

“BUT THE HALF CAN NEVER BE TOLD”:  
THE LIVES OF CANNELTON’S COTTON MILL WOMEN WORKERS

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## Acknowledgements

On March 2, 2012, I ventured on my first big thesis research trip. My visit to Cannelton, Indiana, was cut short, however, by a massive tornado outbreak. Driving home under green black sky and unfamiliar with the counties on the radio warnings, I shakily pulled off the road. I spent the next three hours in a gas station cooler as a funnel cloud touched down on the opposite side of the highway and blew through Henryville, located at the next exit. I was fortunate to pull into that exit a mere five minutes before the tornado hit, just as I was lucky to discover the extraordinary life of a different Terressa “K,” who was born 171 years to the month before I defended this thesis. This entire process was a whirlwind of ups and downs, and learning the stories of these women changed me just as the weather changed the lives of so many that March day.

I must thank many people for their involvement and support in this project. First, I want to express my gratitude to my thesis committee; Dr. Nancy Robertson and Dr. John Dichtl for their guidance, and especially Dr. Anita Morgan, who patiently coaxed my thoughts out of my head and onto paper. Her advice and shared enthusiasm over historical gossip and stories about the Kirst family made this overwhelming task truly enjoyable and allowed me to finish with my sanity intact.

Numerous thanks go to my family and friends who have expressed interest in my work and listened to my alternatively enthusiastic and cantankerous updates. To Mom, Dad and Nicole, thank you for being my metaphorical “cooler” throughout this whole process, I could not have weathered the storm without you. Finally, to Terressa, Catherine, Ellen, and Lizzie, it was an honor to tell their stories and I hope I have done them justice.

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## Introduction

“The life of a textile worker is trouble and worry and fears. We can never get through what we are expected to do if we work at it ninety nine years.” “Textile Life,” is a poem written by cotton mill operative Mary Branch during the Great Depression. Several verses evocatively describe the emotional and physical hardships of working in a mill and conclude with, “this is only part of a textile life, but the half can never be told.” Branch’s moving words display the consequences of industrial life on everyday people. It is these human experiences, both in the past and present, which are often overlooked or forgotten. As Branch suggests, other people may never truly understand the entirety of industrial workers’ experiences. Poems like this, however, and the work of historians can ensure that what is left of their stories survive and that their voices are remembered and preserved.<sup>1</sup>

The Midwest is an especially rich region for the investigation of working people, specifically wage-earning women. Substantial pockets of manufacturing appeared in the Midwest in the mid-nineteenth century, and industry boomed in the area by the early-twentieth century. While many historians have analyzed and continue to analyze working women, studies that focus on the Midwest are limited in number, especially for the state of Indiana. To gain a more accurate overall picture of women who labored in the nation’s factories, however, it is essential to include the Midwest. Studying the lives of midwestern women workers provides an opportunity to investigate how industrialization, in this case textile production, inspired the development of local communities and a

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Branch, “Textile Life,” Wake Forest, North Carolina, 1938. [poem available online via The Library of Congress >American Memory> Teachers > Classroom Materials > Presentations and Activities > Lyrical Legacy ] Accessed via [http://www.loc.gov.proxy2.ulib.iupui.edu/teachers/lyrical/poems/docs/textile\\_trans.pdf](http://www.loc.gov.proxy2.ulib.iupui.edu/teachers/lyrical/poems/docs/textile_trans.pdf)

region, to determine how wage-earning transformed the role of women in their families, and to analyze how industrialization shaped gender roles, labor reform movements, and workers lives.<sup>2</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, Indiana was a “major manufacturing state,” ranking eighth in the nation. An abundance of natural resources such as coal and limestone, new technologies, and ready access to transportation allowed the state to grow into an industrial powerhouse. The stories about the Hoosiers who worked for these industries, however, are often overlooked. This is particularly true for women. Since working women left little evidence in the historical record, history often ignores or neglects their economic contributions to their homes, their communities, and the nation, even though their voices and experiences are crucial to understanding industrialization and worker activism. Women worked in many industrial plants throughout Indiana, including a cotton mill in Evansville, a paper mill in Delphi, a knitting mill and lamp works in Fort Wayne, and garment and shoe factories in Indianapolis. While women in Indiana’s industrial workforce have garnered some attention, those studies often focus on women who worked in large cities during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, after Indiana’s manufacturing economy was well established. This leaves a large number of unanswered questions about earlier workers. For example, how did conditions for later urban workers compare to the experiences of earlier industrial employees? How did women contribute to the state’s transformation from agriculture and small-scale production to industrialized manufacturing in Indiana’s small to midsized towns? What developments occurred throughout the state during the antebellum and

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on Midwest industry: David Nelson, *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

immediate post-Civil War eras that allowed manufacturing to boom in the late nineteenth century? More research is needed on small town communities which experienced the transitional stage of Indiana industry in order to gain a better understanding of the state's development.<sup>3</sup>

One small town in Indiana provides a useful case study to begin to address these questions, and invites more research on the contributions of working Hoosier women. From 1851 to 1954, under various names, the Indiana Cotton Mills was the dominant industry in the small town of Cannelton, Indiana, mostly employing women and children. The female industrial laborers who worked in this mill during the middle and end of the nineteenth century represent an important and overlooked component of midwestern

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<sup>3</sup> Growth of Indiana industrialization: James Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 160-163. Clifton Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1968), 271. It is not clear the sources that were used to state that Indiana ranked eighth as a manufacturing state. On Evansville: Lawrence Lipin, *Producers, Proletarians, and Politicians: Workers and Party Politics in Evansville and New Albany, Indiana, 1850-87* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994). The Evansville Cotton Manufacturing Co. opened in 1867 and little work has been done on the women operatives who worked there. Lipin mentions the female operatives, but focuses on the male labor force in Evansville. For Delphi: Annual Report of the Indiana State Board of Agriculture, State Board of Agriculture, 1877, Vol. 18, p. 123. In 1887 Delphi had two paper mills which employed around twenty-five workers. Studies on Indianapolis manufacturing include: Robert V. Robinson, "Making Ends Meet: Wives and Children in the Family Economy of Indianapolis, 1860-1920," *Indiana Magazine of History* 92 (September 1966): 197-234 and Robert V. Robinson and Ana-Maria Wahl, "Industrial Employment and Wages of Women, Men, and Children in a 19<sup>th</sup> Century City: Indianapolis, 1850-1880," *American Sociological Review* 55 (December 1990): 912-28. On Fort Wayne: Peggy Seigel, "Industrial 'Girls' in an Early Twentieth-Century Boomtown: Traditions and Change in Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1900-1920," *Indiana Magazine of History* 99 (September 2003): 231-253. According to Seigel, in the early twentieth century, "Fort Wayne's largest employers of women included Wayne Knitting Mills, Boss Manufacturing Company (a maker of industrial gloves), the Perfection Biscuit Company, and General Electric and the Dudlo Manufacturing Company (a pioneer magnet-wire producer)." Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 327-331. Phillips only mentions working women very generally at the turn of the century. Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, Indiana Historical Society, 1995) provides some small discussion on antebellum women workers. In general, little has been written about midwestern wage-earning women, although in 2013, studies included: Anita Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence: Industrial Labor in Antebellum Indiana," *Michigan Historical Review*, 23 (Fall 1997): 1-24; David Schob, *Hired Hands and Plowboys: Farm Labor in the Midwest, 1815-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 191-208; Robinson and Wahl, "Industrial Employment and Wages of Women, Men, and Children in a 19th Century City"; Kathleen A. Murphey, "Schooling, Teaching, and Change in Nineteenth-Century Fort Wayne, Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History* 94 (March 1998): 1-28; Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) and Nancy Gabin, "Fallow Yet Fertile: The Field of Indiana Women's History," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 96 (September 2000): 203-250.

workers. The Cannelton mill has intrigued historians for decades, though minimal research on the town has been done. According to historian Emma Lou Thornbrough, Cannelton, in 1850, was the “largest single manufacturing establishment in the state.” Historian James Madison states that the Cannelton mill was “indicative of the hunger for rapid industrialization that would enable Hoosiers to be less dependent on distant producers.” Several articles exist concerning the formation and early history of the Indiana Cotton Mills, but attention to the workers themselves has been limited. Works by Leigh Darbee and M. Teresa Baer paint a general picture of the lives of the town’s mill operatives. Darbee’s article, “Opportunity on the Frontier: Workers at the Indiana Cotton Mills,” provides a useful view into Cannelton’s earliest mill operatives and original mill organization until its sale to the Newcomb brothers in the mid-1850s. Anita Ashendel’s article, “Fabricating Independence: Industrial Labor in Antebellum Indiana,” provides the most in-depth analysis, specifically addressing the mill’s antebellum women operatives and their opportunities for “economic and social independence.”<sup>4</sup>

Although this scholarship, particularly by Darbee and Ashendel, provides an excellent foundation for further investigating the lives of the women workers at the

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<sup>4</sup> The Bemis Bro. Bag Company purchased the Indiana Cotton Mills in 1946. It then became the Strongwall Mills and operated until 1954. Bemis Company History, “Celebrating 150 Years,” (accessed via <http://www.bemis150.com/content/timeline.asp>). Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 414-415, 423. Madison, *The Indiana Way*, 92. Works concerning the logistics behind Cannelton’s development include: Harold S. Wilson, “The Indiana Cotton Mills: An Experiment in North-South Cooperation,” *Indiana History Bulletin* 42 (May 1965): 74-83; Kate Douglas Torrey, “Visions of a Western Lowell: Cannelton, Indiana, 1847-1851,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 73 (December 1977): 276-304; Thomas R. Winpenny, “Perils in Transferring Technology to the Frontier: A Case Study,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (Winter 1985): 503-521. Ashendel, “Fabricating Independence,” 1-24. Leigh Darbee, “Opportunity on the Frontier: Workers at the Indiana Cotton Mills,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History: a Publication of the Indiana Historical Society* 16 (Spring 2004): 36-45. M. Teresa Baer and Leigh Darbee, “Perry County’s Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850 to 1954, Part 1: Cannelton’s Transformation from Village to Industrial Town,” *The Hoosier Genealogist* 42 (Spring 2002): 44-45. M. Teresa Baer and Leigh Darbee, “Perry County’s Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850-1954, Part 2: The Creation of Cloth,” *The Hoosier Genealogist* 42 (Summer 2002): 109-113. M. Teresa Baer and Leigh Darbee, “Perry County’s Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850 to 1954, Part 3: The Lives of Cannelton’s Workers,” *The Hoosier Genealogist* 42 (Fall 2002): 174-178.



Indiana Cotton Mills, additional research is needed on how women's wage-earning in Cannelton changed over time. This thesis will incorporate a more comprehensive study to explain how women in Cannelton played an essential role in Indiana's transition from small scale manufacturing in the 1850s to large scale industrialization at the turn of the century. In particular, this work will provide an in-depth exploration of female operatives' primary place in Cannelton society, their essential economic contributions to their families, and the unique tactics they used in attempts to achieve better working conditions in the mill. It will also explain the small changes in women's work experiences from 1854 to 1884, and how ultimately marriage, not industrial work, determined the course of their later lives. Investigating one town in this way, and particularly one family on a micro level reveals new data on employment opportunities for women in Indiana and gives a more accurate picture of industrial labor in the Midwest.

Ever since it was built in 1849, the Indiana Cotton Mills has been a landmark along the banks of the Ohio River, where it still stands today. The four-story mill, made of local sandstone, includes two imposing towers that stand over one hundred feet tall and dominate the mill entrance. Workers came and went by climbing the winding stairs of the right hand tower. Opening for business in 1851, the mill was founded by Louisville investors and built in close proximity to southern cotton. Despite high expectations, the 1850s proved a poor time to undertake the creation of a new textile mill. Still, many Indiana historians credit businessman Hamilton Smith for the company's resilience and ultimate moderate success. As a textile factory, a rarity in the Midwest, Smith intended the facility to rival those in the eastern United States, and especially those

in Lowell, Massachusetts. Indeed, the mill originally recruited experienced women textile operatives from New England to work at Cannelton, though immigrant laborers quickly replaced them.<sup>5</sup>

About eight months before the opening of the Cannelton mill, there were twenty cotton mills in Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania and one in Brookville, Indiana, which employed thirty operatives. The incorporation of the Indiana Cotton Mills “heralded the transition of Indiana’s economy from primarily agriculture to primarily industrial.” The company also became “an important link in the network of goods and services nationwide,” with their famous Hoosier Sheeting being distributed in Cannelton, Cincinnati, Louisville, Chicago, and St. Louis. Still, several obstacles, including isolation, technical issues with steam production, and limited coal resources prevented the mill from reaching the heights of Lowell’s success. During its early years, the town of Cannelton was especially underdeveloped and remote. The Ohio River, the best means of transportation during warm months, trapped residents in town during the winter when it froze. The town lacked cultural facilities such as libraries or even schools, and housing for the earliest mill operatives proved very limited. Still, for approximately one hundred years, the mill remained the largest employer and driving force within the Cannelton community.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For general mill history: Indiana Cotton Mills Records, 1849-1948 (hereafter ICMR), Indiana Historical Society (hereafter IHS); Ashendel, “Fabricating Independence,” 1-24; Torrey, “Visions of a Western Lowell,” 276-304; Wilson, “The Indiana Cotton Mills,” 74-83; Winpenny, “Perils in Transferring Technology to the Frontier,” 503-521; *Cannelton Economist*, 18 March 1854, p. 203 in Smith, H., Scrapbook, Hamilton Smith Manuscript Collection (hereafter HSMC), Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana.

<sup>6</sup> On other mills prior to Cannelton’s opening and quote: Leigh Darbee quoting the *Cincinnati Price Current*, 10 April 1850, in *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History* 16 (Spring 2004): 36-45. Hoosier sheeting distribution: Baer and Darbee, “Perry County’s Indiana Cotton Mills 1850-1954,” 43-47. For early underdevelopment in the town: Torrey, “Visions of a Western Lowell,” 292-293, 302, and Winpenny, “Perils in Transferring Technology to the Frontier,” 515. The town was not connected to a railroad line until 1888: *The Cannelton Enquirer*, 21 January 1888. Ice blockade: *Cannelton Reporter*, 7 January 1871.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Cannelton employed up to four hundred workers, the majority of them young women and children.<sup>7</sup> These women and children worked long hours in dangerous conditions for very little money. Middle-class, Victorian society often shunned and judged female operatives, and the workers theoretically held little bargaining power to improve working conditions. Despite these limitations, the women workers of Cannelton provided crucial financial contributions to their families' survival and served as an integral component of the development of midwestern manufacturing.

The Kirst family, whose members worked in Cannelton during the last half of the nineteenth century, provides a case study for this thesis. By the mid-1850s, Cannelton's mill workforce consisted of a large number of German immigrant workers. People outside the community believed Cannelton could offer better wages and working conditions than found elsewhere, points which mill propaganda and the *Cannelton Economist* both emphasized and exaggerated. This propaganda may have reached Anton Kirst in Dettwiller, France, a small village near the German border. Kirst, his wife, and his five children left France and arrived in Cannelton sometime before October 1854. Unfortunately, his wife and youngest daughter did not survive the long and grueling voyage. By September 1855, Kirst had found work at the Indiana Cotton Mills, most likely in mill repairs, and by May 1856, he had purchased his own home, remarried, and officially set down roots in the town. Prior textile manufacturing experience in France may have improved the chances of Anton and his three oldest daughters finding jobs in the mill. Over the years, at least four of the Kirst daughters, the three eldest from Anton's first marriage and the youngest from his second marriage, worked in the mill as spinning

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<sup>7</sup> Wilson, "The Indiana Cotton Mills," 78.

and weaving operatives. The cotton mill provided one of the few employment opportunities in the area for women. The family worked hard and combined their wages to make ends meet. This Kirst's strong tradition of mill work facilitates a study of Cannelton's women operatives over a three-decade period, and focusing on one family allows for an intimate analysis of changes in female workers' experiences overtime.<sup>8</sup>

Some regional and period explanation of the sources in this thesis is necessary. Although scholarship exists on working women in various regions of the United States, the New England textile mill operatives of the early nineteenth century, specifically those who worked in Lowell, Massachusetts, are by far the most intensely studied group of nineteenth-century working women. This is due in part to the existence of more primary sources for northeastern mills, where workers were more literate. During the initial

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<sup>8</sup> The spellings I have used are based on the cotton mill payrolls' spelling of employee's names. I will refer to individuals throughout by how their names appear in the payroll. If individuals do not appear on the payroll, I will refer to them with the most consistent census spellings. For the Kirst arrival in America: *Richard Morse* 19 January 1854, "Kirsch" on line 319, in *New Orleans Passenger Lists, 1820-1945* (accessed via Ancestry.com); Anton Kirst's naturalization record 1854, State of Indiana, County of Perry, copy from personal correspondence. The Kirsts' prompt appearance in Cannelton upon their arrival in America suggests they had prior connections in the town and that some of the children had textile experience. They came from a French village called Dettwiller, located in a heavily industrialized area near the German border and they spoke a German dialect. This close proximity to Germany and an industrialized area makes it probable that Cannelton's round of 1852 recruitment pamphlets which were sent to Europe for distribution by clergy and others with connections to the mill owners had reached the family. They could have also made arrangements for placement with the New Orleans' German Emigrant Society shortly after their arrival in America. On reasons for coming to the mill, ethnicity of workers and German immigrants to Cannelton: Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence" 3, 12-13. German recruitment pamphlets: Smith, H., Scrapbook I, 1849-1873, p. 228-231, HSMC. On the Kirst family's prior textile experience: Anton Kirst's occupation at the time of his first marriage is listed as "weaver" (French documents translated by Yvette Fukuda unless otherwise noted), Marriage Record no.18 Dettwiller 23 November 1841, Conseil Général du Bas-Rhin, Archives Départementales, Dettwiller M, 1841, 4E 88/7, p.12 (accessed via GeneaNet.org). On the Kirsts' early years in Cannelton: Anton's second marriage to Mary "Yorkle" 18 May 1856: Tell City County Clerk's Office, Marriage Records Book 2, p. 236; Indiana Cotton Mills Spinning Room Time Book, June 1860- February 1869, Franklin College Manuscript Collection, Franklin College Library, Franklin, Indiana; Federal Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States of Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana, p. 25 (accessed via Ancestry.com) (census hereafter listed by year); Anton Kirst obituary, *Tell City Anzeiger*, 18 August 1883, translated from German in "Tell City Indiana German Newspaper Items," p. 404, images scanned and sent by Mark Ress, Tell City Historical Society, Inc., Tell City, Indiana. Anton purchased part of 1 Sq. M for \$550 in February 1856: Tell City County Clerk's Office, Tell City, Indiana, Grantee Book 4, March 1815-March 1852, p. 192.

industrialization of America, the earliest mill workers were mostly white, middle-class, young women, from nearby villages and farms. Yet several regional and period distinctions exist between these early northeastern workers and those later employed in the Midwest, such as the operatives in Cannelton.<sup>9</sup>

Several works on eastern mills explain the changing motivations of the women's decisions to work in Lowell, and those reasons varied by time period and social circumstance. For the early generation of New England-born operatives, the mills offered social and economic freedom in relatively comfortable working conditions. Paternalistic industrial organization created a tightly controlled living and working environment designed to protect the girls' morality. As new economic factors emerged in the 1850s, the classical period of New England mill operatives ended, and immigrants filled the majority of mill positions the earlier operatives had left behind. Factors that drove these female operatives away included owners' demands for increased production and the use of new and improved technology which resulted in the employment of fewer numbers of immigrant workers with larger workloads. Unlike earlier workers, immigrant operatives depended on the pooling of family wages to survive and were, therefore, motivated to work despite increasingly bad working conditions and reduced pay.<sup>10</sup>

It is with this later group of northeastern industrial workers that workers in Cannelton and the Midwest are similar. For example, by the time the Indiana Cotton Mills opened, textile work was less socially acceptable for middle-class women, working

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<sup>9</sup> This is a long standing concern. Some early "researchers have concluded erroneously that findings based on [Northeast] region are generalizable to all regions in the country." See Robinson, "Making Ends Meet," 202.

<sup>10</sup> These differences are highlighted by the well-known historian Thomas Dublin, who went beyond a basic analysis of earlier northeastern workers in his influential books including *Farm to Factory: Women's Letters, 1830-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981) and *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

conditions in the mill had deteriorated, and wages had declined which resulted in the employment of mostly poor, immigrant operatives. These differences make much of the literature on the New England workers less useful for the study of later nineteenth and early twentieth-century midwestern women workers.

Nevertheless, Cannelton was influenced by northeastern mills. As Leigh Darbee points out in “Opportunity on the Frontier: Workers at the Indiana Cotton Mills,” the mill “blended the two most common systems of factory organization in early nineteenth century New England, the Waltham System and the Rhode Island System.” Mills under the Waltham System included Lowell, which employed native-born farm girls, while mills under the Rhode Island system recruited entire families. Since mill owners needed to attract people to live in Cannelton, mill owners employed both of these recruiting methods, but especially encouraged families. This blended tactic makes the Cannelton mill distinct from New England mills, despite the fact that the town was dependent on one industry.<sup>11</sup>

While Hamilton Smith and the initial mill owners may have intended Cannelton to function like New England mills, and indeed the recruitment methods they used drew on both the Waltham and Rhode Island systems, life for these millhands had more similarities with Upper South mill operatives who lived during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing partially on *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, this thesis defines the Upper South region as including areas in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina and northern portions of

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the Rhode Island system: Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1990) and Johnathan Prude, *The Coming of the Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

South Carolina and Georgia. Indiana's women lived under both Midwest and Upper South influences, and the state remained a transitional area between the North and South as well as the East and West. Although most textile mills in the post-Civil War South did not prosper until the 1880s (by which time Cannelton's mill was firmly established), Cannelton, Indiana, and its workers, and other similar small, Midwest industrial towns, had more in common with later southern textile mills in matters of town size, working and living conditions, worker activism, and company paternalism.<sup>12</sup> These regional complexities altered industrialization and social organization which, in turn, influenced operatives' work experiences, methods of activism, and opportunities for occupational mobility in the mill. Due to these characteristics, midwestern working women's experiences cannot be understood by placing them in northeastern contexts.

Cannelton and the Indiana Cotton Mills provide a perfect opportunity to analyze the midwestern working woman's experience, in part via the Kirst women's lives. During the nineteenth century, Cannelton's 1870 population stood at 2,481 citizens, and today it remains a small town. Due to its small size and the mill's dominant role over the lives of the residents, it is possible to effectively investigate Cannelton's working women within the confines of this thesis. For example, the length and digitization of the 1860, 1870, and 1880 censuses made it feasible to complete an intense analysis of their statistics. Although one small Indiana town does not necessarily provide a representative sample, this method remains a good starting point for generating information about this overlooked aspect of midwest history. Other researchers with similar constraints can utilize these techniques in other towns across Indiana in order to gain snapshots of

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<sup>12</sup> Blended systems: Darbee, "Opportunity on the Frontier," 36-45; southern mills: Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, LuAnn Jones, Christopher B. Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

midwestern history and ultimately come closer to creating a representative historical analysis.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, although this methodology includes a case study of German Catholic immigrants at a specific mill, the study is still valuable for an overall understanding of how gender and ethnicity shaped female midwestern wage earners. Since there is a lack of personal records and information on the working class in general, most previous studies have tended to limit their analyses to statistical data and generalized assumptions about workers' experiences. These same records, including census data and payrolls can, however, also provide a much more detailed and complex picture of working women's experiences. For example, the Cannelton payrolls display much more than days worked and wages earned. Studying the intricacies in payroll organization allows for an account of mill hierarchies and the varied experiences of the female operatives.<sup>14</sup>

The chronological parameters of this research include the mill's years of production from 1854-1884, in part, because only two mill payroll ledgers exist (covering 1860-1869 and 1881-1884). Also, this time period is very significant for the study of working women. Not only does 1852 mark a transition in the Cannelton mill from the original employment of eastern Lowell mill workers to newer immigrant groups such as

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<sup>13</sup>Cannelton's population in 1860 was 2,155. 1860 Census, Population of Cities and Towns, Table 3, p. 123, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana. In 1870 it was 2,481 and in 1880 it fell to 1,834. 1880 Census, State of Indiana Population of Civil Divisions Less than Counties, p. 153, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana. This census also included the population totals for 1870. In 2010, Cannelton was home to 1,563 people. Bureau of the Census, Manuscript of U.S. Census of Population of Cannelton, Perry County, Indiana, 2010 (accessed via <http://www.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=18>). The population censuses of 1860, 1870 and 1880 were 55, 63, and 41 pages long respectively.

