109	$11.60	8.34
Scotch	399	293	12.75	8.66
English	2,723	1,853	11.71	8.87
Irish	1,900	2,164	10.49	8.17
French-Canadian	5,708	5,482	10.09	8.23
Portuguese	3,025	1,974	8.05	7.28
Polish	4,217	3,842	7.84	7.32
Greek	2,060	339	7.06	6.88

SOURCE: *I.C. Reports*, X, 83, 87, 89

[11] *I.C.*, X, 405.

New England cotton industry. Next were the Irish, who as it is well known had begun to enter the New England textile industry en masse as far back as the Antebellum period. Although the workers represented by these data were foreign-born, Irish immigrants entering the cotton industry during the Progressive Era had clearly the advantage of entering mills where three generations of their fellow countrymen had already firmly implanted themselves.

French Canadian male workers ranked immediately after the Irish. Here too one may argue that the lower earning performance of French Canadian workers vis-à-vis that of the Irish was largely owing to the fact that the former group had entered the New England cotton industry at a later date. Yet one is surprised to note that the difference in the earning levels of the two groups was quite minimal. In the case of the female work force, French Canadian cotton workers actually ranked higher than their Irish counterpart. These data offer an interesting starting point to pursue an in-depth comparative analysis of these two groups of immigrant workers who taken together represented the largest component of the work force in that industry and whose entry into cotton manufacturing corresponds to two distinct stages of that industry's historical development. What needs to be stressed here, is that by the early 1900s the position of these two groups — at least in terms of their earning level — was fairly similar and as Table III shows, could be defined as a middle position between the highest-paid workers (English, Scotch, Americans), and the "new immigrants" who had recently begun entering cotton manufacturing en masse (i.e. the Poles, the Portuguese, the Greeks, and the Italians).

Another important aspect that emerges from this picture is that the earning level of *women* belonging to older immigrant groups (Irish and French Canadians) was substantially higher than that of *men* belonging to "new" immigrant groups, such as the Portuguese, the Poles, and the Greeks. Only a detailed analysis of the evolving job structures of the cotton industry along sex lines can show the extent to which those two groups of cotton workers had entered into competition by the time the investigation was done. Yet, if one considers that Irish and French Canadian workers represented the overwhelming proportion of the female labour force, one may safely deduce that the changing sex ratio within the industry's work force (decline in the proportion of female workers) was taking place primarily at the expense of those two groups of female workers. While this trend, and the competitive dynamics it created in the industry's labour market, seem to have been quite real, the fact remains that the work of women (and that of children) continued to be an important source of income for households which depended on the cotton industry for their sustenance.

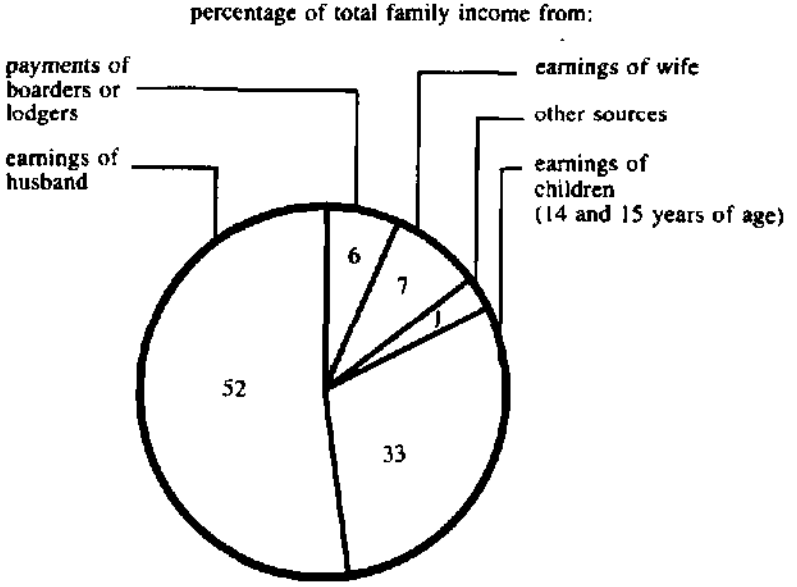
Studies of French Canadian immigration to New England have stressed the important attraction exerted by the cotton industry as it permitted various members of a family unit (parents as well as children) to work in the mills. The extent to which a "family income" (as opposed to a single-breadwinner income) was a reality for French Canadian immigrants may be observed by analyzing the following set of data. The Commission investigated 945 households, mostly immigrants, which depended on the cotton industry for a living,