<sup>14</sup>For example, early labor studies by Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).



the Kirsts, but it also aligns with a nationwide growth in textile production, an increased reliance on immigrant labor, and a deterioration in working conditions.<sup>15</sup>

The main primary sources this thesis relies on include mill payrolls, company records, census and government records, and genealogical records. The earliest existing payroll, the Indiana Cotton Mills Spinning Room Time Book June 1860- February 1869, is located in the Franklin College Manuscript Collection, in Franklin, Indiana. This book provides a monthly payroll of the Cannelton mill's spinning room and allowed me to choose the Kirst family as the focus of my work. This payroll shows not only the limited opportunities for female advancement within the mill, but provides a better understanding of the financial impact of the Civil War on the company, town, and employees. The second mill payroll exists as part of a larger collection, the Indiana Cotton Mills Manuscript Collection, located at the Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana. This is the largest source of primary evidence on the cotton mill. It includes correspondence from the first mill superintendent about the difficulties and arrival of the first operatives, a Cannelton Cotton Mills Letter Press Copy Book, and an invoice copybook for mill transactions. Most importantly this collection includes a *complete* mill payroll (Payroll, March 1881-June 1884, bound volume 24) with records of every position in the mill and employee salaries, advances, and company rents. Comparisons to the other existing mill payroll show changes in the responsibilities and skill levels among the Kirst sisters.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 60-61.

<sup>16</sup>Indiana Cotton Mills Spinning Room Time Book (hereafter SRTB), June 1860-February 1869, Franklin College Manuscript Collection (hereafter FCMC), Franklin College Library, Franklin, Indiana. Indiana Cotton Mills Manuscript Collection (hereafter ICMMC), Payroll, March 1881-June 1884, Bound Volume 24, Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana.

The Hamilton Smith Manuscript Collection is also located in the Lilly Library. Hamilton Smith owned the mill for many years and this collection consists of much of his business and personal correspondence and company records. His scrapbook of newspaper articles, Smith, H., Scrapbook I, 1849-1873, (many of which he authored) and German recruitment pamphlets describe the earliest years of the mill and the company's paternalist influence. The Indiana Cotton Mills Records, 1849-1948, located in the Indiana Historical Society, is another useful source of information. This collection provides several primary sources that give accounts of operatives' living and labor conditions, document the assets and liabilities of mill real estate holdings, detail the construction of a church, stores, a hotel, and employees' houses, and describe the increase in population and health of the "emigrants." It also contains an anonymous handwritten company history circa 1900 which mentions several strike attempts, wage reductions, and mill accidents, one of which resulted in the death of a female operative.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, since no personal documentation exists chronicling the Cannelton worker experience, newspapers, census data, and other public records allow a better understanding of their lives. For example, the *Cannelton Economist* was a company controlled newspaper which produced exaggerated reports and propaganda. Leigh Darbee terms this paper as "essentially an organ of management," and analyzing its articles displays how the mill preferred to be viewed and how it attempted to control local opinions.<sup>18</sup> Several historical Cannelton newspapers from various dates are digitized and

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<sup>17</sup> HSMC, Indiana Cotton Mills Records, 1849-1948 Collection Numbers M0156 and OM0125, (hereafter ICMR), Indiana Historical Society (hereafter IHS).

<sup>18</sup> Darbee, "Opportunities on the Frontier," 45. Roger Van Bolt states that "the *Cannelton Economist* was also founded in 1849, with the express purpose of forwarding the cause of the new industrialism." Roger H. Van Bolt, "The Hoosiers and the 'Eternal Agitation,' 1848-1850," *Indiana Magazine of History* 48 (December 1852): 346.

available online through the database NewspaperArchive.com. The majority of this research used only sources in English, although a German paper did exist in nearby Tell City during the later years. It is important, therefore, to keep in mind the biases of these newspapers and that what they do not mention is just as important as what they do include. For example, after the Civil War the town's African American population was rarely discussed and, in general, the paper gave few details on the working class. Although some of the Cannelton census data is available at the Indiana State Library, most of my access to this data and other documents, such as birth, marriage, military, and death records, is made possible by using Ancestry.com.

The use of digitized records, for example through databases such as Ancestry.com, has ultimately allowed this research to occur. Accessibility to these types of sources in the past was limited by a historian's ability to travel, and finding and examining sources proved extremely time consuming. Today, online access, although problematic in several ways, does enable the utilization of a greater number of valuable sources. Although Ancestry.com is not a traditional database, this research relied on records which include the actual scanned document, and that can be verified elsewhere. Digital databases provide crucial evidence on the Kirst's German-French heritage, information on the sisters' husbands, and allowed me to quickly view multiple states' records for the sisters' own families. Most importantly, Ancestry.com allowed me to analyze and transcribe three of Cannelton's censuses.

This thesis begins with a discussion of gender and labor history and demonstrates the dearth of prior research on midwestern working women and, therefore, points to the significance of this current work. Chapter two presents life in Cannelton over three

decades through the use of the 1860, 1870 and 1880 censuses. The resulting analysis investigates local employment opportunities for working women and how race and ethnicity determined class. Chapter three explores the mill's working conditions and avenues for their improvement utilized by the female operatives. To conclude, this thesis follows the Kirst sisters after they married and stopped working in the mill. Comparing the economic disparity among the sisters in their later lives demonstrates how industrialization provided women with limited opportunities for greater social mobility.

The female industrial laborers, such as the Kirsts, who worked in this mill during the last decades of the nineteenth century, represent an important aspect of midwestern industrialization and labor activism. Although Cannelton mill operatives had limited options for control in the workplace, these women still took an active role in determining their own fates. As young working women, they held various degrees of economic power and certainly more than recognized by scholars relying on early ideas of gendered "separate spheres," which credited marriage as working women's only option to improve their lives. For example, small opportunities for mobility in the workplace existed as did a resilient, if censored and intermittent, tradition of labor unrest within the mill community. Does Cannelton align with most Indiana industrial trends or represent a unique situation? Although textile work did employ many women throughout the country, it was still a relatively rare form of occupation in comparison to farm work and domestic servitude. For example, in the 1860 manufacturing census, the Cannelton mill was the only industry in Perry County listed as employing women. In fact "nationally, over three-fifths of women in manufacturing worked in industries other than in

textiles.”<sup>19</sup> For this reason, Cannelton, as a one-industry town, may represent an anomaly in some respects to female employment. Since larger industrial cities like Indianapolis and Fort Wayne employed few immigrants and offered diverse opportunities for employment, more case studies and research throughout small midwestern towns are needed to determine this. It is clear, however, that the Kirsts, the town of Cannelton, and midwestern women workers are keys to understanding part of the larger story behind local, regional, and national transitions to industrialization.

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Tentler, in *Wage-Earning Women*, relied on views of gendered “separate spheres” and many other early historians viewed working women’s agency through societal norms such as “the cult of domesticity” (which considered women’s proper place within the home) resulting in a limited interpretation of women’s labor activism. 1860 Manufacturing Census. Robinson and Wahl, “Industrial Employment and Wages of Women, Men, and Children in a 19<sup>th</sup> Century City,” 926.

## The Historiography of Midwestern Working Women

For many years, labor historians overlooked women's economic contributions or assigned women secondary roles as wage-earners and failed to question the causes of their subordinate position. The rise of the revived feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s resulted in a rush of scholarship which attempted to insert women into the historical record and analyze why women historically held these disadvantaged positions. This first wave of scholarship tended to generalize women's experiences, include women in the historical narrative, and assign them to a "separate sphere." Much of the scholarship simply presented facts in order to compensate for a lack of information.<sup>1</sup>

*Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* by Leslie Tentler is representative of this early literature. She analyzes women through a "separate but equal" lens and focuses her study of the impact wage earning had mostly on white, female industrial workers in major cities in the East and Midwest. She argues that the work experience did not result in the women challenging cultural views on

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<sup>1</sup> For a helpful review of the study of women in history: Rebecca Edwards, "Women's and Gender History" in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple University Press and the American Historical Association, 2011). On the separate spheres argument: Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 9-39. Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," *American Studies* 10 (Spring 1969): 5-15. In the boom of historical scholarship dedicated to the female laborer rising from the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, historians realized the key to understanding the contributions and experiences of workers was to simultaneously analyze workers as women. The emergence of gender history produced an article by Gerda Lerner, which was revolutionary in its attempt to place working women in history. "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," investigates the historical transformation of the value and acceptability of women's economic contributions in America from 1800-1840. According to Lerner, over time, engaging in idleness evolved from being considered a Puritanical sin to a Victorian "status symbol." This time of industrialization, although providing opportunities for lower class women, also widened the social gap between the classes. Despite the polarity of experiences between working women and middle or upper class ladies, females of both classes were equally limited in their access to real power. This article is the classic interpretation of how society viewed working women.

femininity or their expected place in the family and society. She comes to this conclusion based on what she interprets as a “conservative female reaction,” or lack of militant organized reform to remedy poor working conditions and wages. Since male employees used existing social power constructs to control working women, unequal gendered work experiences and a lack of alternative employment opportunities existed for women. Marriage, therefore, Tentler argues, became women’s only option for social or economic freedom. Although she presents a compelling argument about the impact of social pressures on working women, she treats housework as a separate issue, uninfluenced by cultural expectations. While problematic in some areas, overall this work was an important contribution to the field as a new attempt to contextualize working women’s work lives. Tentler makes several good points on the limited options for female employment created by sociocultural beliefs and pressures, therefore heightening the importance of marriage prospects for women. The conclusion of this thesis supports the idea that marriage remained one of the only major opportunities for social or economic mobility for women, and indeed marriage, not previous wage earning experience, determined the Kirt sisters’ economic futures. Still, in terms of individual agency, Tentler’s interpretation underestimates working women’s views of themselves, their goals, and their ability to create independence for themselves and to express power within their families.<sup>2</sup>

In response to this initial scholarship, a second wave of research, which occurred in the 1980s, attempted to move beyond stereotypes and to include women as full actors in the historical narrative. Before the 1980s, women’s labor history failed to consider how waged and unwaged work impacted one another. In order to truly understand female

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<sup>2</sup> Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women*, 1-9, 28, 71-83, 180-185.

wage earners, historians must also understand their roles outside of work in their families and in society. The idea that paid and unpaid work could not simply be categorized into spheres, but were, in fact, dependent on one another, became an important consideration due to works by historians, such as Alice Kessler-Harris's *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women*. Kessler-Harris defines wage-earning women as all women except professionals, slaves, and housewives. Currently the most up-to-date and comprehensive book on working women, *Out to Work*, presents an overview of American working class women from the colonial era until the twentieth century. Kessler-Harris investigates the evolving sociocultural influences on and changing attitudes toward wage-earning women as well as the economic reasons for and implications of women in the work force. Kessler-Harris, along with Tentler, points out that the social expectations of women's obligations in the home and family severely narrowed and limited opportunities for employment outside the home and reinforced the belief that women's presence in the workplace was inappropriate. Kessler-Harris's book especially demonstrates the argument that wage labor evolved as a "gendered" component of modern economics, as opposed to the agricultural household subsistence model in which women and men were considered more or less equal contributors. Her compelling arguments have shaped much of this thesis's analysis of female working class life including discussions on wages, working and living conditions, and social mobility.<sup>3</sup>

While scholarship concerning Lowell and similar eastern establishments is extensive, perhaps the most groundbreaking historians on this subject is Thomas Dublin. His most influential books include *Farm to Factory: Women's Letters, 1830-1860* and *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell*. Earlier

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<sup>3</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 30-38, 49-53, 75-81, 101, 152-154, 160-162.



interpretations had considered these female workers only in terms of economic analysis or viewed the employees solely through their role in the trade union movement.<sup>4</sup> Dublin's books, however, went beyond this approach to analyze intimate details of the operatives' working and housing conditions, as well as their personal relationships. Dublin also includes a more extended period of study, ending with the mills' transition to the employment of Irish immigrant operatives. Ultimately, he disproved previous scholarship which had argued that operatives worked only in order to contribute their wages to their families. Dublin's interpretation of worker correspondence reveals that most white, American-born women sought employment in order to gain economic independence and social freedom, for example, a desire for spending money. By reconstructing the lives of young, middle-class farm women, he contextualizes women's various motives, both altruistic and personal, for working. Unlike Tentler, Dublin and Kessler-Harris do not fail to realize that complicated expectations for and social pressures on women in the home regulated their work opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

Due to temporal and regional differences between early New England operatives and Cannelton's work force, this thesis builds on influential work on industrial communities outside of New England, including *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton-Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-84* by Daniel Walkowitz. In this comparative labor history, Walkowitz compares Troy, a union-dominated town of skilled male ironworkers, and Cohoes, a town with mostly female cotton mill workers,

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<sup>4</sup> These earlier interpretations include: Caroline Ware, *The Early New England Cotton Manufacture* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1931). Harriet Hanson Robinson, *Loom and Spindle, or Life Among the Early Mills Girls*, (New York, 1898. Rev. ed. Kailua: Press Pacifica, 1976). Henry A. Miles, *Lowell As It Was and As It Is* (Boston: S.N. Dickinson and Co., 1845).

<sup>5</sup> Dublin, *Farm to Factory*, 1-36, 136-139, 187-191. Dublin, *Women at Work*, xvii-xxi, 1-13, 132-150. Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 30, 49-53, 101.

controlled by company paternalism. He argues that because of the environmental and organizational differences of each community, each experienced different types of protest patterns. At the time of its publication in 1978, this was a new way to look at urban and labor history. Labor historians tended to view worker militancy as being narrowly based on economic considerations such as low wages and poor working conditions. Walkowitz instead examined the interrelationship between the two industrial cities to construct the relationship of place and behavior to explain the attitudes of resistant workers. Adapting to a specific community environment was the foundation for the differing approaches to labor reform in Troy and Cohoes. The ethnic community in Troy had a history of resistance and was involved in persistent organized reform movements, while in Cohoes, resistance was infrequent until reaching a boiling point in the late 1880s. More ethnically diverse and multi-industry towns, such as Troy, provided more opportunities for employment and enhanced workers' ability to negotiate. In single industry towns such as Cohoes or Cannelton, lack of skill translated into a lack of power and workers had less room to engage in activism.<sup>6</sup>

Walkowitz's observations can be applied to the limited and unsuccessful attempts at reform that occurred in Cannelton. Walkowitz's towns lay outside the typical New England mill, and the activities he describes fall within this thesis's time period; as such his theories are especially useful for a study of Cannelton. The contributions of more comparative studies such as this would be extremely enlightening in terms of understanding different regional working community experiences in the Midwest. Although this analysis of Cannelton is not comparative, it does strive to similarly

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel J Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton-Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-84* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 1-15, 44, 73, 81-82, 247-260.

highlight the importance of local and regional economic and social structures had on the manufacturing worker experience.<sup>7</sup>

Another important non-eastern regional study is *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990* by Daniel Nelson. Nelson reevaluates previous scholarship and compiles a compelling overview of Midwestern labor. The author argues that the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa differed from other areas in America in that the growth of agriculture and industry occurred simultaneously and significantly shaped the lives of individuals in the Midwest. This “commonality of experience” justifies the need for separate attention and study to be given to Midwestern workers. This late-nineteenth-century concurrent growth resulted in immigrants supplying urban industrial labor needs and native-born white midwesterners tended to remain involved in agriculture. His analysis begins with farm and rural labor; however, he mainly focuses on Midwest industry until the modern period of deindustrialization. Although this work tends toward a generalization of experiences, it certainly advocates the need for case studies like Cannelton as an addition to the midwestern worker experience, and provides important points for contextualizing the impact of the Cannelton mill locally and nationally.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most influential regional scholarship that influenced this thesis is *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* by Jacquelyn Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, LuAnn Jones and Christopher Daly. This unique social history of Upper South textile communities is based on oral histories,

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<sup>7</sup> Besides a similar, yet less successful study by John Cumbler published in 1979 that also compared environmental reasons for working-class militancy this type of analysis outside of New England has been rare. See John T. Cumbler, *Working-Class Community in Industrial America: Work, Leisure, and Struggle in Two Industrial Cities, 1880-1930* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979).

<sup>8</sup> Nelson, *Farm and Factory*, vii-ix, 1-3, 3-47.

interviews, letters, and articles on southern cotton mill workers, particularly women and their families, during the 1920s and 1930s. It is particularly useful in analyzing worker agency in areas of the Midwest influenced by the Upper South because it is one of the few comprehensive studies on southern textile production. Since most southern cotton mills were located in very rural, isolated areas (much like Cannelton), studies on urban northeastern textile mills provide less relevant regional information to my study. For example, while both urban and rural tenement housing conditions were typically equally poor, *Like a Family* provides a more relevant discussion of the rural living conditions and socio-cultural aspects of southern textile workers. In addition, Chapter three of this thesis relies heavily on *Like a Family's* analysis of worker activism and not only reveals similarly alternative forms of worker expression, but provides a discussion of them outside of the northeastern context. The authors argue that social, economic, and cultural factors formed a family economy of mutual dependence which then became an important common cultural identity for the workers. This resulted from a “commitment to cooperation rather than competition,” that defined mill village culture. Family ideology was important to these workers despite, or perhaps due to, the stifling company control of work and private life. Loyalty to family and the expected pooling of wages for survival describes the typical experience in mill villages, but also highlights how working women, like the Kirsts, held considerable economic responsibility within the family.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that although historically the majority of working women engaged in both paid and unpaid work, such as agriculture, business, and housework, labor historians and the majority of other scholars tend to focus on their employment in industrial factories. Nevertheless, several influential works analyze women's experiences

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<sup>9</sup> Hall, et al., *Like a Family, Like a Family*, xvii, 100, 86-87, 100-105.

beyond factory work and allow a comparative analysis of Cannelton's working women in Chapter Two. For example, Mary Blewett's work, *Men, Women and Work: Class Gender and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910*, focuses on the experiences of New England shoemaking women. Prior to her work, although scholarship had pointed to the role of skilled artisans' participation in working class reform, they ignored artisan women's contributions. She follows the transition of the shoemaking wives of artisans as they participated in family piecework in the home, to their eventual positions as semi-skilled factory workers after the Civil War. She discusses how traditional relationships between the sexes caused gendered labor markets and segregated work lives. No matter how crucial these women remained to the shoemaking industry, at every stage in history their roles were still different from men's roles. This task segregation, along with cultural ideology such as the cult of domesticity, led society to view female labor as less valuable than men's labor.<sup>10</sup>

A growing number of historians have considered the role of women as white collar workers. *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940* by Susan Benson was one of the first to discuss the emergence of the department store and service industry in the late nineteenth century along with the rising significance of consumerism. Benson investigates the intersection of gender, class, power, work and private lives, and provides an influential contribution to the history of gender and labor in America's emerging consumer economy. Since department-store work eventually became the "Cinderella of occupations" for women, this important work contextualizes where mill work fell in desirability as an occupation

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Blewett, *Men, Women and Work: Class Gender and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), xiii-xxii, 320-325.

for women. In the hierarchy of preferred work for women, textile production fell somewhere in the middle. Women often took what were considered more socially acceptable jobs, despite earning lower wages. For example, some women favored low paying sales work to more high paying textile production, and most agreed that mill work was far preferable to domestic servitude. Still, socially acceptable jobs for women remained extremely limited until the twentieth century and women often had few employment options.<sup>11</sup>

While many feminist scholars had focused their attention on urban workers, few have attempted to analyze the commercial amusements of urban life, specifically those targeted at workers and immigrants. One of the most influential texts on working women, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York* by Kathy Peiss did just that. Her work challenged the trickle-down theory of cultural change proving that the process was much more fluid. This book also altered understandings of female immigrants, specifically mothers and their working daughters. Previous research assumed that immigrants clung desperately to old traditions and shunned American culture. Wage earning, however, was especially transformative for young female immigrants who both shaped and were shaped by new American cultural patterns. For example, clothing became especially important for working women. Access to wages enabled them to purchase garments and create their own independent American identity and also represented an attempt to distance themselves from their families. Since little documentation on working women exists, understanding their public lives and leisure activities is especially difficult. Yet, this remains an important layer of the working

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<sup>11</sup> Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 1-11, 177-216, 283-293.

woman's experience, and Peiss's book suggests that the young working immigrant women at Cannelton would have had many experiences similar to those of the New York female wage earners.<sup>12</sup>

While all of these previously discussed monographs provide a strong general framework for this thesis, several articles provide a more local focus on the history of the Indiana Cotton Mills, with only two specifically addressing the lives of antebellum female mill operatives. "The Indiana Cotton Mills: An Experiment in North-South Cooperation," by Harold S. Wilson describes the formation and inception of the Indiana Cotton Mills. He also addresses many of the logistical and financial struggles the mill encountered during its history and credits Hamilton Smith for its eventual success. Although written in somewhat idealistic terms, the article goes beyond providing a

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<sup>12</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 1-10, 11-55, 185-188. Thirteen years later, Nan Enstad argued that American working women's participation in consumerism was not receiving enough attention from historians. Her book, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*, insists that the working class women in Peiss's study, as consumers, also participated in labor reform. Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). In *The Freedom of the Streets*, Sharon Wood provides an in-depth analysis of Davenport, Iowa, female clerks, factory hands, professionals and prostitutes, and the social criticism they drew as single working women. This period was marked by strong social and political opposition to single working women by men and middle, upper class women seeking to protect the morality of society and their own positions within it. Even though the time period of this study concerns only one of my mill workers, it offers contextual insight on society's views of working women. Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in the Gilded Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2005). Author Lara Vapnek claims that scholars have spent too much time analyzing the struggle for women's political rights and not their fight for economic equality. Her book, *Breadwinners*, covers aspects of both women's and labor history. It investigates the historical struggle of women labor reformers to "win full economic equality" as opposed to the more studied struggle for political rights. She suggests that working class women lived within a false separate sphere where male established unions and the demeaning attitude of their upper class female "allies" made the struggle against exploitative working conditions especially difficult. Although her geographical focus and overall thesis will be beyond the scope of this thesis, Vapnek's analysis of the cultural obstacles of working women significantly impacts my understanding and definition of agency. Lara Vapnek, *Breadwinners: Working Women & Economic Independence 1865-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

general outline of the mill's history and does include a discussion of mill working conditions and wages, and mill facilities.<sup>13</sup>

In "Visions of a Western Lowell: Cannelton, Indiana, 1847-1851," Kate Douglas Torrey highlights the financial difficulties of the mill from its inception to 1851. Hamilton Smith's attempt to replicate and revive the industrial power of Lowell, Massachusetts, influenced most of the initial planning and design of the mill, including plans to staff the mill with New England women workers. This article allows a better understanding of the planned social organization of the mill, its origins and background, as well as the living and working conditions of many of the earliest employees.<sup>14</sup>

In "Perils in Transferring Technology to the Frontier: A Case Study," Thomas Winpenny also investigates the formation of the Cannelton mill. He, however, focuses more on the business difficulties and the technological problems of steam power, stating this as the ultimate reasons for the failure of Smith's view of a "western Lowell" to materialize. Despite a mechanical focus, the article provides a good explanation of the organizational failings of the social aspects of the town.<sup>15</sup>

Leigh Darbee and Teresa Baer coauthored a three-part series on the mill and its workers in 2002. The articles provided a short history of the mill, its method of production, and general information on the lives of the operatives. A few years later, Darbee authored an article on the earlier mill workers and the mill's recruitment strategies.<sup>16</sup> Anita Ashendel's article, "Fabricating Independence: Industrial Labor in

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<sup>13</sup> Wilson, "The Indiana Cotton Mills."

<sup>14</sup> Torrey, "Visions of a Western Lowell."

<sup>15</sup> Winpenny, "Perils in Transferring Technology to the Frontier."

<sup>16</sup> Darbee, "Opportunity on the Frontier." Baer and Darbee, "Perry County's Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850 to 1954, Part 1." Baer and Darbee, "Perry County's Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850-1954, Part 2." Baer and Darbee, "Perry County's Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850 to 1954, Part 3."



Antebellum Indiana,” provided the most information on the mill’s wage-earning women. Ashendel points out that despite little to no acknowledged power and the eventual dependence on wages for subsistence, women factory workers in Cannelton still possessed significant agency. Her article provides an excellent framework in which to shape questions on the role and status of women wage earners in their jobs, families, and society. Although previous scholarship specifically concerning Cannelton is limited, Ashendel, in addition to the previous authors, provide an excellent foundation for further investigating the lives of the women workers at the Indiana Cotton Mills.<sup>17</sup>

As much of this scholarship suggest, there is room for more regional case studies in order to gain a better understanding of the depth of American working women’s experiences. The fact that this secondary literature tends to be dated underscores the significant decline in research on midwestern working women after the 1980s and the lack of diverse regional studies within the scholarship. This thesis will not only be supported and strengthened by this historiography, but can bring new evidence to light and demonstrate useful methodology for filling in the gaps that exist in labor and gender history in the Midwest. The following case study reveals the unheard stories of hardworking women in order to provide a more accurate picture of larger issues, such as midwestern industrialization, through the lens of the individuals who created those industries.

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<sup>17</sup> Ashendel, “Fabricating Independence.”

## Life in a Textile Town

On March 7, 1861, nineteen-year-old Terressa Kirst paced between her assigned spinning machines, carefully watching the blurs of thread winding on a whirling spindle. The large room was filled with eighty-five spinning frames and their violent shaking rhythm reverberated through the wooden floorboards and through her body. Fourteen hours of standing had left Terressa with throbbing legs and feet, and her arms ached from constantly reaching and quickly retying broken threads. Coughing in the stuffy lint and dust filled air, she caught a glimpse of her two younger sisters, Catherine and Ellen, hard at work at identical frames, their fingers darting between racing spools and bobbins. At last, quitting time was signaled by a tolling bell, and she and around eighty other spinners, mostly young women and children, filed down three flights of winding sandstone steps and out into the cool air. Catherine and Ellen met her outside and they patiently waited beneath the cotton mill's two 100-foot towers for their fourteen-year-old brother Anton, Jr., and father, Anton, a mill machinist. Together, quiet with exhaustion, the family walked four blocks past a family grocery, furniture store, drug store, and the mill-owned tenements on the way to their home.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SRTB, March 1861, FCMC. Terressa, Catherine, and Ellen all worked in the Spinning Room on 7 March 1861. Spinning Description: *The Fabric of Civilization: A Short Survey of the Cotton Industry in the United States: A Short Survey of the Cotton Industry in the United States*. New York: Guaranty Trust Company of New York, 1919. [online book] (accessed via [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29048/29048-h/29048-h.htm#VIII\\_IN\\_THE\\_COTTON\\_MILL](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29048/29048-h/29048-h.htm#VIII_IN_THE_COTTON_MILL)). Number of spinning machines and tower height: *Cannelton Reporter* 8 April 1854, "Indiana Cotton Mill." According to the SRTB, the number of spinners averaged around 80 hands in 1860 and 1861. One hundred and twenty-three spinners were listed in *Cannelton Reporter* 8 April 1854, "Indiana Cotton Mill." Spinning room located on the third floor: Insurance Survey of the Indiana Cotton Mills, 18 August 1890, copy from personal records of Michael Rutherford in possession of Kim Hawkins, Cannelton, Indiana. The 1860 census shows Anton, Sr., working in the mill. The 1883 payroll lists him as a machinist, and he was employed in the mill for 28 years: Anton Kirst obituary, *Tell City Anzeiger*, 18 August 1883, translated from German in "Tell City Indiana German Newspaper Items," p. 404, images scanned and sent by Mark Ress, Tell City Historical Society, Inc., Tell City, Indiana. Based on the SRTB for 1862, Terressa's brother, 14 year old Anton, Jr., was most likely working in the mill at this time as well. Cannelton's hours fluctuated by time period, but 14 hours seems to have been the norm for the early 1850s and 1860s. Discussion on Cannelton mill hours: Ashendel,

Seven years earlier the family had boarded the *Richard Morse* and crossed the Atlantic Ocean with Terressa's maternal grandparents, aunt, parents, and four younger siblings, leaving behind their home in Dettwiller, France, forever. They arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana, on January 19, 1854, and sadly Terressa's mother and six-month-old sister did not survive the voyage. Their life in Dettwiller, a French village located in a heavily industrialized area near the German border, had become increasingly difficult and her father, already working as a textile weaver, reflected on opportunities for work in America. Since the Kirsts lived near an industrialized area, it is probable that Cannelton's round of 1852 Indiana Cotton Mills recruitment pamphlets, which advertised highly paid mill positions for families, had reached them. People from outside the community believed Cannelton could offer better wages and working conditions than where they were employed, points which mill propaganda and the *Cannelton Economist*, significantly emphasized and exaggerated. The family could have also made connections for placement in the mill shortly after their arrival in America through the New Orleans' German Emigrant Society. Anton's in-laws settled with a relative in Evansville, a town

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"Fabricating Independence," 16-19; Wilson, "The Indiana Cotton Mills," 79; *Cannelton Economist*, June 1855, p. 209; German pamphlet, pp. 228, 231 in Smith, H., Scrapbook, HSMC; Torrey, "Visions of a Western Lowell," 295. Wilson states the girls worked a 12-hour day six days a week with 45 minutes for breakfast and lunch. Ashendel cites the 1855 *Cannelton Reporter*, which claims the girls worked 14 hour days, with 30 minutes for breakfast and 40 for dinner. On general textile mill hours: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 59-60. Bell times: ICMR, Folder 4, *Cannelton Telephone* 31 August 1916, IHS. "Bell Program Given at Historical Meeting," 21 December 1981, Cannelton newspaper article copy in the papers of Michael Rutherford in possession of Kim Hawkins, Cannelton, Indiana. The bell rang in the northern tower of the mill until 1914. For quitting bell: Michael Rutherford, *Hancock Clarion*, Hancock County, Kentucky, 20 October 1988. Route from mill to Kirst's house: Anton purchased part of 1 Sq. M for \$550 in February 1856: Tell City County Clerk's Office, Tell City, Indiana, Grantee Book 4, March 1815-March 1852, p. 192. Correspondence with Mark Ress, Tell City Historical Society Curator, "Seventh Street in Cannelton, perpendicular to the mill (about 4 blocks)." Also see oversized map folder OM0125 in ICMR, IHS. 1886 Cannelton, Indiana, 1886 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (accessed via Union List of Sanborn Maps through Indiana University Bloomington Libraries Databases <http://www.libraries.iub.edu/index>). I compared the 1860 census with articles from 1857 and 1867 along with the earliest existing Sanborn maps from 1886 to get an accurate general picture of the route from the mill the Kirst's home. *Cannelton Telephone*, 25 July 1907, "Fifty Years Ago," reprinted clippings from the 1857 *Cannelton Reporter*. *Cannelton Reporter*, 3 January 1867, "Fire!!"

fifty miles down-river, while he and his children settled in Cannelton. The Kirsts' prompt appearance in Cannelton upon their arrival in America, suggests prior connections in the town or nearby and that other family members also had textile experience.<sup>2</sup>

They arrived at Cannelton by steamboat and the family had their first glimpse of the mill where they would soon work. The four-story building loomed over the Ohio River and the small, surrounding town. With its two towers and beautiful rose-colored sandstone, people often mistook it for an important government building. Despite the

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<sup>2</sup> David Nelson, *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 24. Nelson states that in the 1850s due to "the prosperous state of Midwestern agriculture . . . nonagricultural enterprises there faced greater labor constraints . . . and had to attract employees to isolated, rural settings." This issue, along with the small population of Cannelton, led the Indiana Cotton Mill proprietors to specifically advertise positions to skilled New England operatives, yet the mill also employed many native Hoosiers and immigrant families and heavily distributed recruitment pamphlets in Germany. For the Kirsts' arrival in America: *Richard Morse* 19 January 1854, "Kirsch" on line 319, in New Orleans Passenger Lists, 1820-1945 (accessed via Ancestry.com); According to the ship's log, out of 407 passengers, 50 died. Anton Kirst's naturalization record 1854, State of Indiana, County of Perry, copy from personal correspondence. On early workers, promotional literature, reasons for coming to mill, ethnicity of workers and German immigrants to Cannelton: Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence" 3, 12-13. Smith, H., Scrapbook I, 1849-1873, p. 228-231, HSMC; Torrey, "Visions of a Western Lowell" 285. German broadside and translation from personal correspondence with Professor Anita Morgan (formerly Anita Ashendel). According to Ashendel, in "Fabricating Independence," in 1850 a friend of Hamilton Smith's and a Catholic priest first distributed pamphlets in Germany. Impressed with the immigrant workers who responded, another round was sent in 1852 which most likely reached the Kirsts. The American Canal Coal Company also circulated advertisements for workers in Germany. One of the listed references in these pamphlets was "Rev. M. Marendt, Priest of Roman Catholic Church Emigrant from Alsace." Michael Rutherford, *Perry County, Indiana: Then and Now* (Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 2000), 52-53. On the Kirst family's prior textile experience: Anton Kirst's occupation at the time of his first marriage was listed as "weaver," Marriage Record no.18 Dettwiller 23 November 1841, Conseil Général du Bas-Rhin, Archives Départementales, Dettwiller M, 1841, 4E 88/7, p.12 (accessed via GeneaNet.org). On the Kirsts' early years in Cannelton: SRTB, June 1860-February 1869, FCMC. 1860 Census, Cannelton, Perry County, Indiana, p. 25 (accessed via Ancestry.com); Anton Kirst obituary, *Tell City Anzeiger*, 18 August 1883. Anton purchased home: Tell City County Clerk's Office, Tell City, Indiana, Grantee Book 4, March 1815-March 1852, p. 192. For Dettwiller and Alsace information: Robert Weiland, *D'Alsace en Lorraine, Histoires de familles* (accessed via <http://www.robert-weiland.org/emig.php?lang=en>). Xavier Mathes and Madeline Mathes/Roll were Anton's first in-laws and traveled with the family on the *Richard Morse*. *Richard Morse* 19 January 1854, in New Orleans Passenger Lists, 1820-1945 (accessed via Ancestry.com). 1860 Census, Evansville, Vanderburgh County, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Xavier Mathes's naturalization year: An Index to Indiana Naturalization Records Found in Various Order Books of the Ninety-Two Local Courts Prior to 1907, Indianapolis: Family History Section, Indiana Historical Society, 1981, p. 172 (accessed via Ancestry.com). According to family oral history, in 1841 Anton Kirst married into a wealthier family of land owners, but the marriage was not wholly accepted and his wife never received her inheritance. Anton sold several parcels of land in 1845 and 1847 prior to leaving for the United States and there was already a Roll cousin settled in the United States. Whatever the familial connection, it is possible Anton had financial help from his first wife's relatives in Evansville during his first year in Cannelton.

impressiveness of the mill, the family had arrived at an undeveloped town and struggled to survive their first year in America. In the early 1850s basic provisions proved hard to come by in Cannelton and working class families could often not afford to buy what little was available. In fact, the local German benevolent society raised money for “distressed Germans” in September 1854. Since it is possible that Anton did not find employment in the mill until September 1855, the Kirsts may have relied on aid from this society in order to survive their first year in Cannelton.<sup>3</sup>

Still very much a part of the frontier in 1854, Cannelton’s streets were ungraded, had only one gutter, and were bordered by a cinder sidewalk. These primitive roads at times proved impassable. In addition, the town had a considerable absence of housing, and the Kirsts probably had difficulty finding a place to stay. Housing options for the earliest Cannelton mill operatives proved very limited, and national antebellum rent trends were high, approximately \$1.50 a week, and \$2 per week post-Civil War. Although the owners had originally intended to build Lowell-style tenement housing for all of the operatives, financial difficulties resulted in the construction of only five or six company owned boardinghouses, eventually termed the cotton mill blocks. In addition, a four-story building controlled by landlords was built for housing, and many private homes were rented to workers. So, although some operatives lived in the tenement housing provided by the mill, others found living quarters elsewhere or even purchased their own lots. In fact, according to the payroll for 1881-1884, most workers did not have

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<sup>3</sup> Expensive supplies: *Cannelton Reporter*, 21 April 1855. By 1859 the market was well stocked showing a marked change from 1854-1855 when “everything was remarkably scarce.” See *Cannelton Reporter*, 20 October 1859. Description of mill: Cannelton Cotton Mills, Cannelton Indiana, National Register Information System, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service (accessed via nrhp.focus.nps.gov) and Davis Frederick, “Cotton Mill Experiment Unravels at Cannelton,” *The Indiana Preservationist*, 5 (Jan/Feb 1989): 4. People often mistook the mill for a government building. Wilson, “The Indiana Cotton Mills,” 77. Anton employment: Anton Kirst obituary, *Tell City Anzeiger*, 18 August 1883. German Benevolent Society: *Cannelton Reporter* 16 September 1854.

rents deducted from their pay, suggesting the majority did not pay rent to the company. For example, five months after gaining a job, Anton Kirst bought his own property in Cannelton for \$550.<sup>4</sup>

For people who were not as lucky as the Kirsts, typical lodgings consisted of a few small rooms crowded with large families and the income of three or more wage earners would have been required to make ends meet. This type of arrangement usually resulted in poor living conditions. Tenement housing on a national level was especially dreadful, with communal restrooms, overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. In fact, even as late as 1913, the secretary of the board of health reported on the “filthy, unsanitary and desperate condition” of the alleys of the Cannelton cotton mill housing blocks. Since working class families often could not afford new, more sanitary technologies and household conveniences such as running water and ice boxes proved rare in rural areas, housework remained very labor intensive. Historian Alice Kessler-Harris, points out that “never had so large a proportion of the American population lived in such overcrowded conditions and never had ideal housekeeping standards been so

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<sup>4</sup> For conditions of streets: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 12 June 1879. The streets were ungraded until 1865. According to Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 119, federal investigations of southern mills in 1907-8 stated that “the smaller mill villages and those in the country are often primitive in the extreme.” *The Perry County News*, 13 July 1995, states that “the cotton mill blocks, located on Taylor Street, were owned by the mill and built in 1851-1852. They burned in 1908 and then consisted of two-story apartments with four large rooms, two up and two down.” From copy in Michael Rutherford’s personal papers, in possession of Kim Hawkins, For early housing options: Torrey, “Visions of a Western Lowell” 287 and the *Cannelton Economist* 18 March 1854, p. 203 in Smith, H., Scrapbook, HSMC. For national and Cannelton rents: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 59, Wilson, “The Indiana Cotton Mills” 79, and Payroll, ICMC. By 1881 Cannelton company rents could vary from \$2.75 to \$6.25 a month. Kirst housing: Anton Kirst bought from Michael Keating and wife, part of lot #1 Block M on 2 February 1856, Grantee Book 4. He then married his second wife, Mary Jaggi (spelled incorrectly as Yorkle) three months later. Anton’s second marriage to Mary “Yorkle” 18 May 1856: Tell City County Clerk’s Office, Marriage Records Book 2, p. 236.

high.” Although not all of the operatives lived in mill-owned housing, they probably lived in less than ideal conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Poor sanitary conditions meant that many in town suffered and died from a variety of contagious diseases. Serious outbreaks of cholera occurred in September 1854 and June 1866, and outbreaks of scarlet fever in June 1859 and December 1861. From November 1862 to at least June of 1863, small pox raged through the town and the infected were urged to remain in their homes. Ten years later another severe outbreak of small pox occurred, lasting for several months and the mill tried desperately to keep itself “free from the disease.” Illness continued to be a consistent concern with outbreaks of diphtheria, yellow fever, measles, and meningitis occurring into the early 1880s. Illnesses like these typically had the biggest impact on young children who, along with women, supplied a large majority of the mill’s labor.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these hardships, during its early years, Cannelton lacked cultural facilities such as libraries and, initially, schools. The Kirsts who worked in the mill had

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<sup>5</sup> Living conditions probably included a mixture of tenement and rural characteristics, both of which faced similar hardships. Unlike Cannelton, later southern mill villages typically formed around mill owned houses. However, similarly to Cannelton these were located in very rural isolated areas. For the 1913 secretary board of health report: *The Cannelton Enquirer*, 1 November 1913. For rough living conditions see: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 114-120. Although original housing plans based on Lowell’s paternalistic tenements did not materialize, Darbee’s suggestion that unlike Lowell owners, Cannelton’s mill owners never intended to regulate their workers’ lives outside of mill hours is debatable. Darbee, “Opportunity on the Frontier,” 41. For general tenement living conditions and family wages see Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 121-122.

<sup>6</sup> *Cannelton Reporter* 31 May 1867. In 1867 the mill employed over 100 children under sixteen years old. Cholera occurred somewhat seasonally: *Cannelton Reporter* 2 September 1854 and 21 June 1866. In 1866 it was especially prevalent in the cotton mill tenements. Scarlet fever: *Cannelton Reporter*, 11 June 1859 and 13 December 1861. Diphtheria: *Cannelton Reporter*, 15 October 1870. Cholera and diphtheria specifically killed many children in town. Yellow fever: *Cannelton Reporter*, 12 September 1878. Measles: 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). This census lists many residents as suffering from this, including many children. *Cannelton Reporter*, 13 January 1881. In 1881 schools closed because of the prevalence of measles. *Cannelton Reporter*, 7 April 1881. Meningitis affected the “young people of town.” Smallpox: *Cannelton Reporter*, 10 October 1862, 19 June 1863 and 25 January, 1 February, 22 February and 18 April 1873. *Cannelton Reporter*, 31 July 1875. In July of 1875 the locals who lived on Washington Street suffered from an incurable illness termed “garcel.” This month also saw many warnings for sickness from heat and wet and that other “epidemics may follow the flood” including cholera, and mold.

limited free time and beyond religious gatherings, the town offered little in the way of activities outside of work. Church provided operatives not just with spiritual and general education, but also with social activities including fairs and dinners. Still, idle time during mill closures led to some more irreverent forms of entertainment. Children who had time to play skated on the frozen Ohio River during the winter and some even skipped Sunday School to do so. In September 25, 1860, the mill decided to provide \$100 to the employees to celebrate the ensuing Fourth of July “in an appropriate manner.” Saloons provided another avenue of distraction and, indeed, the local paper had to remind saloonkeepers of the law forbidding the selling of liquor to minors. Working-class citizens could attend rare forms of entertainment such as a traveling circus if they could afford to purchase tickets and had time off from work. Still, small town life must have proved tedious as the paper reflected that “nothing can exceed the dullness of our town just at this time. There appears to be absolutely nothing new transpiring. Not even a dog fight.”<sup>7</sup>

Although most working class families in town had little free time, activities in Cannelton do reveal important details about life in Cannelton in the nineteenth century. As a company town, the mill provided a paternalistic influence on leisure time. For example, Cannelton’s mill owners commonly sponsored parties and entertainments on

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<sup>7</sup> *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 24 July 1879. St. Michael’s held a four-day fair to benefit the church in November 1879. *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 8 January 1880. St. Michael’s held another benefit in 1880. *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 7 November 1885. In 1885 the women of St. Michael’s put on a Thanksgiving turkey dinner. Ice skating on the Ohio: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 6 January 1881. Fourth of July: Ashendel, “Fabricating Independence,” 20. This may have been a response to previous unruly Fourth of July celebrations. In 1858 workers spontaneously extended their Fourth of July celebrations causing the mill to be closed for an extra day. Darbee, “Opportunity on the Frontier,” 36. The money was supposedly, however, a reward for employee cleanliness and efficiency. Minors’ drinking: *Cannelton Reporter*, 28 August 1875. “It is a notorious fact that there are minors in this town who get drunk” and lounge about the premises “playing cards, dominoes and other games.” *Cannelton Reporter*, 19 June 1875. Under a “new liquor law” Cannelton had nine saloons in 1875. *Cannelton Reporter*, 15 May 1875. In May 1875 a circus advertised they would soon come to town. Not even a dog fight: *Cannelton Reporter*, 14 November 1874.



holidays or in response to broken machinery. In May 1855, the mill held a holiday party for the younger operatives where workers elected a king and queen among of their own and participated in a picnic and ball. It appears most of the operatives attended. Mill superintendent Ebenezer Wilbur hosted a Fourth of July party in 1861 attended by 1,000 people. Separate dinner tables laden with food were provided specifically for the workers. Following the Civil War, the mill closed to hold Decoration Day ceremonies which included the decoration of Civil War veterans' graves. The mill also closed down for three days to let operatives attend the local G.A.R. encampment. The annual celebration of the shutting off of the gas lights in March, the Sun-Down Ball, was a much highlighted event. It celebrated dispensing with the artificial lighting that allowed the mill to run until 8 p.m. instead of closing at dark from September 20 to March 20. In 1867, the ball included an open house at the mill which was decorated by the operatives with flowers and wreaths. This was likely an upper-class function, the mill still ran and tickets "admitting Ladies and Gentleman" were 75 cents, so it is very unlikely that the mill operatives themselves were able to attend. In 1881, mill employees organized a welcome home party for Superintendent Wilbur who had travelled to England. Following the typical division of labor, male workers supervised women workers who organized the celebration. The local paper stated that "the entire force of the cotton mill contributed to the expense and arrangement of the affair." Although it is not clear to what degree this celebration was actually influenced by other mill higher-ups, it still proved an excuse for employees to celebrate. The large celebration included cannon fire, dancing, and speeches and lasted until 12 a.m., although the employees still had to be at work early the next day.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Cannelton Reporter* 9 May 1855. The party was held because of broken machinery, possibly to distract

Children employed at the mill had little time and inconsistent opportunities for education, and a compulsory school attendance law was not enacted in Indiana until 1897. Although a company school was created in 1851 and Sunday Schools were available through various parishes, these by no means provided a reliable avenue for education. By 1874 at the latest, the company school was no longer functioning and indeed, it was only when the mill ran on half days that children employees had time to attend school. A Catholic church organized a school in 1855, and it is probable that the KIRSTS and other local Catholics received at least some schooling through their parishes. Although a public school was formed in 1866, some locals expressed the need for a night school because working children could not attend the public one. In 1867, the mill employed over 100 children under sixteen years old. When new state legislation required children under sixteen to work no more than 10 hours each day, the School Trustees opened an afternoon school. It began at 4 p.m. and families were encouraged to “embrace this rare opportunity” and send their children for two to three hours a day. This afternoon school, however, appears to have been unsuccessful or short lived. In November 1873 the mill went to half time and the paper suggested children use this free time to attend school as it was probable that this would be “the only opportunity that [would] ever be offered to many of them.” The next year, the paper asked “when are the children in our Cotton Mill going to be educated? Do any of our citizens ever think of the hundreds of children in that mill that are growing up uneducated?” Parish education remained an option for some because by 1874 the paper recognized the efforts of the nuns who ran a school at St.

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the workers from a lack of a pay check. *Cannelton Reporter* 11 July 1861, “The Celebration.” Decoration Day: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 31 May 1884. G.A.R: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 30 August 1884. Sun-Down Ball: *Cannelton Reporter* 14, 21 March 1867. *Cannelton Reporter* 14 March 1861, tickets were 75 cents. *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 14, 21 July 1881.

Michael's Catholic Church, which the Kirsts attended. In fact, by the early to mid-1870s, it appears parish schools provided the most common form of education for the Catholic working class of Cannelton. Although children too young to work in the mill or at other employment would have had the opportunity to attend these schools for at least a few years, most working-class children left school before the fifth or sixth grade. School, especially as provided by the mill company, reinforced working in factories by encouraging basic reading, writing, and math skills, along with respect for authority and routine. This type of training created further opportunities for paternalistic mill companies to easily control and exploit their employees.<sup>9</sup>

Due to previous textile experience, the Kirsts fit into the middle working class of Cannelton and their lives serve as an example of the variety of immigrant family economies in the Midwest. In Cannelton, two distinctive classes existed, the upper class and the working class; race, ethnicity, and profession impacted where families fell within these socio-economic levels. The upper class, although controlling more wealth, property, and influence in town, were outnumbered by the working class. Cannelton's upper class included mostly native-born, white-collar workers such as lawyers and mill businessmen. Although a large gap existed between the upper class and working class, a small but

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<sup>9</sup> For compulsory school law see Madison, *The Indiana Way*, 164. The 1897 law required children age 8-14 to attend at least 12 consecutive weeks of school per year. On the Catholic school: *Cannelton Reporter*, 8 December 1855, "Catholic School in Cannelton." Formation of public school; *Cannelton Reporter*, 20 September 1866. The school does not appear to have opened to students until 1869. According to Meyers Grade School History (accessed via <http://www2.siec.k12.in.us/cannelton/myers/indexmyers.htm>). Call for night school: *Cannelton Reporter* 29 November 1866. According to Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 331, the ten-hour work day for children under sixteen was not enforced until the late 1880s. The *Cannelton Reporter* 31 May 1867, states that the mill employed over one hundred children. Afternoon school: *Cannelton Reporter* 13 June 1867. School during mill half time: *Cannelton Reporter* 1 November 1873, *Cannelton Reporter* 31 October 1874. Michael Rutherford, *Perry County, Indiana*, 274 and *Cannelton Reporter*, 11 September 1875. Classes taught by nuns were also held in St. John, another Catholic church, from 1888-1914. All of the Kirsts except the stepmother, Mary, were listed at some point in the censuses as literate. This also suggests that the older children, born in France, received an education there. For general education: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 55. Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 127-128. Company owned schools often operated as an extension of the mill business.

evident hierarchy existed within Cannelton's working class. This included distinctions between an upper-working class, middle-working class, and lower-working class. The upper-working class included both native-born and immigrants who owned relatively large amounts of property, but who worked blue-collar jobs, such as in the mill, or owned businesses, such as a grocery or bakery.<sup>10</sup>

For the purpose of this research, the upper-working class category remains separate from a distinctive middle class for several reasons. Within this thesis's chronological parameters of the mid-1850s to the mid-1880s, the distinction between upper class and working class in Cannelton remained very segregated. It was not until closer to the turn of the century that a third type of merchant, middle class, which increasingly interacted with the upper class, can begin to be identified through social pages in the newspapers and by marriages between families.<sup>11</sup>

Distinctions in types of work prove the most significant indicator of class due to the fact that although some upper-class citizens, for example physicians, owned less recorded property than many of the upper working class, their professions still afforded them a higher social status. Often, well-off immigrants did make enough money through self-employment or trade to potentially be considered upper class, but due to the type of businesses they ran, they remained in the upper working class category. For example, in 1860, a Prussian family with an exceptionally large amount of real estate valued at \$2500 and with a personal property valued at \$300 accumulated their holdings through owning a bakery and therefore still remained in the working class. Recorded wealth is not the only characteristic indicative of class; the presence of domestic servants in a household also

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<sup>10</sup> Compared to other members of the working class, the upper working class typically held income or property in the triple digits.