in an attempt to single out the various sources of family income. Of the total number of households included in the survey, 166 of them were French Canadian. Of the wives belonging to those households, 22.9 per cent were found to be at work. This percentage, significant in itself, becomes even more so when compared with the experience of other ethnic households included in the survey. Only the Portuguese had a higher proportion of wives at work (28.1 per cent), while for the other groups the proportion varied from 11.9 per cent in the case of Americans, to 15.9 per cent in the case of Poles.[12] Next to the Portuguese, therefore, French Canadian households were the ones with the largest proportion of wives at work.

Another important source of income was that coming from the work of children. In 42 per cent of the French Canadian households surveyed, children contributed to the family income through their work. As Chart V shows their income accounted for exactly one third of all the income gained by those households. Thus, the image of the male breadwinner (father or husband) providing through his work for the economic sustenance of the family, was far

Chart V

Relative importance of different sources of family income, French Canadian households, 1908.



Adapted from *I.C. Reports*, X, 112, 114

[12] *Ibid.*, 377.

from the reality. Although in 91 per cent of the French Canadian households surveyed the husband contributed to the family income, in only 24.3 per cent of the cases did the husbands' work represent the only source of income for the family. Taking the 169 French Canadian households together, the income from the husbands' work accounted for a little over half (52 per cent) of the entire income.

Reliance on the work of the various members of the family other than the husband was not a peculiarity of French Canadians. All the other ethnic groups surveyed shared, to a larger or smaller extent, this experience. In the case of two such groups, the Irish and the English, the contribution of children was even greater than that of the French Canadians. This seems to indicate that the factors making possible the pursuit of a "family wage" were related primarily to the character of the cotton industry and to the peculiar labour market conditions it created in the communities in which the industry was implanted. The degree to which particular ethnic attitudes toward work and the family affected the mode and the extent of participation of wives and children to the cotton industry is not clearly apparent from these data.

III

THUS FAR WE HAVE ANALYZED all the pertinent data provided by the Immigration Commission making possible the reconstruction of a socioeconomic profile of French Canadian immigrant workers in the New England cotton industry. These data may be grouped into three categories: 1) data pertaining to the demographic composition of the work force (age structure, sex ratio, conjugal condition); 2) data reflecting the economic situation of French Canadian cotton workers (earning levels, earning contribution of the various family members); and 3) data relating to the character of the affiliation that French Canadian immigrants had with the cotton industry (occupational background, length of residence, spatial mobility, degree of family separation). Our main purpose in analyzing these data was to shed some light on the character that the French Canadian immigration movement to New England had taken by around 1910. In the absence of precise statistical data on the physical movements of those immigrants and of their occupational destination, the profile we have attempted in this study allows us to gain some important insights into the changing character of that immigration movement.

One major conclusion that seems to emerge from these data is that by the time the Industrial Commission undertook its survey, French Canadian immigrants were a much more stable component of the cotton industry's work force than has generally been assumed. Their affiliation with the industry seemed to be a fairly long one (in the majority of cases, pre-dating 1900), and only a small minority of that work force was made up of recently-arrived immigrants. Of course, we do not know how many French Canadian workers had quit and re-entered the industry in the years prior to the survey, but the data on the large

French Canadian working population surveyed suggests a fairly long affiliation with the industry. Despite their occupational background that had relegated them to the lowest conditions of entry into the industry, a majority of the French Canadian immigrants surveyed (both men and women) had managed to reach a middle position within the occupational hierarchy of the New England cotton industry.