<sup>11</sup> 1860, 1870, 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com).

serves to categorize Cannelton's upper class families. For instance, in several cases, families with working class occupations appeared to be able to afford to hire domestic servants. These were usually families who seemed to need extra help with children or running a business like a boardinghouse. It was much more usual, however, for upper-class families to hire domestic servants. For this study, the presence of a domestic servant in addition to information on property values and occupations, categorizes certain families as the "upper class" of Cannelton. Another distinction between upper class families and working class families with financial means is that even the upper-working class usually had daughters or female relatives who worked in the mill or at some other occupation. Children of the higher socio-economic class attended school instead.<sup>12</sup>

Although less of a distinction between the middle and lower-working class existed, the middle-working class tended to consist of families, like the Kirsts, who owned some small amount of property, but who worked at manual labor, including in this group, the majority of mill positions, laborers, and coal miners. In comparison to many other operative families, both immigrant and native-born, the Kirsts owned more property placing them in the small, middle-working class spectrum in Cannelton. The lower-working class included families similarly employed, but who owned no listed property at all. Although a slight hierarchy did exist within the working class, upper and middle-working class families usually represented unique circumstances and the majority of

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<sup>12</sup> 1860 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Prussian family named Smuck, family number 61. For the purpose of this research, domestic servants listed in the census without the same last name as the family indicated that the person was usually employed outside the household. Similar conclusions have been made about wage-earning families with domestic servants in Indianapolis. Robinson, "Making Ends Meet," 220. Class in Cannelton: 1860, 1870, 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Comparing the census to the paper's coverage of individuals also gives insight into common class distinctions. For example, unless a conflict or accident occurred the paper rarely gave detailed coverage of working-class individuals and generally only the upper class were included in the "social pages."

families remained in the lowest economic strata. Over time, these class distinctions between the upper and working class remained relatively fixed, but more fluidity existed within the working class. For example, financial difficulties following the Civil War caused some shifts in families' status, and the 1870 census contained fewer reports of property ownership overall compared to the 1860 census. The 1880 census did not list real estate values. Shifts within the working class occurred frequently as families experienced ups and downs, but it took generations for working class families to attain upper-class status.<sup>13</sup>

As a town created around one industry, employment options in Cannelton proved limited, and the three most available means of employment in the area included the cotton mill, coal mining, and agriculture.<sup>14</sup> For nineteenth-century women, opportunities for employment proved especially limited, and census data paints a general picture of the life of Cannelton's working women. Within the working class, race and ethnicity were the most influential factors determining what occupations were available to different women. Within these parameters, which changed over time, further competition for positions existed.

In the nineteenth century, race and ethnicity were inextricably linked to social status. Prior to the Civil War, it appears that Cannelton's population consisted solely of white individuals as the 1860 census listed no African Americans living there. Yet, due to Cannelton's proximity to southern states, it is probable that African Americans lived in or near the area. Before the Civil War, the local newspaper included racist remarks about African Americans and fugitive slaves and negative articles about abolitionists. In 1862,

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<sup>13</sup> 1860, 1870, 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Middle working-class families typically had property in the double digits.

<sup>14</sup> For work options in the area see Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 17.

the paper also included comments about stopping the influx into town of “negroes and woolly heads.” It is not clear how representative the views of the predominately upper-class newspaper editors were of the working-class town members. Newly arrived working-class immigrants, like the Kirsts, may or may not have held any strong prejudice towards African Americans or feelings of southern sympathy which were prevalent in southern Indiana.<sup>15</sup>

In 1860, 1,080 white women lived in Cannelton out of a population of 2,155. During this census, enumerators in Cannelton listed all individuals as white and did not differentiate foreign-born from those born in the United States. Since enumerators listed no African American families, the census data displays that the pool of working women was limited to poor whites and that the majority of them were immigrants. German immigrants were especially prevalent. By “1857 approximately one-half of Cannelton’s 4000 citizens were recent German Catholic immigrants or their children,” and some well-to-do locals looked down on them because they were Catholic. The first German Catholic Cannelton immigrants were viewed as industrious and valuable workers, but an obvious prejudice against them developed early in the town’s history. For example, a letter to the *Cannelton Reporter* titled “Catholicism Anti-republican Foreigners” in 1854 and an article disapproving of the building of Catholic schools in Cannelton in 1855, displays the hostility many felt toward German Catholics, “the Catholics of this town are almost to a man, foreigners . . . . We fear, their purpose . . . is to build up a sectarian school in which anti-American and anti-republican sentiments will be insidiously inculcated.” Not all

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<sup>15</sup> 1860 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). The *Cannelton Reporter*, 22 March 1860, listed 350 operatives as working in the mill. In 1860, Cannelton’s “free colored population” was listed as N/A and I came across no African Americans listed in this census. One example of racism in the paper: *Cannelton Reporter* 26 September 1862. Influx of African Americans: *Cannelton Reporter* 24 October 1862.

locals shared this opinion of Catholics, however, as displayed in a lengthy response on the front page of the newspaper by a local priest condemning the “sinister views against a large portion of our Cannelton people.”<sup>16</sup> The Kirsts, as German Catholics, must have experienced this prejudice to some extent. It is unclear, however, to what extent their religion impacted their ability to find work in Cannelton, though religion proved less of a determining factor following the Civil War due to the lack of anti-Catholic newspaper articles.

In 1870, an African American population was recorded in the Cannelton census and race became a visible factor in determining social status and job opportunities for local working women. Cannelton’s population of 2,481 people was at a peak in 1870 and included 1,636 white, foreign-born, and “mulatto” females. This census listed the numbers of families and white, “colored,” and foreign-born males and females. Enumerators counted “mulattos” in the total white number. It is unclear exactly what the enumerator meant by mulatto or black as a classification. Due to the fact that textile work typically excluded African American women, for the purpose of this thesis the 1870 total number of Cannelton working women does not count the twenty-four black women listed

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<sup>16</sup> 1860 Census, Population of Cities and Towns, Table 3, p. 123, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana. According to Ashendel, “Fabricating Independence,” 12, a 1 June 1857 newspaper article in Scrapbook II of the HSMC lists the Cannelton population at 4000 but this was most likely exaggerated. “Industrious” workers: *Cannelton Reporter* 4 February 1854. *Cannelton Reporter*, 15 July 1854, “Catholicism Anti-republican Foreigners.” *Cannelton Reporter*, Saturday 19 July 1854, “Facts Against Assertions in Reply to An American Citizen.” *Cannelton Reporter* 8 December 1855, “Catholic School in Cannelton.” M. Teresa Baer and Leigh Darbee, “Perry County’s Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850 to 1954, Part 3,” 174 . 1860 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Baer and Darbee state that by 1860, “nearly 60 percent of the workforce was comprised of equal numbers of Germans, English, and Irish. Cannelton residents composed most of the rest of the workers. Also by 1860, half of all the operatives were men.” It is not clear how these numbers were reached. The workforce certainly did consist of large populations of Germans, Irish, and English, however, in 1860 the census listed 134 female operatives and 94 male operatives. The *Cannelton Reporter* 12 September 1855, states “we have scarcely a German or Irish subscriber on our list.” According to Rutherford, *Perry County, Indiana*, 274, in February 1858, the “German speaking members of St. Patrick, numbering around 315, obtained permission to build St. Michael’s.” The first mass was held on 1859.



in the census. They are excluded in order to focus solely on the pool of white women who would have been available for textile work. Working African American women present an essential viewpoint in the national working class narrative, however, a detailed study of them is out of the scope of this thesis. Still, Cannelton as a textile company town clearly displays how race negatively impacted a woman's ability to find wage work.<sup>17</sup>

In 1880, Cannelton's population had fallen to 1,834, including 922 white and "mulatto" women. By 1878, a sizable African American population must have existed in Cannelton, as the paper mentioned the "colored congregation" was building its own church. Two unique instances display how the racial influence on employment in Cannelton may have changed over time. In 1880, a sixteen year old named Mary Davis worked at the cotton mill, her ethnicity was listed as mulatto. This was a rare occurrence because historically mills only employed non-whites in the most grueling tasks such as opening the cotton bales. During this same census year another mulatto female, Martha Board, was listed as dressmaker and in addition to Mary Davis, these two women represent the first recordings of women of color employed in positions other than

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<sup>17</sup> 1880 Census, State of Indiana, Population of Civil Divisions Less Than Counties, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana. This included a population for 1870. On race in cotton mills: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 66-67. African American men sometimes worked in textile factories, but held low-paying and more difficult positions such as moving, loading and opening bales of cotton and finished product. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the picker room especially tended to employ black men. In Lois Rita Helmbold and Ann Schofield, "Women's Labor History, 1790-1945," *Reviews in American History* 17 (December 1989): 502, Helmbold and Schofield point out that unfortunately the tendency to place "emphasis on industrialization and sex-segregation . . . betrays the orientation to white women's experience as the norm." Unlike previous censuses, the 1880 census enumerators did not include counts of families or of white, black, or foreign-born individuals. Therefore, it was necessary to individually count the number of families by page and the number of females by page. For the sake of consistency, this thesis's 1880 count of white women also includes mulatto women, but not black women. According to Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 47, "racial prejudices excluded black women from competing in the same labor markets as whites." 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). In Cannelton in 1870, many native-born women did work outside the home, but often large numbers of foreign-born women listed on a census page meant that the numbers of working women was high as well. Often no foreign-born women were listed on a page and no women were listed as working outside the home. The pattern appears often enough that for this census year; more foreign-born women may have had worked outside the home than those born in the United States.

servants and washerwomen in Cannelton.<sup>18</sup> The Cannelton census displays changes in the social status of working women overtime based on race and ethnicity, and by the 1880s, race was a more determinate factor than ethnicity. Therefore, although the Kirsts were Catholic immigrants, they had the option of working in higher paying positions than any of their African American neighbors.

Yet what jobs existed for the Kirst women other than working in the mill? The availability of women's jobs in Cannelton differed somewhat by decade. The 1860 Cannelton census lists only 8 female occupations including 173 operatives, 19 domestic servants, 7 seamstresses, 4 nuns, 2 teachers, one boardinghouse keeper, one milliner, and one apprentice. Only the occupations of those over fifteen-years-old, however, were supposed to be listed and those numbers do not take into account unrecorded instances of employment which was especially common for child operatives. Indeed, the cotton mill relied heavily on child labor and employed children and adolescents. The occupation of Anton Kirst's third daughter, Ellen, was not recorded, in the census, but she was listed in the mill payroll. More instances of unrecorded working women and children surely

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<sup>18</sup> 1880 Census, State of Indiana, Population of Civil Divisions Less Than Counties, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana. African American Congregation: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 24 October 1878. 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Mary Davis was family number 1165. Martha Board was family number 738. These two examples may indicate increased work options for African American women in smaller towns, such as Cannelton. It is unclear, however, exactly what the term mulatto means in this census as no definition is found with the data. According to Jennifer L. Hochschild and Powell, "Racial Reorganization and the United States Census 1850-1930: Mulattoes, Half-Breeds, Mixed Parentage, Hindoos, and the Mexican Race, *Studies in American Political Development*, 22 (Spring 2008): 59-96 (accessed via [http://scholar.harvard.edu/jlhochschild/publications/racial-reorganization-and-united-states-census-1850-1930-mulattoes-half-br#\\_edn65](http://scholar.harvard.edu/jlhochschild/publications/racial-reorganization-and-united-states-census-1850-1930-mulattoes-half-br#_edn65)), from 1850 to 1880 categories for white, black and mulatto were determined by skin tone for both free persons and slaves (no data on mulattos was published in 1880 however). Citing the "U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses From 1790 to 2000*," (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2002), 27, the 1880 census stated that "the word "black" should be used to describe those persons who have three-fourths or more black blood; "mulatto," those persons who have from three-eighths to five-eighths black blood; "quadroon," those persons who have one-fourth black blood; and "octoroon," those persons who have one-eighth or any trace of black blood."

occurred in other occupations as well. Nevertheless, these numbers represent the most accurate description possible of the female workforce in Cannelton.<sup>19</sup>

At the time of the 1870 census, women engaged in 12 different occupations in town. These included 181 mill operatives, 39 domestic servants, 15 seamstresses, 8 teachers, 7 washerwomen, 4 housekeepers, 4 carpet weavers, 3 milliners, 3 dressmakers, 3 nuns, one cigar maker, and one dry goods and groceries dealer. Sociologist Robert Robinson states that in Indiana, occupations were recorded for children ten years old and above for the 1870 and 1880 censuses; however, in Cannelton this did not always appear to be the case. From 1860 to 1880 the census demonstrates that domestic servitude was the most popular or available employment option outside of textile work in Cannelton. For this study, in 1870, those employees termed as “servants” are listed in the domestic servant count as well. This description, which did not occur in the 1860 census, was less common than the term domestic servant and while a small difference in status may have existed as a result of this terminology, the overall occupation appears to be the same. The “housekeepers” count includes only those instances when this phrase was spelled out as opposed to listed as “k.h,” which was an abbreviated term used by census enumerators to denote when a woman stayed at home and “kept house” at her own personal residence instead of elsewhere for a wage. In 1880, the census again lists 12 occupations available

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<sup>19</sup> 1860 Census, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). *Cannelton Reporter*, 26 February 1876. The paper states that the mill employed 335 operatives in 1876. *Cannelton Telephone*, 25 July 1907 reprinted clippings from the 1857 *Cannelton Reporter*. The milliners in 1857 were Miss Maria James and Mrs. H. Reynolds. Neither is listed or identifiable on the 1860 census. *Cannelton Reporter*, 12 April 1860, “Census of 1860-Questions to Answer.” On Ellen’s employment: 1860 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com), SRTB, FCMC. Unfamiliarity with U.S. customs and concern about losing income from illegal practices may also have caused the family to omit female or young children’s employment statuses on the census. Also according to Robinson, census takers themselves may have been reluctant to record illegal workers. Robinson, “Making Ends Meet,” 202. Robinson, whose sociological study of working class families overtime has many similarities with my own research, eloquently states that the “censuses give a ‘snapshot’ of these individuals and their families at ten-year intervals. Although the decennial censuses miss many changes . . . they contain enough information to suggest clear patterns.”

to women. 146 worked as operatives, 23 as domestic servants, 5 as dressmakers, 5 as teachers, 4 as milliners, 4 as laundresses, 3 as boardinghouse keepers, 3 as store clerks, 2 as grocers, 2 as carpet weavers, one as a typesetter, and one as a midwife.<sup>20</sup>

Although these jobs represent common female occupations, in Cannelton specifically, several appear to be unique cases of employment and not necessarily a typical option for most working women in town. For example, the female apprentice, cigar maker, and midwife are isolated instances only employing one woman each. In 1860, Rose Trey, eighteen years old, was simply listed as “apprentice.” It is unclear exactly what profession she was training for as she resided with the Shydickers and the head male of household was a laborer. The 1870s cigar maker was an older woman who lived alone and the 1880 census was the first listing of a midwife as an occupation in Cannelton.<sup>21</sup>

Boardinghouse keepers, housekeepers, and grocers tended to be options only available to older, widowed, or divorced women. In the case of boardinghouse keepers, all the women were widows except for one divorcee. In 1880, Margaret Knold, age thirty-four, was a divorced boardinghouse keeper with two sons; her sons did not work,

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<sup>20</sup> The high numbers of domestic servants in Cannelton aligns with state and national trends. Robinson states that “in the 1860 Indianapolis sample, 91.7 percent of the single foreign-born women who were employed worked as servants.” Robinson, “Making Ends Meet,” 209, 234. 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). In the census term servant applied to both black and white women and some males, so although it is not obvious, some type of distinction appears to have existed. *Tell City Anzeiger*, 5, 12 April 1884, “Cannelton Neuigkeiten,” translated from German by Elena Ripple and Nick Johnson. This 1884 article states that the mill employed over 300 workers, which again provides evidence that not all working women may have been listed in the census, especially underage operatives.

<sup>21</sup> 1860 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). The Shydickers were family number 273 and they also employed a female domestic servant. 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Catherine Wagner, cigar maker (family number 183). 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Johanna Dalton, the midwife, was a widowed head of household and her son was employed as a coal digger and her daughter as a domestic servant (family 302). It is somewhat strange that midwifery was listed as an occupation in the late nineteenth century as the field slowly became dominated by male doctors. However, earlier midwives may not have been considered as technically employed and, therefore, not listed in previous censuses. See Kessler Harris, *Out to Work*, 117.

but attended school. That same year, Nancy Hurst, age fifty-seven, and Mary Scott, age forty, were both widows and boardinghouse keepers. Compared to 1870 census data, Nancy Hurst first worked as a carpet weaver and lived with a family of peddlers with her daughter, Julia, who worked in the cotton mill. Nancy was able to “move up” from a lower-working class status by becoming a boardinghouse keeper. In 1880, her daughter was at home with no listed occupation, though she possibly helped run the business and Nancy employed a domestic servant to help keep the boarders. In 1870, Mary Scott initially kept house for her husband, a ship carpenter, while their daughter, Emeline, worked in the cotton mill. By 1880, however, Emeline was at home probably helping her mother with boarders. As opposed to a boardinghouse keeper, working as a grocer was a primarily male occupation, and therefore women grocers were also almost exclusively grocers’ widows. In 1880, both women grocers were widows and even in the case of the 1870s dry goods and groceries dealer, it appears she was acting for her husband in some capacity. This suggests that, in Cannelton, women only had an opportunity to enter into this work at their husband’s deaths. Still, becoming a boardinghouse keeper or grocer was a rare possibility for widowed or divorced women that offered them a small increase in social status and personal power as business owners.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 1870, 1880 Census Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). “Hurst” was family number 499 in 1870. The 1870 census does not list widow status so it is not clear when Nancy was widowed. Mary was listed as Mollie in the 1870 Census (family number 317). In 1880 she was family 29. Annie Ulmanhoff, the dry goods and groceries dealer, lived with her husband in 1870 (family number 62) and he appears to have been incapacitated. He had no listed profession. \$500 in real estate and \$500 of personal estate was listed in the wife’s name, family number 62. On boardinghouse keepers: Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998) 28-29, 37. Boardinghouse keepers’ social status often depended on the class of clientele they served. For more on boardinghouse keepers: Anita Ashendel, “She is the Man of the Concern: Entrepreneurial Women in the Ohio Valley, 1790-1860,” (Ph.D. dissertation Purdue University, 1997). Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). For widows as business women: Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women*, 56-59.

Professional housekeeping was a unique occupation in 1870 and this census listed several women as housekeepers for wealthy bachelors, businessmen, or clergy. Economically, and most likely socially, they held a higher status than domestic servants. For example, Jane Spawood, age fifty-nine, was from England and she kept house for mill owner, Dwight Newcomb. He was one of the wealthiest and most influential businessmen in town. For Jane, who owned \$500 of real estate, being a housekeeper to the upper class offered one of the most financially comfortable, if rare, employments to women in Cannelton. Still, her social status would have remained within the working class. Jone Sparrow was another housekeeper from England. She held \$1000 of real estate. Either she was paid a high wage or she brought some of that wealth from England. In comparison, Mary Kelly, sixty, was listed as housekeeper and lived with a domestic serving girl and James and Michael Monerdt, a school teacher and Catholic priest respectively. The Monerdt probably employed these two women to keep house for themselves or at least within the rectory. In a very unique situation, Barbary Jackel was a housekeeper for an upper-working-class grocer, who had means enough to employ her.<sup>23</sup>

Carpet weavers also represent another less frequent form of employment and it is unclear exactly what this job entailed since there were no carpet weaving factories in town. In the 1870s and 1880s the women in this profession in Cannelton ranged in age from their late forties to seventies, except in one case when a weaver's daughter was also in the trade. It is possible this was an older skill women turned to when they did not have support from a husband and that mothers could pass down to their daughters. Finally, the presence of a typesetter and store clerks in 1880 reflects a national trend in the growth of

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<sup>23</sup> 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Newcomb family number 275. Monerdt family number 109. Sparrow family number 191. Jackel family number 169.

new, white collar jobs for women. These employment options, which were nonexistent earlier in the nineteenth century, were still only an option for relatively educated, single, white women. For example, the 1880 census was the first to list females as store clerks. In one case it appears a daughter helped her widowed mother with a grocery store. The other two female clerks had no such family business connections, and all the other clerks in town were males. The typesetter lived with her brother-in-law who was an editor.<sup>24</sup>

While these professions provided work for women in Cannelton, after operatives and domestic servants, the most customarily available occupations were seamstresses, dressmakers, milliners, teachers, and washerwomen. Seamstresses engaged in less skilled work than dressmakers and milliners who earned higher pay and held a higher social status. Millinery and dressmaking were specialized skills which allowed women to earn a larger income and potentially have greater autonomy as a business owner. A small town like Cannelton had limited demand for these services and few positions existed. In 1860, milliner and head of her household, Helen Martin, had \$400 worth of personal estate and her two male relatives worked as clerks. In 1870, milliner Susan Armstrong was financially comfortable. She was the head of her household and owned \$5000 worth of real estate and had a personal estate worth \$300. This was a significant amount even among Cannelton's upper class. Susan was the widow of a merchant, and in 1860 the

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<sup>24</sup>1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Carpet weaving family numbers 40, 102, 135. 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Delila Long was a widow (family number 48) and Mary Stevens was divorced (family number 247). Both lived alone. Annie Dorn was a clerk in a store, while her mother was a widowed grocer (family number 89). Alice Cummusky, whose father worked in the cotton mill, was a clerk in a store (family number 53). Josephine Ernst lived with her uncle who was a teamster (family number 96). Betty Wagenstedt the typesetter, was listed as a compositor (family number 192). On carpet weaving: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 68. Carpet weaving was revolutionized in the 1840s when technology then allowed women to replace intensive male labor. There is no evidence of Cannelton having a carpet weaving shop or factory during this time period. For an analysis on the newly available service occupations: Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 1-11, 177-216, 283-293.

family held \$2000 worth of real estate and \$400 worth of personal estate. She most likely inherited money after her husband's death and expanded or furthered her wealth by working as a milliner. Another milliner, Margaret Benson, was married to a grocer. She owned personal property worth \$3500 in 1870. These three women obviously did well as entrepreneurs. Teaching, which was one of the more socially acceptable occupations for women, paid very low wages and women competed for these limited positions with men who earned a higher wage. More teaching positions existed in Cannelton in 1870, most likely due to the larger population. At the other end of the spectrum, "taking in wash" was one of the lowest paid and least regarded occupations available to both black and white women, although it was listed only in the 1870s census. Since female African American's frequently held this position, white women who also worked as washerwomen had a comparably low social status. It is possible that so many washerwomen are listed in 1870 as opposed to the 1860 census, where none are listed, and the 1880 census, where they are most likely the equivalent of laundresses, because of the difficult economic period following the Civil War. This occupation seems to be a last resort for some female-led families who did not work, in the mill and who had no male members providing income.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 1860, 1870, 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). A connection between seamstresses and operatives seemed to exist. In 1860, "J" Hockinson was a seamstress and head of household, while her older daughter was an operative (family number 97). Another seamstress, Ellen, and four female operatives worked in the Luych household (family number 195) and Bridget Dunn, who was a seamstress in 1860 (family number 363) and 1870 (family number 175), kept house in 1880 while her sister worked in the mill (family number 84). In several cases in 1870, a household of females had an older woman head of household, while the younger female relatives worked in the cotton mill (in one case the head of household was employed as a seamstress). This connection might simply be due to the fact that textile work in general was a gendered occupation and also because most families needed to supplement their incomes with wages from the mill. Martin family number 367. Armstrong Family number in in 1860 was 286 in 1870 it was 279. Benson family number 301. In 1860, Harriet Dow (family number 250) who was one of two teachers in town, had an unusually large amount of real estate and personal estate for a working women. The other teacher was her daughter or other female relative. For the hierarchy in female economies including millinery, dressmaking, seamstresses, washerwomen and laundresses: Kwolek-



For many women, working in a textile factory was preferable to the previously listed occupations because operatives earned much higher wages in comparison. The cotton mill also offered a wide variety of types of work and the majority of working women in Cannelton found jobs engaging in the various tasks that manufactured cotton into a coarse brown muslin sheeting. By the 1860s, immigrant labor, including German families like the Kirsts, had replaced most of the original New England operatives, but the mill also employed many native Hoosiers. A strong presence of Irish immigrant operatives also lived and worked in Cannelton in 1860, despite a mill recruiter's original claim that he would hire "very few Irish." During the 1870s, the mill employed a significant number of southern textile operatives, including women and young girls who migrated north after the war. These female operatives composed a large portion of the Cannelton population. In 1860, at least 12 percent of local women worked in the cotton mill. The 1870 census displays that 11 percent of women worked in the mill and by 1880, 16 percent of women worked as operatives. The total number of women per year includes a count of *all* of Cannelton's white women and women of color, including those too young or too old to work, as well as upper class women and married women who would not typically be considered part of the eligible female work force. The total number of operatives is based solely on the census data and excludes unlisted children or adolescent

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Folland, *Incorporating Women*, 40-41. For a discussion on the hierarchy of work for women: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 127-128. It is possible that so many washerwomen were listed in 1870 as opposed to the 1860 census, where none were listed, and the 1880 census, where they were most likely the equivalent to laundresses, because of the difficult economic period following the Civil War. It appears to be a last resort for some families who were not employed in the mill and had no male members providing income. For example, in 1870, Mary Doughtery the head of a family of six was employed as a washerwoman as are her two eldest daughters (family number 468). One other washerwoman was also the head of her household (family number 106). Two older women, aged 50 and 71, each live alone as washerwomen (family numbers 103 and 296). Two black women are also listed (family numbers 254, 256).

operatives. Therefore, although these percentages may not prove overwhelming, they still display Cannelton's dependency on the labor of female cotton mill operatives.<sup>26</sup>

Life as a cotton mill operative was not easy and in return for higher high wages the Kirsts endured poor working conditions. Six days a week, Terressa Kirst, Catherine Kirst, Ellen Kirst, and their coworkers woke early in order to arrive at the mill before 6:30 a.m. Operatives worked between twelve and fourteen hours each day, with around thirty to forty-five minutes for breakfast, and forty minutes for lunch. Despite the owner's claims of extra safety features, their work was difficult and dangerous. The sisters breathed in air filled with combustible lint particles and the multitude of machines produced a deafening racket that shook the room. Respiratory infections were particularly common and deadly. Workers stood for long periods of time and risked having limbs, hair, or clothing caught in machines. During the summer, the intense heat made the stuffy rooms miserable and when the days grew shorter, gas lights flickered in the rooms ensuring work continued. Work accidents were commonplace; condensers and boilers burst, workers became entangled in elevator ropes and the threat of fire was constant. By the 1850s improved technology enabled textile operatives to work four to six looms at a time. Fewer workers and increased productivity satisfied mill businessmen. Women workers, however, suffered additional stress as they struggled to keep up with new

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<sup>26</sup> Description of jobs in the mill: Baer and Darbee. "Perry County's Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850 to 1954, Part 1," 1. On ethnicity of workers and German immigrants to Cannelton: Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence" 3, 12-13. Very few Irish: Ashendel "Fabricating Independence," 11, citing Charles T. James to Hamilton Smith, 28 June 1850, Folder "1850, May-June," Box 2 (emphasis in original), HSMC. Baer and Darbee, "Perry County's Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850 to 1954, Part 3," and Patricia Beatty, *Turn Homeward Hannalee*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1984). Their research supports the census findings of other histories on southern migrants. 1860 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). 134 female operatives worked out of 1080 white women in Cannelton and 93 males are listed as operatives. 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). 181 women operatives worked in the mill out of 1636 foreign, white, and mulatto women. 126 males are listed as operatives, though the majority of them are young boys and adolescents. 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). 144 female operatives worked in the mill out of 922 white and mulatto women. 76 males are listed as operatives.

demands. For the Kirst sisters, these difficulties would have seemed commonplace and unavoidable job hazards.<sup>27</sup>

Within the mill, women and children completed very different jobs from men and earned much less. Women found employment in the carding, spinning, weaving, and dressing rooms while men worked as room supervisors, repair men, and clerks. Male supervisors earned as much as \$5.50 per week, while the highest paid woman could earn \$3.60 a week, and children earned about \$1.50 a week. Meticulous detail recorded the length of day an employee worked. Even within specific work rooms of the mill, operatives' wages depended on age, gender, and experience. Since the cotton mill provided one of the highest paying jobs available to women in the area, however, operatives were forced or even willing to work for lower wages.<sup>28</sup>

According to Kessler-Harris, "women could move up the economic ladder only within those occupations defined as theirs." Once a woman was employed in the mill, in comparison to men, few chances for promotion existed. Women could advance in the mill through more efficient productivity as a result of gaining more experience. This, however, meant that women attained the highest available positions quickly and maintained that level until leaving the mill. Compared to other operatives, the Kirst family proved to be fortunate by having previous textile experience and family connections. The daughters held some of the highest status and best paying positions for

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion on respiratory infections: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 81-84. For mill hours; Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 19; Wilson, "The Indiana Cotton Mills," 79. The mill ran on a 72-hour work week during the 1800s and 1900s according to Michael Rutherford. *Hancock Clarion*, Hancock County, Kentucky, 20 October 1988. For accidents: Anonymous, "History of the Indiana Cotton Mills," Box 1, Folder 11, General History, ICMR, IHS. For general textile work conditions: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 60, 106-107.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, "The Indiana Cotton Mills," 79, citing letters from Ziba Cook to Geo Thayer and Willis Ranney, and the Petty Book Invoice, ICMMC. For general textile pay see Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 59. Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 16-17. The three most available means of subsistence in the area included the mill, mining, and agriculture.

women in the mill. In June 1860, Terressa Kirst was already one of few “top” spinners, earning the highest possible female wage in the spinning room. Catherine, who originally worked as a “spare hand” spinner, was promoted to a “top spinner” position like her older sister by October 1860. Even during times of economic difficulty, when the mill was opened a limited number of days, the Kirst family remained in the group of the most regularly employed workers. Terressa, Catherine, and sometimes Ellen also often moved between the carding and the spinning room, demonstrating their multiple skills.

Eventually, by 1862, Ellen moved her way into to a position of importance in the spinning room as had her older sisters. In January 1862, Terressa, Catherine, and Ellen literally held the top three out of five main spinning positions in the mill. With this type of experience, the Kirsts were responsible for at least four to five machines at a time. Still, although they worked the same hours, and held equally difficult positions, women earned as much as one half less than male employees.<sup>29</sup>

Despite this, and although the Cannelton mill, as was common, employed only men in supervisory positions, the organization of the Cannelton payrolls suggests that women actually did have a small opportunity to gain a higher status within their gendered

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<sup>29</sup> On limited mill workplace mobility and hierarchy: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work* 36, 126. The analysis of mill positions is based on the SRTB, FCMC. The fact that Terressa reached this high status so quickly after arriving in Cannelton suggests that, in addition to her father, she also had textile experience in Alsace. “Top” spinning positions ranged from 5-7 women or none at all depending on the mill’s manufacturing needs. These spinners were paid differently from the majority of “spare hands” in the spinning room. Instead of simply listing a wage and number of days worked, top spinners appear to have been paid by pieces or cuts. For example, spare hands earned “3.00” per day while top spinners usually had “11 cints” and then numbers such as “126 ½” in the days column of the payroll. Although the exact payments and wages are unclear, two groups of workers with different levels of payment did exist. Top spinners, such as Ellen, then moved back and forth between tasks in the spinning room and received both types of payment per month. Employers often allowed supervisors direct power over hiring, firing, and promotions. Therefore, gaining a position in textile mills often depended on social connections. The achievements of Anton, Sr., and the older siblings probably enhanced the opportunities for younger Kirsts in the mill. On carding: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 69. Due to the skill and need for physical strength, carding was typically reserved for men, but “stronger women, usually with experience in the spinning room” could sometimes be found working alongside them.

positions. As a young “spinner learner” in 1860, Ellen Kirst displayed this by literally moving up from the bottom of the payroll, where less experienced hands with lower wages were recorded, to the top of the list in 1862 as a “top spinner.” By October 1865, as one of four top spinners, she earned the most per day out of eighty-five spinning hands. She also consistently ranked as the top piece worker among the top spinners. The upper portion of the payroll listed approximately six girls above the male supervisors, followed by employees who worked fewer days and earned less money. The position of these “top” spinners consistently appears even during periods of half-time operation. The range of days worked and differences in wages, therefore, display the hierarchy of experienced and non-experienced women workers who existed within the work rooms. This opportunity for female mobility in the workplace, although limited, translated into power. More experienced women earned higher wages and higher status positions and they likely played important leadership roles within the mill.<sup>30</sup>

In general, female textile operatives tended to stay in the mills for fewer than five years and left once they married. Single women living at home, like the Kirsts, probably handed over their hard earned money to the head of their household. By contributing to the family’s financial income, the Kirst sisters most likely felt a sense of pride. They may have earned privileges in the home and their efforts most likely did not go unappreciated. Indeed, while working in the mill the sisters held considerable economic responsibility within the family. Terressa and Catherine worked as operatives and contributed to their

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<sup>30</sup> SRTB, FCMC. *Strongwall News*, Vol.1, No. 1, Cannelton, Indiana, Friday 28 June 1946, from copy in Michael Rutherford’s personal papers, in possession of Kim Hawkins, Cannelton, Indiana. *Strongwall news* was a company owned newspaper. Mrs. Julia Miller began working in the mill in 1891 when she was fourteen years old as a “spinner learner.” She was a spinner for fifty-five years and worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and earned 50 cents a day. She described working conditions as “not pleasant.”

family's income for at least three years, while Ellen worked for at least seven years, but the sisters all left their jobs at the mill once they married.<sup>31</sup>

As adolescents and young single women, the Kirst sisters represent a typical operative's work experience in Cannelton, but the mill did employ small numbers of mothers, and older, widowed or divorced women.<sup>32</sup> Although women operatives were the dominant economic force in Cannelton, this did not translate into direct power in the mill or the ability to significantly improve local circumstances. Since the mill employed exponentially more women than other occupations in town, mill closures proved disastrous for the community. Hundreds of laid off female operatives could not hope to find employment in Cannelton's limited work force of domestic servants, seamstresses, or teachers. With so many families reliant on the wages their daughters, wives, and mothers brought home from the mill, it is easy to see how these operatives had very little bargaining power in the work force.

Nationwide cultural expectations shaped the Kirst sisters' and other women's opportunities to find work in Cannelton. The changing opportunities of employment in Cannelton over time displays how social status, mostly defined by race and ethnicity, determined which jobs were available to individual working women. From the census data we can see both the limited options for female employment for women in Cannelton beyond the mill, and how these limitations aligned with national trends for female wage work. Although dependence on a family economy often required women to work outside

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<sup>31</sup> Average years worked: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 36, 126. For more on the sister's marriages see Chapter Three and Conclusion.

<sup>32</sup> 1870, 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Although generally providing the most employment to single women, in 1880, at least two divorced women in their mid-30s who boarded with other families supported themselves by working in the cotton mill, as did several widows. In 1870, Mary Warren (family number 18), age 64, was one of the older employed women in the mill. She also had a total of \$300 of real estate.

the home, traditional social views and expectations and a double standard in society complicated wage earning for women. Upper and middle class Victorian society considered a woman's place to be at home, raising children and taking care of the household. Women of higher socio-economic standing often looked down on and questioned the morality of those of their sex who worked outside the home to help their families survive. Single working women were equated with sexual availability and married working women were seen as neglectful of their children and husbands. Although economically unrealistic for most households, society expected men to financially support the family solely by the wages he earned working outside the home. If a woman did work, her wage was typically viewed as a supplement to the man's income. Employers also valued women's work less than men's work as seen in the discrepancy in earnings. Consequently, women had fewer occupations to choose from and they earned much lower wages than men.<sup>33</sup>

Certain jobs were considered more socially acceptable for women than others, and the level of that acceptability changed over time. By the time the Kirsts arrived in Cannelton, textile work was no longer considered appropriate for native-born, white women. Women often took what were considered higher status jobs despite earning lower wages. For example, some women preferred low-paying shop work, such as

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<sup>33</sup> For cult of domesticity expectations: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 30, 49-53, 101. Although these views do represent a general attitude towards working women, many, including some of Cannelton's local society, were not totally ignorant of working women's plight. An article on the front page of the *Cannelton Reporter* on 29 March 1860 lamented wage inequality between men and women and argued for legislation to protect working women and allow them to earn a living wage. Still, millowners often remarked that they were running the mill solely for the good of the employees. For example, when the mill went to three quarters time, the *Cannelton Reporter* 31 May 1867 stated that "it is well known that for a long time past, they [the owners] have been running without profit, mainly to keep the help together, by giving them constant work during this staggering crisis to cotton manufacturers." The *Cannelton Reporter* 19 December 1862, also mentioned that Newcomb was trying to keep the mill running as much as possible even though it was "against his interests" to have his cotton processed in Cannelton.

clerking in a store, to more high paying textile production, and most white women agreed that mill work was far preferable to domestic servitude. Still, socially acceptable jobs remained very limited until the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

These factors directly shaped the role of working women in Cannelton in several ways and their lives represent a typical Midwestern experience. The small town was settled by a large population of immigrants who provided most of the labor for the mill. A very distinct separation existed between women wealthy enough to “practice household arts without pay until marriage” and women who had to support themselves or their families through wage work before marriage, such as the Kirsts. Yet unlike many towns, Cannelton was built solely around one large industry, the cotton mill. Both in spite of and also because of Victorian ideals about gender, textile factories relied almost exclusively on female labor. In a town with few industries, the mill provided many more positions for single women, while limiting their other occupational choices. Therefore, although women ideally did not work outside the home, without the labor of women Cannelton’s cotton mill and Cannelton itself could not exist. These double standards defined the life of working women during the middle to late twentieth century. On a national level, working women, like the Kirsts, made middle-class women’s lives possible and the Cannelton operatives proved essential to the existence of the town and mill. Yet these women workers had little influence on the conditions of their employment.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For hierarchy of women’s work and marriage: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 127-128, 71-72. Mary Augusta LaSelle and Katherine E. Wiley, *Vocations for Girls* (Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913).

<sup>35</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 30. Economically, females proved especially suited to textile work because they provided the cheapest labor. Cultural views expected women to remain at home. Therefore, employers sought ways to justify women’s presence in the workforce. For example, textile work was represented as



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aligning with traditional values as women were often responsible for textile work within the home prior to industrialization. Employers often went to lengths to display their workplace and their employees as moral and virtuous, despite the fact that they worked outside the home. For example in the *Cannelton Reporter*, 8 April 1854, owners initially tried to entice workers to move to the area not only with promises of high wages but also with assurances of the morality of the mill and the women operatives' "proprietary of conduct." Nevertheless, it is obvious that many in town looked down on the "factory girls" as the newspaper went to some lengths to defend them on multiple occasions. For example in the *Cannelton Mercury*, 17 February 1855, following a tour of the mill by some upper-class women who "were very much disgusted, judging by their upturned noses and unlady-like manners," the paper defended the local operatives by stating that a "true and virtuous woman is known by her conduct, no matter in what position she may be placed." A few months later, another article, *Cannelton Reporter*, 2 May 1855, applauded the hard work and frugality of Cannelton mill operatives in comparison to young, unemployed men and ended by saying their remarks were "made simply in justice to a class of our population whose only 'crime' or 'dishonor' in the eyes of ignorant and badly raised people, is that they work." In the *Cannelton Telephone*, 9 May 1895, complaints of an existence of a large population of unemployed men seemed to be an enduring theme as the newspaper declared that "the old codgers who loaf around town and let their wives and daughters make the living by working in the cotton mill, ought to be attended to."

## **To Work and To Wait: The Indiana Cotton Mills Strike of 1884**

Textile mills were notorious for their low wages and dangerous working conditions, and Cannelton was no exception. Historians James Madison and Nancy Gabin point out that efforts to improve female work environments were very slow to develop in Indiana. It was not until 1913 that state legislation authorized an investigation of working conditions in garment factories and retail stores. Clifton Phillips states that “in general, Indiana lagged somewhat behind most other industrial commonwealths in successfully restricting the hours of labor and types of employment for both women and children.” Although a law existed as early as 1867 prohibiting children under sixteen-years-old from working more than ten hours a day in cotton and woolen mills, few officials enforced this and almost no regulation occurred until the middle to late 1880s. Many families depended on the wages brought home by very young children. Cotton mills, which in addition to relying on women operatives, also relied on employing less expensive child labor. For example, the Kirsts had as many as four siblings working in the Cannelton mill at one time. When the Kirst’s arrived in 1854, Terressa, at twelve-years-old, would have been old enough to work full time in the mill, and with her possible earlier experience in textiles, she most likely found work quickly. Even ten-year-old Catherine could have worked. As the eldest daughters, both would have realistically been expected to help contribute to the family income. In Cannelton, in 1855, the mill openly employed ten-year-old operatives. Later in the nineteenth century it seems children had to be at least twelve-years-old to work, but even in 1870 some families had children as young as nine working in the mill. Determining at what age operatives began working in Cannelton proves difficult for several reasons. First of all, the mill’s child and adolescent operatives

were inconsistently recorded in the census, possibly intentionally in an effort to avoid labor laws. For example, although fourteen-year-old Ellen Kirst was listed on the payroll in 1860, the enumerator did not record her employment in the census, though several other children her age were reported. The employment of children under twelve years old in Cannelton occurred consistently from the 1850s through the 1870s. In 1870, the census listed nine-year-old cotton mill operative Washington Garbow and in 1871, a ten year old boy had his legs crushed in mill machinery.<sup>1</sup> Based on this, it was certainly common for children this young or even younger to work in the mill when the Kirsts arrived in Cannelton in 1854.

In a company town, child labor proved especially complicated. *Like a Family* reveals how “mill work was source of pride as well as pain, of fun as much as suffering; and children made choices, however hedged about by their parents’ authority and their bosses’ power.” In addition to helping support their families, young children might be brought to work in order to be watched over by family members or to deliver a meal or message to a parent or sibling. These casual interactions in a mill meant that “children could easily wander in and out of the mill, and their first ‘work’ might be

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<sup>1</sup> General textile conditions: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 60, 106-107; Madison, *The Indiana Way*, 165. Gabin, “Fallow Yet Fertile,” 245-246. 1867 law: Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 331-334. *Cannelton Reporter* 1 August 1855 reprint from a 26 July 1855 article, “Dear Sir.” The mill employed “women and girls between ten and thirty years old.” 1860, 1870, 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com) and SRTB, FCMC. In 1870, nine year old Washington Garbow worked in the mill (family number 206). *Hancock Clarion*, Hancock County, Kentucky, 20 October 1988. The mill had a “72 hour work week for 12 year olds too in the 1800s and early 1900s. By lying about age an 11-year-old often began working.” This aligns generally with most of the other mill payrolls and census data. 1860 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com), SRTB, FCMC. For example, in 1860 Ellen and Anton, Jr., were not listed as employed in census but Ellen was in the payroll and Anton was most likely working in the mill. *Cannelton Reporter*, “A Sad Accident” 25 November 1871. A ten year old was severely injured. 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). In 1870 operative Lydia Garbow (family number 206), Joseph Maher (family number 54) and Alexander Haury (family number 161) were 11, Rose Willard (family number 23) and Kate Jaen (family number 45) were 12, and Washington Garbow was 9. In 1880, in at least one case, May Louise White, age 12, (family number 805) worked in the cotton mill while her older brother, 14, went to school. The youngest female operative listed in the census in 1880 was Kate Gallagher, age 12 (family number 1475).

indistinguishable from play.” Children as young as seven and eight did casual mill work, like doffing and sweeping or might tend a machine with an older family member. Children often lied about their ages to start working and by the time operatives’ names appeared on the payroll, they had most likely already been working in the mill for months or even years. Since few inspectors existed to enforce early child labor laws in Indiana, children working illegally in the mill could easily hide from visiting officials.<sup>2</sup>

A small community like Cannelton could easily avoid labor laws and save money on labor by not recording underage children on the mill payroll and labeling them as “helpers.” By having children act as “helpers,” families could supplement their income and employers could cheaply increase their production. In addition, helping often provided the only available formal training for an operative and gave workers, like the Kirsts, with connections to the mill, an advantage over other operatives. The Cannelton mill relied so greatly on young labor in fact that after the June 1867 law made it illegal for children under sixteen years old to work more than ten hours a day, it shut down to three-quarter time for the month. The mill soon, however, went back to normal hours despite this law, and child labor remained an integral part of Cannelton’s cotton mill. In 1893, a newspaper from Jasper, Indiana, mentioned that “there is a general dissatisfaction

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<sup>2</sup> Young children in the mill: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 56-57, 60-61. The Library of Congress National Child Labor Committee Collection has digitized photographs by Lewis Hine that document working and living conditions of children between 1908 and 1924. His notes on images of textile mills highlight the frequency in which children “helped” in the mill, or lied about their ages (accessed via <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc/>). *Richard Morse* 19 January 1854, “Kirsch” on line 319, in *New Orleans Passenger Lists, 1820-1945* (accessed via Ancestry.com). Interestingly, the Kirst’s ship record lists all of the Kirst children as two years younger than later records. This could have been done intentionally in order to gain employment in the mill. Or it could have been a mistake made on the ship. But I chose to use the census dating as the most consistent determinate of age. The ship’s log has the Kirsts’ ages as: Anton, Sr., 42, Terressa 9, Catherine 8, Ellen 6, Anton, Jr., 5. Working off the payroll and hiding from inspectors: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 59, 63-64. This provides further supports the evidence that Terressa, Catherine, Ellen and Anton, Jr., worked in the mill well before the existing census and payroll indicate.

because the grand jury failed to indict the proprietors of the Indiana cotton mill, at Cannelton, for employing children under fourteen years of age and working them eleven hours a day.”<sup>3</sup>

In general, textile operatives’ work hours, including those of children, varied depending on the decade, and the hours for Cannelton appear to have changed over time. The Kirst sisters worked six days a week if they were capable and if the mill was running

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<sup>3</sup> On mill helpers: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 64. New labor law: *Cannelton Reporter* 31 May 1867; June 1867 SRTB, FCMC; *The Jasper Weekly Courier*, 1 December 1893 (accessed via NewspaperArchive.com). Most women involved in textile production began their careers at a very young age and left at the end of adolescence. The scholarship on the history of American children has recently seen an increase in attention, and several publications have effectively addressed the issue, including Priscilla Ferguson Clement, *Growing Pains: Children in the Industrial Age, 1850-1890* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997). Clement’s work argues that due to war, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization during the late nineteenth century, no universal childhood experience existed. Children shared some experiences, such as the demands of obedience required by adults and being subjects of attempts at welfare and reform by the middle class. However, gender, religion, class, ethnicity and race created “multiplicities” of childhood. Class was the most significant factor influencing the age children entered the work force. She points out four distinct parenting techniques and childhoods: urban middle class, urban working class, farm families, and African American families. Each of these groups viewed childhood differently as a life stage, and each held different expectations for children in terms of contributing to the family income and survival. This offered a useful perspective for the analysis of the organization of the Kirst family, and other working class economies. Modern notions of childhood make it difficult for some people to understand child labor, yet many working class families depended on their children’s contributions to survive. Considered even cheaper labor than women, children earned the lowest wages and typically entered the work force in their early teens. Clement makes the valid point, as feminists did in the 1960s and 1970s about women, that history remains incomplete without incorporating the story of children, who made up approximately half the population during the years of industrialization. Crista DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 1830-1930* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007) provides an intellectual history of the influences to cultural views on female adolescence in the United States. She argues that historians have previously simplified adolescence and female development, and need to further investigate the roots of these changing conceptions. Antebellum health reformers laid the foundation for modern scientific concepts of developing girls, which later fueled debates over nature versus nurture on femininity. These reformers believed the demands of industrial work robbed young girls of a critical developmental period when they should have been free of adult responsibilities. Popular opinion also accused working class and immigrant girls of being unruly socially, morally, and physically. Sarah E. Chinn, *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009) investigates American citizenship and the “immigrant body” and its influence on modern views of adolescence that occurred in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. She analyzes conflicts between generations, immigrant working class women, and the evolution of what we now consider “adolescence” today. The romanticized American childhood for upper- or middle-class whites that emerged at this time was violated by industrialization and the use of child labor. Reformers blamed immigrant parenting and popular culture linked teen rebellion to working class radical bohemianism. Chinn claims that modern views of teenagers as trouble makers evolved out of American fears of immigrants and activists. Both DeLuzio and Chinn help contextual the transitional period characterized by emerging scientific stereotypes on working women and children. These texts invite more investigation into Cannelton’s operatives in their teenage years, as they lived in a time of changing ideals of what it meant to be a child specifically as a young immigrant or the child of an immigrant.

full time, and their hours would have initially ranged from fourteen to eleven-hour days. By 1894, however, an Indiana labor law officially cut hours from eleven to ten. By modern standards, this hourly decrease may seem like an improvement. Many women, however, intended on working long hours for a few years to make as much money as possible before marrying, or relied on long hours for earning more money in order to support their families.<sup>4</sup>

Workers faced dangerous conditions in the mill every day, including breathing unhealthy air, standing for long periods of time, and having limbs, hair, or clothing caught in machines. Mill accidents occurred often and many mill safety measures did not exist until later in Cannelton's history. Respiratory infections, including tuberculosis and byssinosis or brown lung, were particularly common and deadly. For instance in 1895, a nineteen year-old mill worker, who was the principle support of her family, died from influenza. Twenty-four-year-old Annie Crecelins, who lived in the "cotton mill blocks" and most likely worked in the mill, died of consumption in 1896. The local newspaper even advertised "hops bitters" which supposedly cured ailments caused by factory work. During the summer the sweltering heat was a health hazard and many operatives were "overcome by heat" during their work.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "History of Indiana Cotton Mills," ICMR, Folder 11, IHS. Apparently the mill was found to have infringed upon this new law and on 5 April 1894 the mill officially went to 10 hour work days. For discussion on textile mill hours, Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 19; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 60; Wilson, "The Indiana Cotton Mills," 79. Wilson states the girls worked a 12-hour day 6 days a week with 45 minutes for breakfast and lunch. Ashendel cites the 20 June, 1 August 1855 *Cannelton Reporter* which claims the girls worked 14-hour days, with 30 minutes for breakfast and 40 for dinner.