More complex and problematic is the second major conclusion that seems to emerge from these data, namely, that during the period under examination the cotton industry did not act as the major force of attraction for French Canadian immigrants that it had been in the 1870 to 1890 period. Although the decline in the immigration movement of French Canadians to New England after 1900 is reflected in the declining influx of French Canadian immigrants in the cotton industry, what needs to be established is whether this phenomenon resulted from a lowered attractiveness of that industry for French Canadian immigrants, or whether their entry into the industry was limited by the competition posed by the massive influx of "new immigrants." Of course, these two hypotheses are not mutually exclusive, and in fact the data allow us to argue that both factors played a role in the changing character of that immigration movement. One may also add that the lowered-attractiveness hypothesis can find empirical support not only in the New England labour market situation, but also in that of Quebec where a major process of economic expansion and urbanization was underway.[13]

As to the labour market situation in the New England cotton industry, the available data suggest that the French Canadian male immigrant workers surveyed by the Commission were well placed within the industry's occupational structure to have to compete with the "new immigrants." The question of attractiveness, however, becomes more significant when one shifts the attention on the second-generation of French Canadians — those classified by the Reports as born in the United States of French Canadian fathers. The Commission devoted one entire volume of its Reports to gather data on the occupational position of first- and second-generation workers belonging to the various immigrant groups. This information was based on unpublished 1900 census data. As far as the French Canadian group was concerned, the data revealed a substantial decline in the entry of second-generation French Canadians into the cotton industry, and this was true of both male and female workers. Whereas cotton workers made up 14.1 per cent of the entire first-generation French Canadian male work force, only 6.7 per cent of the second-generation work force was employed in that industry. This trend was even more marked among first- and second-generation French Canadian female workers. Whereas 48.6 per cent of

[13] On Quebec's industrialization and urbanization during this period, see P.A. Linteau, R. Durocher, J.C. Robert, *Histoire du Québec contemporain* (Montréal 1979), esp. chs. 18, 19, 22; P.A. Linteau, *Maisonneuve: comment des promoteurs fabriquent une ville* (Montréal 1981); Jacques Rouillard, *Les travailleurs du coton au Québec, 1900-1915* (Montréal 1974).

the first group were employed in the cotton industry, the proportion declines to 20 per cent in the case of the second group.[14]

For French Canadians who were born and raised in New England and who had not experienced in the first person the rapid transition from a rural, agricultural background to an industrial, urban setting, the cotton industry did not seem to exert the kind of attraction that it exerted for their immigrant fathers and mothers. Here again it must be pointed out that these data do not enable us to make generalizations as to whether second-generation French Canadian workers consciously shunned the cotton industry or whether their entry into that sector was precluded or limited by the growing presence of "new immigrants." Yet, the dramatic slow-down in the French Canadian immigration flow to New England after 1900, the low presence of recently arrived French Canadian immigrants in the cotton industry's work force, and the sharp decline in the proportion of second-generation French Canadians as compared to that of the first-generation group, are compelling aggregate evidence pointing toward a significant change in the relationship between French Canadian immigration and the New England cotton industry.

[14] *I.C.*, XXVIII, 9, 72.

Notice of Conference

This is to advise that the Third Biennial Conference of the Canadian History of Education Association/Association Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Education will be held in Vancouver, B.C., from October 14-16, 1983 in conjunction with the annual meeting of the History of Education Society (U.S.A.). Some forty paper presentations will be given in the CHEA section and some two dozen papers and panelists are scheduled for the jointly held American meeting. Sessions concern various aspects of the history of education broadly defined and the history of children and youth. Topics relate to Canada, United States and Europe from classical times to the present.

Included among special speakers and paper givers are Brian and Joan Simon (Leicester University), Robert Stamp (Calgary), David Tyack (Stanford), Marvin Lazerson (U.B.C.), Pierre Savard (Ottawa) and Margaret Prang (U.B.C.).

Copies of the programme, registration forms, and information concerning accommodation may be obtained by writing Professor J. Donald Wilson, CHEA Programme Chairperson, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z5.