<sup>5</sup> For accidents: Winpenny, "Perils in Transferring Technology to the Frontier," 510, and Anonymous, "History of the Indiana Cotton Mills," ICMR, IHS. For a discussion on respiratory infections: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 81-84. Death from influenza: *Cannelton Telephone* 9 May 1895. Her father was crippled and the girl's weaver coworkers helped gather money for the burial. Annie: *Cannelton Telephone*, 2 January 1896. Advertisement: *Cannelton Reporter*, 31 July 1879, "Factory Facts." 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). There was at least one case of consumption listed in 1880 census, fifteen year-old Blanche Baker was at home but it is possible that she worked in the mill at some point. This was the first census that recorded if a person was "sick or temporarily disabled so as to be

Mill accidents occurred often and although the Cannelton mill owners and even later historians, such as Wilson, praised the safety amenities of the Indiana Cotton Mill facilities, their degrees of effectiveness must be examined. For instance, historian Wilson describes the width of the tower staircases as providing easier evacuation in case of a fire, when in actuality only one tower contained a staircase. Wilson also claimed that “one tower contained trap-doors between floors through which air was sucked downward, through a tunnel, to the chimney.” Supposedly this ventilation occurred two times a day during breakfast and lunch in order to filter out combustible lint. Michael Rutherford in his book *Perry County, Then and Now*, however, points out that Wilson most likely confused the trapdoors with toilets, which were located in one tower. It does appear, however, that each working room of the mill was equipped with a 150 foot fire hose and that cisterns of water existed near the back of the mill. Although it was often boasted that no fire ever occurred in the mill itself, a small fire did occur in the spinning room in 1854, and another one broke out in December 1859. In addition, fires in the adjoining waste buildings, warehouse, and nearby batting mill did occur on a fairly regular basis. Still, it is unclear at what time these features were added, and many safety measures did not exist until later in the mill’s history. For example, two fire escapes were not added until 1892, and the mill had no automatic sprinklers until 1894.<sup>6</sup>

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unable to attend to ordinary business or duties.” The phrase “overcome by heat” was used in the *Cannelton Enquirer* 5 August 1895. It most likely meant the women fainted or suffered from heat stroke. *Cannelton Telephone* 14 February 1895. Circulation was poor enough that the mill’s head carpenter bored holes in the ceiling of the third floor spinning room to let air escape into the fourth floor dressing room. *Cannelton Telephone* 7 September 1916. Portions of the mill were advertised as having air conditioning in 1916.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on Cannelton’s safety amenities: Wilson, “The Indiana Cotton Mills,” 77 and Rutherford, *Perry County, Indiana*, 77. *Cannelton Reporter*, 29 December 1859, “Local Items.” A small fire causing no damage occurred from spontaneous combustion in the spinning room. Fire in the batting mill: *Cannelton Reporter*, 8 August 1860. Waste house fire: *Cannelton Reporter*, 13 September 1860. *Cannelton Reporter*, 30 July 1864. Another fire in the waste house caused some damage. *Cannelton Reporter*, 13 August 1864.

In addition to the threat of fires due to a lack of safety regulations, mill operatives often became injured on the job. Although the unofficial mill history recorded only a few accidents, the threat of injury was prevalent for Cannelton operatives. The accidents reported in the local newspaper provide a better insight into the experiences of Cannelton's operatives and also disprove claims that the mill ran with very few injuries. In fact, in April 1875, the newspaper reported that "we have not heard of an accident in town this week" which in addition to the numerous newspaper accounts, displays that small accidents actually proved quite common at the mill. The articles also reveal a tendency to describe mill mishaps based on the gender of the operative. For example, at the beginning of September 1861 a "young woman employed in the Indiana Cotton Mill was seriously injured." The article included no details, possibly in an attempt to downplay the injury of a female operative. Society may have objected to learning details of women's injuries, as social expectations frowned on women in the workforce. In comparison, a few days later a much more detailed article described how Frank Gerber had his arm torn off in the cotton mill.<sup>7</sup>

Accounts of male injuries typically included their name, age, and details of the injury. Reports of female injuries included vague descriptions and rarely gave a name. For example, earlier in March 1861, Warren Richards had his hand so badly mutilated in the mill that it had to be amputated. In February 1867, "Albert Richie, aged 12 years, got his hand caught in a belt . . . which broke his arm and otherwise severely injured him." In

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A fire in cotton mill warehouse was stopped before spreading. Fire escapes and sprinklers: Anonymous, "History of the Indiana Cotton Mills," ICMR, IHS.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, "History of the Indiana Cotton Mills," ICMR, IHS. The mill history states that in 1853 three condensers burst, and on 1 October 1885, a boiler exploded with "no one seriously injured." *Cannelton Reporter* 17 April 1875. No accidents this week. It is also important to remember that these are only the injuries considered important enough to include in the newspaper. Serious female injury: *Cannelton Reporter* 5 September 1861. Frank Gerber: *Cannelton Reporter* 19 September, 1861.



1871, when an accident caused ten year-old Washy Pohl to have two fingers amputated, the newspaper went to great lengths to try to assure readers that accidents like this were very rare. In comparison, less than a year later “one girl was hit by a piece of loom but not seriously injured,” her name and no details of the injury were included. In 1879, “Tim Sweeney’s arm [was] in a sling due to an accident in the machine shop of the mill.” A young boy had his hand crushed in the lap room in January 1881. While in June 1882, the newspaper reported that “Joseph Standifer had his thumb caught in a new machine and possibly might have to have his whole hand amputated.” Then in 1884, the paper included a detailed report of Ernest Lehman, who, while working over the steam pipe in the cotton mills, fainted and had to go home, fainting twice more on the way there. A boiler explosion in August 1885 burned and injured several men, but was supposedly “the first accident that has happened in a number of years.”<sup>8</sup>

Newspaper coverage of female injuries increased in 1885, but it is unclear why. It could possibly result from an increase in attention to female injuries or from bigger workloads and the need for more production causing a greater number of accidents. The *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* informed readers that Miss Ellison lost one finger at her first joint on Halloween 1885. A week later, Miss Scull had her first finger of her right hand amputated. Still, the newspaper continued to devote more detail to men with even minor injuries. For example, Ernst Rinkle bruised his foot and had to be on crutches in July 1887. This gendered coverage of injuries occurred steadily during the mid-

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<sup>8</sup> Warren Richards: *Cannelton Reporter* 7 March, 1861. Albert Richie: *Cannelton Reporter* 14 February 1867 “Accident.” Washy Pohl: *Cannelton Reporter* 25 November, 1871 “A Sad Accident.” Girl hit by machinery: *Cannelton Reporter* 18 October 1872. Tim Sweeney: *Cannelton Reporter*, 20 November 1879. Young boy had his hand crushed. *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 6 January 1881. Joseph Standifer: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 1 June 1882. Ernest Lehman: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 23 April 1884. A boiler explosion: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 22 August 1885.

nineteenth century and makes it difficult to assess the frequency with which men and women operatives experienced injuries.<sup>9</sup>

In 1895, the mill's first reported fatality was recorded, when a woman's hair was entangled in the elevator cables in the weaving room. Twenty year old Dora Gilman, who lived on the same street as the Kirsts, was instantly killed on March 13 and the mill closed for the day as a result. Her father, Lewis Gilman, proceeded to file a lawsuit against the mill for \$10,000 in damages, arguing that her tragic death was a result of their carelessness and neglect. The case was drawn out for years and eventually sent to the circuit court in Boonville in the middle of June of 1898 but the final ruling is unclear. Lewis Gilman was a well-to-do farmer, and unlike many other operatives, he could apparently afford lawyers and the expenses of a drawn-out lawsuit.<sup>10</sup>

Since industrial workplaces in the nineteenth century rarely provided compensation for workplace injuries, dismemberment or death could prove disastrous to families who depended on the wages of someone who could not return to work. After the turn of the twentieth-century, an increased presence of lawsuits against the Indiana Cotton Mills appear in the newspapers, most likely for employees seeking compensation for injuries. Unlike Lewis Gilman, however, poor operatives had limited means to carry out their suits and usually lost when they filed grievances against the mill. Employees could often do little to combat their poor work environments in the Cannelton cotton mill,

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<sup>9</sup> Miss Ellison: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 31 October 1885. Miss Scull: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 7 November 1885. Ernst Rinkle: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 2 July 1887.

<sup>10</sup> *Cannelton Telephone* 14 March 1895, 24 March 1898, 16 June 1898, 10 October 1907. Since the initial jury could not agree on a ruling the case had to go to Warrick County Circuit Court. The trial in Boonville was attended by several mill businessmen and two women from the mill who knew Gilman. Unfortunately, Gilman was paralyzed in 1906 and died in 1907 at which point if the case was not already settled the charges were most likely dropped. 1900 Census, Spencer County, Hammond, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). The newspaper says the Gilman had a farm in nearby Newtonville.

which proved just as dangerous for the operatives there as they did in other textile factories.<sup>11</sup>

Although textile work provided one of the highest paying occupations for women, workers still earned very little. Since the surviving payrolls are not entirely clear, the exact organization of Cannelton earnings remains imprecise. Historically, the Indiana Cotton Mills promised the first mill operatives the equivalent of high Lowell mill wages; however, the mill lowered wages not long after opening in 1851. In a June 1855 article in the *Cannelton Economist*, mill owner Hamilton Smith claimed that in 26 days the average salary for men was \$29.35, for women \$19.33 and for children \$8.26. A German recruitment leaflet states that the average weekly wages for men was \$6, for women \$4.50 and for children \$2.25. Yet based on the surviving payrolls, Anita Ashendel's calculation that male supervisors could earn as much as \$5.50 per week, while the highest paid woman could earn \$3.60 and children earned \$1.50 per week, provides a more accurate picture. Based on correspondence from the mill superintendent, Wilson states that the women earned pay by cut or bolt, with each girl receiving 17 cents per 33 yards as the average daily production, and according to him "the best weavers made 28 cuts a week," so by tending four to five looms they would make \$4.50-\$5.00 a week. With board equaling \$1.50 a week, the operatives could take home \$3.00 a week. As the payrolls demonstrate, top spinners like Terressa, Catherine, and Ellen were similarly paid by production or by the number of machines they tended. The wages for their youngest

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<sup>11</sup> On lawsuits against the mill: *Cannelton Telephone* 11 April 1912. "The cases of Ollie Latimer, Martha Clark, and Dorthea Carr against the Indiana Cotton Mills have been dismissed by plaintiffs, plaintiffs paying costs. In the cases of Jos. Gerber and wife and *Winnie Heubi vs. Indiana Cotton Mill* for damages, the defendants are required by the court to answer." *Cannelton Telephone* 1 November 1913. "Winnie Heubi vs. Indiana Cotton Mills, damages; dismissed by plaintiff." In the case of Dora Gilman, "damages" indicated an employee fatality, but may have also indicated an injury.

sister, Lizzie, (a weaver) appear to have been determined in a similar fashion, though most likely by cuts of cloth. Undoubtedly, however, by the 1850s, despite working similarly difficult jobs and the same hours, women earned one half to one third of men's wages and this trend continued throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Since the cotton mill provided one of the few opportunities for female employment in the area, however, women in Cannelton may have been forced to or were even willing to work for these lower wages.

At the end of every month, unless pay was withheld due to mill financial difficulties, operatives received their wages. In the 1850s pay was sporadic and on at least one occasion in 1859 operatives were paid their wages by a paper slip promising them money four months after the received date. Eventually, every second Saturday of the month was termed Silver Saturday in town because the operatives received their pay in silver "hard money." In February 1887, a new law was passed that required employers to pay their employees every two weeks and suggests that prior to this the distribution of paychecks was not altogether reliable.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Early Cannelton pay: Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 18; Wilson, "The Indiana Cotton Mills," 79, citing letters from Ziba Cook to Geo Thayer and Willis Ranney, and the Petty Book Invoice, ICMC, Lilly Library. The first workers had to wait three months before getting paid on 11 March 1851, and in response to the wage cut many operatives from New England went on strike or left Cannelton. Average pay: Only two payrolls survive, SRTB, FCMC, and Payroll, ICMC, Lilly Library. *Cannelton Reporter*, 26 February 1876 listed wages of weavers at five dollars per week, and spinners at four dollars per day, which seems excessive and does not align with the existing payrolls. For other wage discussions: Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 16; *Cannelton Economist* June 1855, pg. 209 and German pamphlet pg. 228, 231 in Smith, H., Scrapbook, HSMC. Torrey, "Visions of a Western Lowell," 295. Wilson, "The Indiana Cotton Mills," 79. Although Wilson's calculations could match up to the SRTB, it appears operatives pay varied greatly depending on experience, work room and tasks. For spinning vs. weaving wages: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 78. On general textile mill hours and wages: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 59-60.

<sup>13</sup> In ICMR, Folder 2, IHS pay slips exist for Cynthia and Rebecca Sandwich at \$3 and \$3.15, which are signed by Superintendent Wilbur. Due to wording in the *Cannelton Reporter*, 10 August 1872, wages may have been paid in some other form intermittently. The *Cannelton Reporter*, 8 March 1873 states that "this is pay day, formally known as Silver Saturday." According to the *Cannelton Reporter*, 17 June 1876, the

Even though Cannelton mill operatives had limited options for control in the workplace and were ultimately forced to endure poor working conditions and low wages, these women still took an active role in determining their own fates. Small opportunities for occupational mobility in the workplace existed and various, typically unsuccessful, protests of working conditions occurred throughout the mill's history. As poor wage earners, women factory workers lacked a strong bargaining position and efficient avenues for labor reform and, in general, throughout the nineteenth century female participation in labor movements remained low. Yet, measuring activism through union involvement alone creates a misleading picture of how women navigated power struggles in the workplace. Contrary to the arguments of early historians, who gave working women limited credit for participating in labor reform in comparison to working men's activism, social historians now examine untraditional expressions of agency by women beyond their involvement in male dominated organized unions. These nontraditional forms of activism can be considered "marked" categories, in that women's successes are measured against the "unmarked" labor reform standards historically set by men.<sup>14</sup> Although lacking formal, large-scale organizations until the twentieth century, working women did not remain passive; they utilized different, or untraditional, avenues of activism in order to express themselves in the workplace.

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mill "paid out in silver last Saturday" but there were no issues over the surplus of hard money in town. New law: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 26 February 1887.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Tentler in *Wage-Earning Women*, relied on views of gendered "separate spheres" and many other early historians viewed working women's agency through societal norms such as "the cult of domesticity" (which considered women's proper place within the home) resulting in limited interpretation of women's labor activism. Nancy Shoemaker's article "Regions as Categories of Analysis," in *Perspectives*, 34 (November, 1996): 7-8, presents the useful idea of marked versus unmarked categories of analysis. Although Shoemaker uses this term for region, I have found it useful in categorizing my work as well. Subfields of a topic, such as women's labor history, become marked as different and the standard that it is measured against (in this case male-centric labor history) becomes the norm and unmarked.

According to historian Nancy Gabin, Indiana women's activism proves unique even among other midwestern states. For example, "women factory workers failed to capture the attention of contemporary reformers and labor activists," and Indiana passed only limited protective legislation for women workers until the twentieth-century. Gabin concludes her point by noting that this "apparent anomaly in the history of the politics of gender merits attention." Although she refers more to twentieth-century factory workers, she underscores the need to better understand the history behind midwestern working women's expression of dissatisfaction in the workplace and their attempts to achieve labor reform outside of politics.<sup>15</sup> The following analysis of Cannelton's women cotton mill workers, then, is an effort to add regional perspective to the expressions of agency beyond male-dominated unions and to display how women's attempts at labor reform must be studied differently than men's.

Conditions in the Cannelton cotton mill proved just as poor for the operatives as in other textile factories and as a result the Indiana Cotton Mills faced labor unrest from the start. Since local newspapers provided very little coverage of labor conflicts in the Cannelton mill, gaining an accurate picture of the depth of unrest and attempts at reforms by the operatives is difficult. Nevertheless, several unsuccessful strikes did occur throughout the mill's history. Cuts and withheld wages forced the earliest workers, who had expected to immediately earn relatively high pay, to protest. In September 1851, the operatives, many of them from New England mills, carried out public meetings and a three-day strike in response to a pay cut. When protestors received unflattering media coverage, they turned to more militant demonstrations, such as symbolically beating a

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<sup>15</sup> Gabin, "Fallow Yet Fertile," 245-246.

straw figure of the *Cannelton Economist* editor. Despite this show of discontent, the workers lacked any bargaining power, and two or three days later accepted the lowered rates. Even after immigrant labor replaced most of the Lowell operatives, dissatisfaction continued. Mill closures due to equipment failure and lack of cotton caused wages to be sporadic. In addition to these factors, in 1857, when Anton and most likely his daughters Terressa, Catherine, and Ellen were working in the mill, a national economic panic caused the owners to demand a 10 percent decrease in wages that the operatives initially refused. The mill closed for a short period, but eventually workers accepted the reduction and agreed to receive only half cash and half “due bills,” or credit within four months. The local newspaper downplayed these cuts by saying that the workers would “save more than they did last winter in consequence of the present cheapness of provisions and the general reduction of prices on all the necessaries of life.” This assurance, however, was surely of little consolation to the workers who continued to struggle.<sup>16</sup>

Unrest persisted when the women working in the dressing room of the mill demanded a raise in August 1858 and protested in September 1859. It is highly likely that the Kirst sisters were employed in the spinning room during this particular strike, and although it is uncertain if they themselves participated, they certainly must have felt some affinity with their coworkers. Ashendel points out that following this particular strike, “mill owners chastised Wilbur [mill superintendent] for not replacing the dressing room employees with ‘girls’ who would be easier to manipulate and control.” Company pressure such as this explains why workers repeatedly capitulated to employers’ demands and highlights the limited power of wage-earning women to mobilize for effective work

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<sup>16</sup> 1851 unrest: Ashendel, “Fabricating Independence,” 17-19. 1857 unrest: *Cannelton Reporter*, 24, 31 October 1857; Ashendel, “Fabricating Independence,” 20.

reform during this time period. As cheap labor, women were easily replaced, and circumstances often forced them to accept the offered wages despite their frequent inability to survive on them. Still, striking remained one of the only ways to exhibit discontent and continued to be used despite its ineffectiveness.<sup>17</sup>

The Civil War proved a difficult time for the community, especially the town's working-class citizens, since the cotton shortage often closed or resulted in reduced hours at the mill. Yet the Kirsts remained more fortunate than others. For example, when the mill prepared to shut down again in March 1863, the Kirsts continued to be indispensable employees and Catherine, Ellen, their brother, and their father were included in the group selected to finish the last remaining product and prepare the building for closing. During this period the sisters' economic contributions proved critical to the family's survival. Catherine and Terressa contributed to the family income until their marriages in 1863, and Ellen was one of the few employees who maintained almost continual employment throughout the Civil War during the periods the mill was open. According to Ashendel, many other workers in the area, including stonecutters, coal miners, and journeymen shoemakers, all struck unsuccessfully for higher wages during the war. Cannelton's women cotton mill operatives, however, did not strike. Although the women and children workers refrained from walkouts during the Civil War, working conditions proved especially difficult during the conflict. As the war dragged on, the mill continued to run sporadically and even a small advancement of the operatives' wages over the summer of 1864 did not improve their circumstances. In October 1864, the mill

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<sup>17</sup> Unrest in 1858, 1859: Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 20. Using less standard methods of activism, workers also spontaneously extended their Fourth of July celebrations in 1858 causing the mill to be closed for an extra day. According to Darbee in "Opportunity on the Frontier," it is possible that in 1854 the dressing room may have employed mostly men. However, by the strike of 1858 and 1859 it employed mostly women, which is also consistent with the payroll in the 1880s.



closed for eight months and left many families destitute. Fortunately the end of the war in April 1865 allowed the mill to reopen, but Ellen Kirst and the other operatives initially had to work for free or on advanced wages until the company earned a profit. When workers finally received wages again, their earnings remained very low.<sup>18</sup>

The national depression following the Civil War also caused Cannelton's mill to run infrequently in the 1870s. During this era, termed an "age of strikes, turnouts and mutual misunderstandings" by the *Cannelton Reporter*, no mention of any disputes or collective action concerning the mill exists in the local newspapers. The newspaper does, however, include a much larger presence of anti-reform literature and propaganda than found in other decades. Since no payroll exists for this decade, newspaper accounts combined with census data suggest that perhaps desperate to earn whatever wages they could, workers patiently endured wage cuts and stoppages and waited for future opportunities for reform. Despite reopening after the war, work stoppages occurred in the summer of 1870 and the winter of 1871. In the fall of 1873 the mill ran on half time until, with a reduction of wages by 10 percent in December, it resumed normal hours. Although the newspaper dismissed the impact this pay cut would have on the operatives, it surely was a strain on those already struggling to make ends meet. In addition, by May 1875, the mill ran for only four days a week for five months and the paper directed biting remarks

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<sup>18</sup> SRTB March 1863, FCMC. *Cannelton Reporter*, 6 March 1863. Employees worked very few days in March (even though the paper says the mill closed because there was no more cotton) and all of the Kirsts who worked in the mill were present in the spinning room along with some regular employees and a few women who were washing curtains. It is likely that only a few spinners, maintenance men, and cleaning women were needed to prepare the spinning room to close. War hours: SRTB, FCMC; Anonymous, "History of the Indiana Cotton Mills," IHS; and Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 21-22. Terressa Kirst marriage to Joseph Neising, 13 January 1863, Tell City County Clerk's Office, Book 3, p. 78. Catherine Kirst marriage to Bernard Blom, 24 November 1863, Tell City County Clerk's Office, Book 3, p. 122. Local strikes during Civil War: Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 22. Coal miner strike: *Cannelton Reporter*, 17 September 1864. Advanced wages 10 percent: *Cannelton Reporter*, 7 May and 2 July 1864. Stoppage: *Cannelton Reporter*, 8 October 1864. Reopening after war: Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 22; *Cannelton Reporter*, 14, 16 March 1865; and SRTB, FCMC, April, May 1865.

to operatives saying that two extra days off would give workers time to “cultivate small patches of land, and thus raise something to eat, which they had better do.” By February 1876, with the workers becoming more desperate and many people out of work for months and living on exhausted means, the “Ladies of Cannelton” gave a charity ball for the town’s poor. During 1878 and 1879 the mill stood idle for long periods of time and between June 1879 and June 1880 the majority of mill employees listed an average of three or four months of unemployment in the census. During this particularly difficult decade it appears the operatives attempted little, if any, reform until the early 1880s. A lack of evidence for activism in the 1870s combined with the existing newspaper and census data suggests living conditions for workers proved desperate enough that they refrained from any extra stoppage of work, which methods of striking or walkouts necessitated.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Anti-strike propaganda: “Factory Life,” 6 June 1872. Examples include articles from 27 July 1872, 30 November 1872, 12 August 1876. Stoppages: *Cannelton Reporter* 23 July 1870 (the coal mine also was closed during this period), 7 January 1871. Mill half time: *Cannelton Reporter* 25 October 1873. Despite assurances on 11 October 1873 that the financial panic would not affect operatives and the mill would continue to employ and pay their workers regularly, ironically two weeks later it was announced that hours would soon decrease to half time. 10 percent wage reduction: *Cannelton Reporter*, 14 December 1873. The overall tone of the newspaper was very dismissive of the operative’s plight. In addition, the *Cannelton Reporter*, 1 November 1873 mentioned that the benefits of having the mill run half time was that it allowed children to attend school for three days a week. It is unclear, however, what, or if any, educational opportunities any existed for working class children during this period. The *Cannelton Reporter* 20 December 1873, “What Might Have Been” article condescendingly belittled the effect the wage cut would have on operatives by suggesting that workers should have put 10 percent of their paychecks last year into savings and investments and that “the reduction we suppose will not materially decrease the absolute comfort of the operatives. It will probably deprive them of some of the luxuries of life, but for the most part at the end of the year they will have hardly noticed a difference.” It did however seem to also be arguing for the development of a local bank. Tending plots: *Cannelton Reporter* 8 May 1875. This was of course assuming operatives had plots of land. Back to full time: *Cannelton Reporter* 9 October 1875. Charity Ball: *Cannelton Reporter* 26 February 1876. Idle: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 8 August, 28 September, 1878; 25 September, 9 October 1879. The 1880 census listed how many months of unemployment for the previous census year: 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). This is the first census to list periods of unemployment within the previous census year. Some operatives had no months listed which is strange. The highest recorded was eight months. During the taking of the census there was also a measles outbreak which especially affected the younger operatives.

Like the rest of Cannelton's working class, the Kirsts struggled economically in the late 1860s and early 1870s. As surviving on mill wages became even more difficult, the Kirsts struggled to support a family of eight, with six children living at home. For example, in 1860 the family had \$300 worth of real estate, yet by 1870 their property value had decreased to \$200. Still, owning their home was a significant indicator that they were able to maintain a middle-working class status even during this financially difficult period. By 1869, Terressa, Catherine, and Ellen, the backbone of the family's female labor force, had all married and moved away and no longer contributed to the family economy. With the death of Anton, Jr., in March 1864, it appears that the Kirt family of eight survived on the father's wages alone for quite some time. Although his wife and daughter, Mary, aged thirteen, did not engage in wage work, they may have participated in or taken in odd jobs, such as cleaning or washing, as many working class women did. According to the census, the other working-aged Kirt children, Philomena, age eleven, and Joseph, age ten, attended school for a time. With such a strong family tradition of employment in textile production and connections at the cotton mill, it is possible that Mary and Philomena, like their older sisters, also found positions at the mill during the mid-1870s. Unfortunately, however, no mill payroll exists for this decade and other evidence suggests that in fact they did not find long-term employment there. For example, the mill's frequent closings meant that increased competition for positions most likely existed. This probably led Philomena and John to seek alternative forms of employment since by 1880 Philomena worked as a servant and John as a carpenter's apprentice.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 1860, 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). For 1860 the family also possibly had \$25 worth of personal property, but the number was crossed out. Ellen Kirt marriage to

Indiana historian Emma Lou Thornbrough stated that a large percentage of industry in Indiana “operated only part of the time during the seventies. It is probable that workers were fortunate to be employed eight or nine months a year.” Most working-class families in the Cannelton community would have encountered similar hardships and unfortunately few other options for employment existed beyond the mill, especially for women. The Civil War took a toll on families and in comparison to the 1860 census more instances of nontraditional family organization and employment appear in the 1870s. With the death or injury of male wage earners more women, who often worked as operatives, appeared as heads of households which tended to consist of mostly females and young children. In family after family, a woman head of household was either employed in the mill or stayed at home while the family’s younger children worked in the mill providing income. In fact, families without a father or male head proved much more likely to support themselves by employing multiple children in the mill. In several instances, young women operatives provided the only recorded source of income for their families, despite the presence of seemingly employable parents and older male relatives. Young female operatives also supported aging relatives and minor family members. The gendered quality of the mill resulted in more opportunities for women and young children to find work in town. Still, it took the contributions of more women and children to attempt to earn the same as one male wage earner. Analyzing the 1870 census provides a snapshot of Cannelton’s working class and allows us to see how a lack of employment

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John Mateling, 30 January 1869, Hamilton County, Ohio, in John Mateling Form 85D Full Pension File, Civil War, Number 492481, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. Description of Anton, Anton, Jr., and Mary Ann Kirst headstones at St. Michaels, Cannelton, Indiana, from personal correspondence with Mark Ress. On March 14, 1864, Anton, Jr., died. 1880 Census, Kenton County, Covington, Kentucky, p. 2 (accessed via Ancestry.com). Philomena was listed as “Minnie” and employed as a servant. 1880 Census, Cannelton, Perry County, Indiana, p. 34 (accessed via Ancestry.com). John Kirst was listed as “apprentice to carpenter.”

options, further intensified during the economic depression, in turn cultivated an absence of activism. With at least 167 families having one or more member employed in the mill, Cannelton's operatives proved hesitant to strike in the 1870s. Yet, though they earned low wages and engaged in no obvious efforts at activism, it is clear that during the late 1860s and 1870s Cannelton's women and children operatives became increasingly essential to the family economy and provided the means of survival for those families.<sup>21</sup>

Although no evidence of activism in Cannelton's mill exists in the 1870s, a relatively successful strike did occur in 1877 at an Evansville cotton mill, a town fifty miles downriver. When forty female operatives refused a wage reduction, "they were able to convince most of the work force, some three hundred women and ten men, to follow them out." Cannelton's operatives would have most likely been aware of their neighbors' struggles, and historian Lawrence Lipin's work suggests that Cannelton's women operatives may have had similarities with Evansville worker activism and community.<sup>22</sup> Evidence such as this indicates that factors during the 1870s in Cannelton, like the Civil War period, did not prove especially conducive to demonstrations involving striking or walkouts.

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<sup>21</sup> Quote from Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880*, 441. 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). The name of every person whose "place of abode on the first day of June 1870" was with a particular family was recorded in one household. The large presence of single women heads of household suggests an increase of widows or orphans. Although, no widow's status or relationships between members of a household are recorded in this census, in most cases these can be inferred by last names, ages, and data from earlier and later censuses. At least 181 females and 126 males, the large majority of them adolescent to younger boys, were listed as working in the mill. This does not take into account the unrecorded operatives. As seen with Ellen Kirst in the 1860 census, the mill did employ children whose occupations were not recorded in the census.

<sup>22</sup> Quote from Lawrence Lipin, *Producers, Proletarians, and Politicians*, 161. This is an interesting connection, not only because of the rivalry between towns, but because although to some extent a more detailed account of labor activism in the Evansville cotton mill is available, to my knowledge no other Evansville company records or payrolls exist. In comparison, the Cannelton mill has little record of labor activism, but two mill payrolls and other records are available.

Cannelton's operatives did not participate in any recorded large-scale demonstrations of activism during this period. Workers, however, could have participated in safer avenues of expression that did not require them to miss work or risk losing their positions. To say that no recorded protests took place during the 1870s is not to say that no expressions of activism occurred at all. It is entirely possible, and indeed probable, that operatives continued to express themselves in the workplace; however, none of those efforts may have been deemed important enough to mention in the newspapers and unofficial mill history. Looking past the lack of working-class records, it seems logical to assume that despite the financial difficulties of the 1860s and 1870s, Cannelton's women operatives did not suddenly forget their grievances or attempts at reform from the 1850s. Instead, historians must remember to take into account forms of agency that have left no records or may exist outside the boundaries of what is typically viewed as worker activism.

For instance, an influential monograph about working women, *Cheap Amusements* by Kathy Peiss demonstrates the ability of the working class to engage in consumerism including individual purchases and "commercialized recreation" like dancing and amusement parks, as its own form of political action and social agency. Working immigrant women utilized a changing capitalist economy and the abundance of "cheap amusements" such as fashionable clothing or occasional treats of food or drink to create personal freedom and independence. This study suggests that the young immigrant women working at Cannelton would have had a similar relationship with American consumerism. Although amusements proved much more limited in early-nineteenth century Cannelton than in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century New York, women

workers had options to purchase fashionable clothing or take the steamboat across the narrow stretch of river to seek entertainment in Hawesville, Kentucky. For example, Lizzie Kirst had her picture taken farther up the river in Covington, Kentucky, in 1887, at which time she was still most likely employed in the mill. In the photograph, she is wearing earrings, a necklace and a throat pin. Several of her siblings lived in Covington during this time period, and as an operative, Lizzie was able to travel and make relatively extravagant purchases. Similarly, Nan Enstand's *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* argues that despite their inability to vote, working women still represented legitimate political actors and she provides a compelling argument that women workers utilized very different avenues for activism than did men, in this case also as participants in consumerism and labor protests. She argues that scholars have mistakenly separated popular culture and entertainment from politics, and that feminists often shun analysis of the impact of "frivolous" areas of women's culture, such as fashion, on labor reform. Enstad concludes that although buying material culture did not make workers radical or particularly "free," it did allow them to create their own unique, working-class sense of self, which she terms "working ladyhood." In the case of New York strikers, their tendency to dress in fashionable clothing and engage in boisterous behavior on picket lines did not fit public perceptions of them as either desolate workers or respectable women. Their political action, therefore, was taken less seriously by strike leaders and the press, ultimately undermining their political influence. These studies extend beyond the time period and region of this study and no documentation of this aspect of the lives of Cannelton's working women exists. Nevertheless, these author's arguments supplement the lack of surviving working class sources and provide a

contextual foundation for how the Cannelton operatives, as participants in the growing consumerism culture, could have engaged in less traditional protest tactics. These authors highlight the necessity of analyzing nontraditional expressions of activism when considering the limited options of Cannelton's operatives for engaging in activism during times of extreme economic struggles.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the lack of documented organization by mill operatives during the 1860s and 1870s, in the early 1880s the voices of Cannelton's working women once again appeared in the historical record. Indeed, several protests and local events during the early 1880s eventually reached a boiling point in April 1884 and resulted in a two-week long, mill-wide strike. Evidence suggests most, if not all, of the mill's strikes occurred simply through local worker organization, though it is unknown if any of the Cannelton strikes resulted from the influence of union organization. Still, it is possible that Cannelton's operatives had connections to a labor union, since a few newspaper articles in the 1850s "lashed out at the strike leaders," and accused them of instigating discontent. It is also conceivable that a connection to the Knights of Labor, an independent trade

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<sup>23</sup>Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 1-10, 11-55, 185-188. The Cannelton newspaper consistently advertised women's fashion and locals often ventured across the river. Scanned copy of photograph of Lizzie Kirst in author's personal possession, provided by Christine Roberts. Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*, 1-10. Gary B. Kulik, "Patterns of Resistance," in *American Workingclass Culture: Explorations in American Labor and Social History*, ed. Milton Cantor (Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1979), 226 explores more militant avenues of resistance, such as arson and the intentional breakage of machinery. While almost impossible to prove, this may be something to keep in mind as other options for nontraditional expressions of worker's agency. Kulik's work on early New England operatives' resistance to capitalism analyzes how the deliberate burning of textile mills was often used by operatives as "acts of anonymous protest." The *Cannelton Reporter* 29 December 1859 stated that a fire did occur in Cannelton's mill in late December 1859, near the time of the dressing room strike. *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 11 March 1880 joked that the breakage of machinery which stopped work, was done on purpose so the operatives could celebrate St. Patrick's Day. However, outside of the earliest 1850s strikes, no large scale evidence of militant tactics exists. On later organization in Evansville: Ileen DeVault, *United Apart: Gender and the Rise of Craft Unionism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 144. In Evansville, in 1900, female cotton mill strikers did engage in some violent actions against strike breakers. For example, a "crowd of women and children chased four women hired to clean the mill home, crying out 'Scab! scab!' and rattling tin cans at them." They also engaged in demonstrations in front of the mill with "more 'tin-canning' as well as mud throwing and other actions."



union popular in the late 1800s, existed as they had a “ladies” local branch of Martha Washington Underwear Workers in Indianapolis and later connections to industries in Evansville. In addition, historian David Nelson discusses how the Knights of Labor, “was appealing to low skilled employees, including upwardly mobile children of new immigrants.” On the other hand, Lipin’s research points out that in Evansville mines and mills, the Knights were established by (male) leaders from outside the German community, suggesting that the similarly large population of German operatives in Cannelton may not have had connections with this union. In addition, although only a single complete Cannelton mill payroll exists, the 1884 strike is the only other mill-wide strike mentioned in the newspapers besides the protests in the early 1850s. Therefore, while certainly a possibility, no evidence points to union organization in Cannelton’s early history. For these reasons, the April 1884 strike, the longest recorded, mill-wide organized walk-out, marks an especially important event and displays the ability of the operatives to organize through nontraditional avenues of reform.<sup>24</sup>

Twenty-year-old Lizzie Kirst, Anton’s youngest daughter, worked as a weaver in the mill during the events of April 1884. On a typical work day, Lizzie would have entered the deafening weaving room located on the second floor of the mill. Hundreds of looms driven by belts from a large iron pulley clacked their shuttles furiously, flinging lint and dust, and making the stuffy air difficult to breathe. She watched over several machines, swiftly stopping to tie broken warp threads, or the lengthwise threads of fabric.

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<sup>24</sup> For early coverage of mill strikes: Ashendel, “Fabricating Independence,” 4, 18, 20; Torrey, “Visions of a Western Lowell,” 301-302; and Anonymous, “History of the Indiana Cotton Mills,” ICMR, IHS. For efficiency of resistance: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 152-153. Nelson, *Farm and Factory*, 39-41. Lipin, *Producers, Proletarians, and Politicians*, 166. *Cannelton Reporter* 19 October 1872. Cannelton’s coal miners did meet in an attempt to organize a “Benevolent and Protection Union,” which was described as only looking to “benevolent efforts for their mutual protection” and that miners would continue to keep clear of the “kindred action” of strikes in other areas. Still, censored newspaper coverage makes it possible that more organized strikes did exist during the nineteenth century.

She often had to reach through the loom to grasp a damaged thread. Or, if she could not reach it, she had to climb up onto the loom or walk around to the back of the machine to draw the end in. Weaving was one of the most difficult jobs in the mill because it required nimble fingers, strength, and speed.<sup>25</sup>

Lizzie had worked steadily in the weaving room for several years, though she had fewer mechanical skills than her older sisters had in the 1860s when they moved between the carding and spinning rooms. Still, she held a significant position as a weaver and earned one of the higher wages available for women in the mill. All the operatives, however, earned very little for their work and women made even less than men, despite working the same hours and holding equally difficult positions. *Like a Family* states that unlike in other mill work rooms, “weaving was the one job in the mill where men and women worked together under more or less equal conditions.” While working conditions for all weavers in Cannelton was certainly the same, their pay was not. The organization of the payroll displays how men in the weaving room made between “.50 cents” to “2.25,” with the average being “1.00.” On the other hand, a range between “.14” to “.16” appears to be the highest wage for regularly employed women weavers, such as Lizzie. Occasionally some women weavers earned as much as “.50 cents,” but then they only worked for a few days. Although the exact nature of these wages is unclear, it is still

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<sup>25</sup> This description of possible conditions in the mill is based on a variety of sources. Payroll, ICMC, Lilly Library. Insurance Survey of the Indiana Cotton Mills, 18 August 1890, copy from personal records of Michael Rutherford in possession of Kim Hawkins, Cannelton, Indiana. There were 400 looms for both the second floor and the basement. Weaving description: Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 69-70; *The Fabric of Civilization*, (accessed via [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29048/29048-h/29048-h.htm#VIII\\_IN\\_THE\\_COTTON\\_MILL](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29048/29048-h/29048-h.htm#VIII_IN_THE_COTTON_MILL)).

possible to see the obvious pay discrepancies that existed between Cannelton's men and women weavers.<sup>26</sup>

It is easy to see how conditions such as these might frustrate many of the workers. Cannelton, like most factories, had few regulations to meet and so often compromised workers safety and cut wages in order to make a profit. Although Lizzie would have been aware that some past operatives had refused to work at times in reaction to wage cuts, these past strikes had usually failed to increase wages or bring any large-scale changes to their working conditions. Refusing to work was a risky venture and could result in dismissal. Many workers could not afford to go without pay and lacked the resources to move away and find other work and so unwillingly accepted the wages given to them.<sup>27</sup>

Early in October 1883, owners cut Lizzie's and other weavers' wages and at the end of 1883 the mill ran very little. During the first few months of 1884, Lizzie often produced the most cuts in the weaving room, but even her increased output was unable to make up for the pay decrease and the Kirsts and other working-class families struggled to make ends meet. When the mill lowered wages a further 10 percent at the beginning of April, Lizzie and the other operatives decided enough was enough and organized a mill-

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<sup>26</sup> Hall, et al., in *Like a Family*, pgs. 69-70. Discusses equality of tasks between men and women in weaving room as opposed to other rooms. No evidence exists for Lizzie working anywhere beyond the weaving room, while according to the SRTB, her older sisters Terressa, Catherine, and sometimes Ellen, often moved between the carding and the spinning room, demonstrating their experience and knowledge of multiple skills. Payroll, ICMC, Lilly Library. "Cents" and decimals appear inconsistently throughout the payroll, and I have recorded amounts exactly as they are written. A handwritten note in the top left hand corner of the first page in this payroll states "March 1884 Average Female 68 cents, Average Male 1.22." Lizzie's ".16" or ".14" wages were high in comparison to other work available to women. For example, Francis Carroll earned ".05" a day for 64 days to wash curtains (May 1882, Spinning Room List) and Mary Schwkert earned ".80 cents" to make curtains (Weaving Room List, May 1882, Payroll, ICMC, Lilly Library.) although she also worked in the cloth room of the mill.

<sup>27</sup> *Cannelton Telephone* 4 April 1895 mentions that the women leaders of a strike, Misses Hattie Amos and Dora Wheeler were initially fired, but those who struck would not return to work until they were reinstated. The SRTB, FCMC shows that Terressa, Catherine, and Ellen were probably working in the spinning room during the dressing room strikes in 1858 and 1859 and whether or not they participated in any of the strikes in Cannelton, the sisters had to have been aware of the troubled atmosphere and most likely shared their co-workers' dissatisfaction to some extent.

wide strike to protest the lack of a living wage. All of the mill operatives refused to work for twelve days and entered negotiations with the owners about increasing their wages before resuming operations. Hopes that the mill owners would increase their pay had slowly dwindled and many workers, hurt by the knowledge that they made nothing at all if they did not work, urged a return to the mill.<sup>28</sup>

Lizzie Kirst's experience in the Cannelton strike of 1884 highlights many national trends among women working in the textile industry at the end of the nineteenth century. Historian Alice Kessler-Harris describes how, denied the right to vote, women wage earners only had three options to voice dissatisfaction in the work place. First, and in general the most usual and effective option, was to quit and look for better employment elsewhere. Similarly, Ashendel states "that operatives asserted their independence from deplorable working conditions by seeking employment at mills that promised a better standard of living and working." In the case of Cannelton, however, a lack of employment opportunities for women in the area often made this an unrealistic option. Secondly, workers could attempt to create an informal organization within the mill to gain the employer's attention. Finally, operatives could join a formal union.<sup>29</sup>

The Civil War proved a turning point in national trends of labor unrest, with harsh conditions and higher costs of living leading to increased female protest. The numbers of poor, wage-earning women participating in labor unions, however, remained low and made this avenue of reform mostly ineffective. Strikes did not fit with ideal views of female submissiveness and once women married they most often left the workforce

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<sup>28</sup> Payroll October 1883- April 1884, ICMC, Lilly Library. For the strike: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 5, 12, 19 April 1884. Although newspaper coverage of the strike is vague, it does describe the strike as a result of the 10 percent cut and discusses prospects of terms to be agreed on and the eventual compromise.

<sup>29</sup> Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence," 9. Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 38, 75-81, 153, 162.

which further weakened incentives to organize. Also, immigrant families had little tradition of unionization, and often proved to be the most desperate for jobs. A useful comparative labor history by Daniel Walkowitz, provides an example of towns dominated by one industry and lacking more employment opportunities, similar to Cannelton. Workers had fewer opportunities to negotiate and resistance was rare and sporadic until events forced workers to act. A lack of skilled labor then translated into a lack of power and resulted in unsuccessful attempts at reform by workers. Paternalistic tactics also played a large factor in intimidating and dissuading women from joining labor unions. Kessler-Harris states that “in small towns where wage-earning women were still subject to debilitating paternalism,” town officials such as sheriffs or boardinghouse company owners strongly discouraged union membership. In attempts to prevent workers from joining unions, mill owners often implemented corporate welfare to appease and further control operatives while discouraging the need for unions. An example of this tactic had occurred in Cannelton after the 1851 strike with the opening of the company school. Overall, working women experienced these barriers to organizing throughout America, and these views perpetuated the idea of women as temporary, marginal workers with no place in the factory and therefore no place in the union. Consequently, as Kessler-Harris also suggests, the inability of unions to bring change for women workers forced them to use other avenues to express themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Without the aid of unions, how then did the April 1884 strike occur? According to *Like a Family*, workers within small mill villages, such as Cannelton, created a family culture which allowed various, if limited, avenues of worker agency. Within this “worker

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<sup>30</sup> On Civil War activism: Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town*, 1-15, 44, 73, 81-82, 247-260. Building of school following strike: Torrey, “Visions of a Western Lowell,” 302. Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 38, 75-81, 152-154, 160-162.

family ideology” emerged methods for social change, and “personal strategies of resistance and accommodation defined the fabric of everyday life in the mills.” Despite a lack of formal avenues for addressing issues in the workplace, earlier southern workers, for instance, established other tactics for voicing their concerns and “millhands managed to carve opportunities for sociability, pride, and achievement from the hard rock of factory labor.” In particular, workers fought for reform through “personal negotiation,” quitting, or walk-outs. For example, low-level managers with loyalties to friends and family in the mill often prevented some of the most egregious exploitation of workers. Unorganized “spontaneous strikes” or short walk-outs provided another way for operatives to communicate dissatisfaction. These protests resulted from a group decision made in the moment, as opposed to premeditated organization, and although occasionally effective, were usually downplayed by owners and ignored by newspapers. Although the majority of workers accepted poor working conditions and low wages unhappily and out of necessity, this creation of a “sense of self” within the existing system is significant and demonstrates that workers could still display their expectations and sense of worth.<sup>31</sup>

The beginnings of the Cannelton strike of 1884, therefore, may have been deeply rooted in these personal displays of resistance and were heavily influenced by several long-term and short-term prior events. In addition to the earlier history of labor unrest in the 1850s, according to a handwritten company history, on October 14, 1881, an unsuccessful one-day strike for higher wages occurred among the Cannelton weaving operatives. This protest happened just before a December 1, 1881, strike in the Evansville cotton mill. In Evansville, after arriving at their looms, one hundred female weaving

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<sup>31</sup> Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, xvii, 86-87, 100-105.

operatives walked out without working. Although they supposedly made no demonstration or formal complaint, the protest was obviously organized in advance. Tension with a new supervisor and low wages were believed to be the cause, and work eventually resumed with “wages made upon the basis of those paid at the Cannelton and Nashville mills.”<sup>32</sup>

This strike received substantial coverage in the Cannelton newspaper, and while publicly criticized by many in the town, here the bias of the Cannelton newspaper coverage of labor unrest is evident. It readily featured detailed articles on any labor unrest in nearby rival industrial towns, yet rarely mentioned local strikes or demonstrations. These dynamics provide important context for labor unrest in Cannelton, because a jealous and competitive relationship between the Cannelton and Evansville mills existed. Cannelton’s newspaper titled the Evansville mill “the child of Cannelton” and stated that Cannelton’s “splendid pioneer establishment created the idea” of a mill and “Evansville profited from the example.” In addition, several Cannelton operatives and machinists left Cannelton for Evansville and then received praise from Cannelton’s newspaper as the reason for the Evansville mill’s success. Additionally, the Cannelton newspaper argued that Cannelton operatives worked in conditions superior to those of their Evansville neighbors. Although no records of working-class opinions exist, this apparently successful strike in Evansville could not have failed to make an impression on Cannelton’s operatives. Despite biased accounts from local newspapers, some workers

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<sup>32</sup> 1881 strike: Payroll October 1881, 1883, ICMCMC, Lilly Library. It is possible that the reference to the October 1881 strike is a mistake. The company history was handwritten circa the early twentieth century and the date 1881 seems out of place in the chronology of the other events on the same page which occurred in 1884 and 1885. The October 1881 payroll shows no hints of a strike or anomalies in pay, yet the October 1883 payroll displays the *first* pay cut within the weaving room. The likelihood that the event occurred closer to the April 1884 strike is probable; however, either date displays the long presence of discontent within the weaving room as an important source for the larger strike. Evansville strike: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 1 December 1881, “Strike at Evansville Cotton Mills.”

may have openly sympathized with the Evansville weavers and the event could have encouraged others in Cannelton to more openly voice their own sentiments and concerns about the mill's working conditions.<sup>33</sup>

The Evansville strike may have added to a sense of growing discontent among the working class in Cannelton that finally surfaced during the last months of 1883. Echoes from the earlier national depression stopped the mill from running full time, which consequently meant even smaller paychecks for workers. According to the payroll, in the weaving room at least, by mid-September and October 1883 the mill lowered weavers' wages significantly. From November 19 to December 8, 1883, the mill stopped due to poor business, and reported heavy losses. During this period the mill did run in December, but some type of disturbance occurred among some of the weavers. Many of the most consistently employed weavers, including Lizzie Kirst, worked many fewer days than was typical. Some weavers were listed as having several different pay ranges for the month, and still other weavers' numbers stayed the same. Although it is unclear exactly what transpired, it is obvious that in addition to mill closings, changes took place within mill work rooms preceding the spring of 1884. Therefore, when in April 1884 the

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<sup>33</sup> Evansville as a child of Cannelton: *Cannelton Reporter*, 3 June 1876 responded to an article in the *Evansville Journal* about the beginnings of their own cotton mill. The Evansville strike: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 1 December 1881, "Strike at Evansville Cotton Mills." Skilled male operatives had more opportunities to leave and find employment outside of Cannelton. The Osborn family had connections to both mills: 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com); *Cannelton Reporter*, 3 July 1875; *Biographical Cyclopedia of Vanderburgh County Indiana: Embracing Biographies of Many of the Prominent Men and Families of the County* (Evansville, Indiana: Keller Printing and Publishing Co., 1897); *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 21 November 1885. Examples of Cannelton mill employees leaving for Evansville include J.H. Osborn's father, sister, and two younger brothers who also worked in the Cannelton mill. He eventually worked as a machine shop supervisor and then became Superintendent for the Evansville mill. Strangely enough his father, William, (or possibly younger brother) attempted and failed to hang himself in the Evansville mill in 1885. Mr. Jones also left Cannelton for the Evansville mill: *Cannelton Reporter*, 22, 25 May 1875. Mr. Irving Jones, supervisor of the card room left in 1875, most likely because of Cannelton's economic struggles. Other industries in Cannelton would have also contributed to this sense of personal resistance strategy. For example the *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 20 November 1879 reported that employees of the local paper mill unsuccessfully attempted to strike.



mill cut the wages of all of the mill operatives by another 10 percent, the workers initiated the mill-wide strike that lasted until April 14.<sup>34</sup>

Although the *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* initially devoted only a meager twenty-one word sentence to this event, it made a significant impact throughout town. The *Tell City Anzeiger*, a nearby German newspaper with ties to Cannelton's working class, provides a more neutral viewpoint of the event. On Tuesday morning over 300 operatives united peacefully and without any demonstration (similar to the 1881 Evansville strike) walked out of the mill. The strike caused such a disturbance that the superintendent called Mr. Chamberlain, the treasurer of the company which was now under the management of the banks, on a telephone. Chamberlain arrived from Louisville on Wednesday and met with the mill's departmental supervisors to negotiate a settlement. On Friday morning the factory bells called the operatives to work. However, determined to stand by their rejection of the 10 percent wage cut, all of the operatives without exception refused to return or to accept the owners' counter offer of a five percent wage reduction along with a promise of increased wages once the price of goods produced increased. The *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* failed to mention that with the mill as the major employer in town, the fourteen-day strike not only affected the majority of

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<sup>34</sup> Payroll October and December 1883, ICMC, Lilly Library. It is possible that this was a failed attempt to organize a small-scale walk-out or demonstration protesting the cut in wages and hours, in which some but not all of the weaving operatives participated. For example, the 91 cuts Lizzie earned in December was quite out of character and well below her usual average of total earned. Several, though not all, of the weavers have this same anomaly recorded in the payroll. "History of the Indiana Cotton Mills," ICMR, IHS, states that prior to the 1884 strike wages were "reduced during year in 3-5% cuts" and that the "mill stopped Nov 19<sup>th</sup> to Dec 8<sup>th</sup> after poor business." This suggests that throughout the year multiple cuts to wages occurred ranging from 3 to 5 percent. ICMR, Folder 18, IHS. Also it appears that the Newcomb-Buchanan Co. who owned the mill was filing for bankruptcy between 1882 and 1884 which may have influenced their decision to cut wages prior to the strike. As reported in the *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 22 December 1883 many of the miners in town also went on strike at the coal mine, the other major local employer, and some left their jobs. For the mill strike: *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 5, 12, 19 April 1884.

working-class families, but also the middle to upper-class engineers, clerks, and businessmen in Cannelton. Indeed, the *Anzeiger* stated that the event was the main topic of conversation and caused anxiety throughout town due to its large influence on local industries. Teresa Baer and Leigh Darbee state that “Numerous businesses . . . depended on the mill for existence. Among these were saw and grist mills; manufacturers of shingles and tin and iron sheets; dry goods, apothecaries, and grocery stores; seamstress, shoemaking, butcher, and bakery shops; artisan shops for blacksmithing, cabinetry, printing, and wagon making, churches, hotels, and saloons; and hundreds of houses.” Regardless of this potential negative impact on other local businesses, it appears the community stood in solidarity with the operatives and generally approved of their behavior and their decision to walkout. Despite being the longest recorded strike in the town’s history, after two weeks the mill closure was causing significant “consequences” in town and the operatives ultimately reached a hollow compromise with the owners: their wages would be returned to the pre-ten percent cut level once the price the mill received for the manufactured goods increased.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 12, 19 April 1884. *Tell City Anzeiger*, “Cannelton Neuigkeiten,” 5, 12 April 1884, translated from German by Elena Ripple and Nick Johnson. Payroll April-June 1884, ICMC, Lilly Library. Baer and Darbee, “Perry County’s Indiana Cotton Mills, 1850 to 1954, Part 3,” 44-45. While the mill’s various department heads that Mr. Chamberlain negotiated with most likely included only males, women obviously played a large role in the organization and logistics of the strike. Using the 1880 census as a guide, it is logical to deduce that at least half of the 300 striking employees mentioned by the *Tell City Anzeiger* would have been female. 1880 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). The 1880 census included 146 females as compared to 76 males listed as operatives, however, not all employees were recorded in the 1880 census. The only other strikes listed in the “History of the Indiana Cotton Mills,” ICMR, IHS, lasted from one to three days. By taking these sources, Anita Ashendel’s work on earlier strikes, and newspaper coverage in to account, the April 1884 strike was by far the longest recorded strike. Tell City is located three and a half miles west of Cannelton. I was only able to utilize the *Tell City Anzeiger* in this instance because I knew the specific dates the strike coverage was likely to appear in the paper and was able to get the articles translated. This German newspaper, however, likely provides insight and opinions more closely aligned with Cannelton’s working class immigrants and further research into this source may increase the understanding of labor reform in Cannelton. I found no mention of the April 1884 strike in the Evansville papers. The ICMR, IHS, collection description includes information on the referenced Mr. Chamberlain. The nature of the strike’s final compromise is somewhat

As the 1884 strike and prior instances of workers activism display, the Cannelton mill saw significant numbers of protests for better pay and working conditions, but ultimately, workers could do little but accept the wages offered. Despite these obstacles, Lizzie, her older sisters, and their coworkers still protested poor working conditions without the aid of unions. Although demonstrations of labor activism existed in the early and late 1850s, circumstances during the Civil War and the ensuing 1870s national depression resulted in a lack of obvious reform attempts. Women workers in Cannelton lacked professional organization or even a noticeable presence in the historical record during the Civil War and the following decade. Despite this, they most likely continued to use unconventional avenues of protest in modest measures. The early 1880s displays of unrest, therefore, mark an important break from decades of unrecorded or nonexistent efforts at reform and a return, as in the 1850s, to more direct, though still untraditional forms of labor activism. Most importantly, the 1884 Cannelton strike reveals how female workers demonstrated internally organized personal power that demanded the attention of business owners.

These “un-unionized” expressions of workers’ agency included personal and spontaneous forms of resistance, years of small scale protests within specific rooms of the mill, as well as organizing across mill labor divisions. The fact that weavers initiated a failed one-day strike in 1881 and that wage cuts in 1883 occurred in the weaving room and resulted in some type of disturbance to the normal work routine, means that Lizzie and her weaving coworkers may have exerted significant pressure and influence in the

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unclear. For example, both translations of the *Anzeiger* articles state that factory owners agreed to pay the earlier salary and the strike consequently stopped. However, the *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* mentions that the return to earlier wages would occur only with an increased in profit. In addition, it appears wages stayed at the 10 percent reduction until the last record of the pay roll on June 1884.

organization of the April 1884 strike. These preceding small displays of power, combined with the 10 percent cut in wages, could have encouraged or led to the participation of all of the mill employees in a longer, more organized strike. That the company history labels this as the “first strike in 25 years,” despite the evidence for many other earlier altercations, is significant. Obviously this demonstration compelled owners to negotiate and they may have acknowledged this as an official strike due to its more organized form and lengthy duration. Although operatives did not gain an immediate increase in wages, the owners’ acknowledgement of their concerns and the process of actual negotiations reflects a certain type of success, especially when compared to previous attempts at activism. That the company treasurer travelled from Louisville to personally negotiate with department supervisors and was pressured into compromising proves that while these strikes were unsuccessful time after time, they did not by any means represent symbolic or useless acts. Spur of the moment walk-outs, or longer, locally organized strikes allowed women to successfully create personal identities as workers and activists and to display a level of power within the industrial system.<sup>36</sup>

Cannelton’s strike of April 1884 displays unique avenues of activism and as a case study provides an important glimpse into the organization of female labor activism in small midwestern towns. Despite the fact that the 1884 strike correlated with an increase in national trends of women’s activism, its organization suggests that midwestern women workers still relied on nontraditional avenues of protest without the aid of unions. Although evidence for the exact origins of the 1884 Cannelton strike does not exist, based on newspapers, census data, and payrolls and drawing upon the methods

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<sup>36</sup> *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter* 5, 12, 19 April 1884. First strike quote in “History of the Indiana Cotton Mills,” unlabeled page 2, ICMR, IHS.

used by nearby Evansville cotton mill operatives, it is possible to make several deductions about activism in Cannelton. Most importantly, we can see how women, despite their lack of enfranchisement and union involvement, still constituted essential players in labor reform and most likely provided the main push for and organization of strikes across gender lines and mill workrooms in small midwestern towns. Unsurprisingly, Cannelton's operatives continued to struggle with labor conditions following this strike. For instance, despite promises of increased wages, when the mill closed for a week in August 1884, owners informed employees (via a note on the office door) of a 5 percent wage cut to take place once it reopened. Then, in October 1885, some operatives "quit work . . . and endeavored to organize a strike for higher wages, but thought better of it" and returned to work. Ten years later, in response to an increase of ten hours to the work week, thirty-six women from the spinning room walked out refusing to work the extra hours. Their demands to return to the old hours were accepted the next day. However, the two female strike leaders were dismissed. In solidarity, the strikers successfully refused to begin working until the two women were reinstated. The documentation of female strike leaders in 1895 reveals some details into the organization of Cannelton's labor reform and further supports the idea that women traditionally held positions as reform leaders. Regardless of their small success rate, understanding the circumstances which allowed workers to organize remains important.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 16 August 1884, 17 October 1885. *Cannelton Telephone* 28 March 1895, 4 April 1895 "For Less Hours." On Evansville: Lipin, *Producers, Proletarians, and Politicians*, 77-78, 89-90, 104, 161-166; DeVault, *United Apart*, 143-145. Although focusing on the increase of women in union based activism in the twentieth century, DeVault's research of Evansville suggests that women's ability to organize across gender lines was an essential and nontraditional aspect of labor reform. She states that during a 1900 cotton mill strike, "all observers agreed that it was the women workers who shared the greatest interest in their strike for shorter hours."

## Shared Work, Varied Fates

No matter how hard a female mill operative worked in Cannelton, she had limited opportunities to improve her socio-economic status. She could achieve mobility only through marriage or entrepreneurship. A man, on the other hand, could use industrial work as a catalyst to a better social status. Even into the later nineteenth century, some female Cannelton operatives stated that they “married to get out of the mills.” Although this sentiment was expressed at a later period of the mill’s history, it certainly would have applied to operatives over the course of the nineteenth century. Indeed, all of the Kirst sisters left their jobs at the Cannelton mill immediately before or shortly after their marriages. During the 1860s, two-thirds of all women stopped working once they married. Why did women leave these relatively high paying jobs once they married? It is likely that limited chances for occupational advancement and cultural disapproval of their employment outside the home caused most women to stop wage work after marriage. These constraints against married working women were generally accepted by the women themselves and persisted as a world view until well into the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

As Leslie Tentler argues, marriage remained one of the only major opportunities for women workers to achieve social or economic mobility and indeed marriage, not previous wage earning experience, determined the Kirst sisters’ economic futures. Still, in terms of individual agency, Tentler’s interpretation underestimates working women’s views of themselves, their goals, and ability to create personal opportunities for independence and power. As this thesis points out, working women’s lives were not determined by Victorian ideas of separate spheres. For example, who women chose to marry was itself a form of control, though one influenced by several factors, including

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<sup>1</sup> *Hancock Clarion*, Hancock County, Kentucky, 20 October 1988. Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 71.

class, ethnicity, and immigrant status. In general, however, women in Cannelton seemed to have difficulty finding men to marry. An 1884 article, though teasing in tone, mentioned that the matrimonial market might “liven up a little” if more acceptable employment options for men existed in town.<sup>2</sup>

Even with limited matrimonial choices, women who worked in the mill used marriage to change their socio-economic circumstances. Despite having equivalent childhood and work experiences, the later lives of the Kirst women proved very different based on who they married. In accordance with social convention, Terressa, Catherine, Ellen, and Lizzie married working class men and left their jobs as textile operatives. None of the sisters engaged in official wage earning employment as wives, but work did not end once they married. Since the responsibility of housework typically fell on the wife, even though they no longer earned wages, Terressa, Catherine, Ellen, and Lizzie continued to contribute to their families’ livelihoods. Working class women, who had less access to convenient domestic technology, found tending to the basic needs of the family extremely time consuming and exhausting. Wives, or an available unemployed female, had the responsibility of organizing the home and raising the children. Women had to budget the finances, shop daily for food, prepare meals, and perhaps purchase supplies to sew or mend clothes for the family. If women also took in paid outside work, even less time remained for housework. The intensity of housework would have varied somewhat based on the economic situations of the Kirst sisters, but their experiences and responsibilities probably proved similar.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women*, 1-9, 28, 71-83, 180-185. *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 12 July 1884.

<sup>3</sup> On the role of women in marriage: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 71, 120. Nelson, *Farm and Factory*, 28. Karen Lystra, *Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1989), 231, 237. While understanding the history of labor and gender are essential to my

Terressa, Catherine, and Ellen married local, working-class men, but ultimately lived very different socio-economic lives. Terressa married Joseph Neising, a coal miner, on January 13, 1863, at the age of twenty. After the Civil War, Terressa and Joseph made their way to Ohio where their first child, Mary, was born in 1865. The family lived there for several years, possibly in Cincinnati. Although it is not clear how they supported themselves, based on the Cincinnati city directories it is probable that Joseph was involved in some type of manual labor. By 1876 at the latest, Terressa and her family moved to Illinois, where her sister Catherine's husband owned a coal mine. Tragically, Joseph died in his brother-in-law's mine during a gruesome accident which flooded the mine in January 1880 leaving Terressa widowed with seven children to support. At the time of Joseph's death, her occupation was listed as "keeping house" most likely referring to her own home. Further evidence points to the Neising's lack of wealth as a newspaper article covering the accident urged the community to raise money for the family. Since none of her children were listed as employed, it is unclear how Terressa supported seven young children, but she most likely took in work unofficially or was employed as a domestic servant. By the turn of the century, Terressa lived with a daughter and a son and although she was listed as the head of the household and owned her home mortgage free, only her salesman son earned wages. In 1910, Terressa lived

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research, an analysis of family life during the mid to late nineteenth century also provided useful context for thinking about the lives of Cannelton's operatives. As young working girls, and later married women, participation in work shaped the Kirsts's roles in the family. Therefore, in order to understand these girls as workers, it was important to understand them as family members. Lystra studies the social and intellectual characteristics of romantic love in the new emerging middle class of Victorian America, including falling in love, courtship, and married relations. Although this text mostly concerns middle class native populations, the book provides a foundation for understanding the structure of male and female relationships, and the lives of the Kirst sisters as both single, courting workers, and married women.



alone next door to her son, who most likely continued to support her until her death in 1917.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Teresa Kirst marriage to Joseph Neising, 13 January 1863, Perry County, Indiana, Index to Marriage Record 1850-1920, Tell City County Clerk's Office Book 3 page 78. Joseph Neising Civil War Draft Registration 1863, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Consolidated Lists of Civil War Draft Registration Records (Provost Marshal General's Bureau; Consolidated Enrollment Lists, 1863-1865), (accessed via Ancestry.com). This record lists his occupation as a coal miner. If Joseph was a Civil War veteran, Terressa potentially received a small pension for herself and for her children. According to family history, Joseph Neising was working in the U.S. Post Office in Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio, as a young man and during this time met Terressa Kirst. Mary Josephine Neising, their first child, (born 3 May 1865) told her children that she was baptized in 1865 in St. Wilhelmina's Catholic Church in Cincinnati. After Joseph supposedly quit his job for religious reasons, they moved to Pinckneyville, Illinois. Based on personal correspondence, family history maintains that Joseph quit a significant position at a post office for religious reasons, before working in the mine. To my knowledge, no documentation for this exists. Joseph then found a job in the Blome family mine, owned by Terressa's brother-in-law's family. Although the family had connections in Cincinnati and family tradition says they lived there, the Neisings were not found in the census records. Cincinnati City Directory (accessed via Ancestry.com). Several Joseph Neisings (under various spellings) were listed in this directory. From 1871, 72, 73 listed as a laborer, 1868 1867 as a stone cutter, 1866 as a "wrks polisher," and 1865 as a "bells mkr works neo." The dates and information align with the family's other data but more evidence is needed to determine the family's exact economic means during the 1870s. 1900 Census, Perry County, Pinckneyville, Illinois. Based on later censuses their first five children were born in Ohio. Teresa born 1868, Ella born 1869, Katie born 1871, John born 1874. Copy of St. Michael's baptism records in German. From personal correspondence with Stella Yamazaki. The family appears to have visited Cannelton in 1866 when Terressa's half-brother A.J. (Anton, Jr.) was born in 1866 and the baptismal records of Anton Kirst, Jr., lists Terressa and Joseph Neising as sponsors. Joseph, Jr., was born in Illinois in 1876. 1880 Census, St. Clair County, Belleville (accessed via Ancestry.com). Belleville, Illinois, where the Blomes lived, was about sixty miles north of Pinckneyville where the Neisings lived, but the Blomes owned the mine close to Pinckneyville that Joseph worked in. The mine was "situated on a tract of land adjacent to big Beaucoup creek, and on the line of the Wabash, Chester and Western (now Missouri Pacific) just north of town." In 1870, Belleville, home to a majority of German immigrants, was the second largest producer of manufactured goods in the state and had large deposits of coal. For a brief history of Belleville: "Belleville History," <http://www.laborandindustrymuseum.org/BellevilleHistory.shtml>. From Stanley Smith, "A Peculiar Tragedy of 1880," from "A Compilation of the Reports of the Mining Industry of Illinois from the Earliest Records to Close of the Year 1930," Department of Mines and Minerals; Springfield, Illinois. (Accessed via <http://hinton-gen.com/coal/disasters.html#sources>). "Joseph Niesing, who thinking there was no danger remained in his room, which was far to the north of the air shaft. How he met his death will, of course, never be known. If still at his post, the probability is, that the first warning he received was the sudden compression of the air which, indeed, must have been the immediate cause of his death. Mr. Niesing was an honest, poor, industrious, hardworking man; he leaves a wife and seven children, several of whom are sick, in straightened circumstances. We have no doubt if the friends of this sadly bereaved family will take the matter in hand, circulate a petition, few, if any, of our citizens will be found, but that will contribute something to these sad, unfortunate ones. The sympathy of our community go out to this bereaved family, and let us show our sympathy to be of the substantial kind if we are shown the petition." Also see *The Democrat*, "Joseph Neising's Body Found," November 1, 1918, which includes a reprint of an 1880 article by Rev. W.S.D. Smith. Illinois Writers' Project, Work Projects Administration, *Illinois Historical Anecdotes*, "From Geysers in Illinois," (Chicago, Illinois, 1940) p.1 copy from personal correspondence. 1900 Census, Perry County, Pinckneyville, Illinois (accessed via Ancestry.com). Terressa's occupation is listed "ng? 0-1-1." It is unsure what this stands for, but a similar marking appears for another woman in a nearby household. It is important to keep in mind that surviving data usually leaves out any "unofficial" or unrecorded supplemental incomes that women often engaged in, like washing or housekeeping. Neising family history mentions that Terressa was the housekeeper for a local priest later in

Catherine married a twenty-three year old coal miner named Bernard Blome on November 24, 1863, when she was nineteen years old. Catherine's husband also served in the Civil War, and she and her family stayed in Cannelton until at least 1870. In 1870, Bernard worked in the coal mine and Catherine kept house for a family which included her mother-in-law and her children Franz, Anton, Anna, Mary, and Henry, nine, six, four, two, and three months old respectively. The Blomes owned significant real estate worth six hundred dollars and claimed one hundred dollars in personal property. Although no records for Catherine and her family exist in Illinois for the 1870s, their earlier presence in the area most likely influenced Terressa and the Neisings move to Illinois. Living in Belleville, Illinois, in 1880, Bernard and his adopted son, Franz, supported the family by working in the mine while Catherine kept house with six children aged fourteen to one at home. Although the census does not give details on the nature of their work, by this period Bernard owned a mine near Pinckneyville, where Joseph Neising worked as a laborer. Therefore, the Blomes held a substantially higher social and economic status than the Neisings, despite the fact that both families' livelihood came from the coal mine. The mine accident was devastating to both families for personal reasons, but it also impacted them economically. While the Neisings lost their sole income provider, the much more financially stable Blomes turned to the grocery business and continued to be successful.<sup>5</sup>

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her life. Teresa Neising death certificate 1917, Illinois, Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947 (accessed via Ancestry.com). Smith, "A Peculiar Tragedy of 1880," (Accessed via <http://hinton-gen.com/coal/disasters.html#sources>). Joseph's preserved body was recovered in 1918 by his son. "J. C. Niesing, one of the family that was bereaved and impoverished by this tragedy in 1880, had become a prominent and substantial citizen of Pinckneyville by 1918. . . . The Blume mine remained flooded for nearly 39 years. In 1918 the body of Joseph Neising, which had been preserved by the mineral-laden water, was finally recovered. It lay face down on the floor of his room and conditions indicated that he had his working place in order. A sack of tobacco and a small clay pipe, with a heel of tobacco tightly tamped in it was found in the pockets."

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Kirst marriage to Bernard Blom 24 November 1863, Perry County, Indiana, Index to Marriage Record 1850 – 1920. Tell City County Clerk's Office, Book 3; page 122. Lizzie Kirst baptism record, 1864,

Catherine was widowed by 1900, and two of her ten children had died. After her husband's death, she was able to move into the male-dominated grocery business as many other widows did before her. Her eldest daughter kept house and her four other children went to school or worked. Her son, Joseph, was a clerk, mostly likely in the grocery store and her son, George, was a grocery salesman. The family also kept a boarder. By 1910, two more of Catherine's children had died and she now owned her home. She lived with her elder, unmarried daughter, Anna, and younger son, Henry, who earned wages as a clerk in a lumber yard. Catherine most likely relied on him for support until her death or on income from the sale of the grocery store. Catherine and Anna remained with Henry even after he married, started a family, and was widowed. He supported the family as a shipping clerk in a shoe factory and in 1930 two of his teenage sons also worked. Catherine passed away in 1935 at 90 years old.<sup>6</sup>

Once her older sisters married in 1863, Ellen continued to help support the Kirsts still in Cannelton by working in the mill. In the spinning room, Ellen befriended Catherine Mateling who lived four houses down the street from her. In 1866, Ellen was a

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St. Michael's Cannelton, Indiana, copy in German, from personal correspondence with Stella Yamazaki. Bernard Blome and his wife, Maria, were her sponsors. This could have been either another Bernard related to the Blome's or Catherine was listed incorrectly. This suggests that the Kirsts had a connection to the Blome family and may explain how Catherine met her husband. 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). The Blomes lived next to several families who worked in the mill. Franz was listed as adopted in the 1880 census. Based on his later occupations, Bernard may have had family connections to mining, allowing him to have a higher paying status position in the Cannelton mine. Illinois Writers' Project, Work Projects Administration, *Illinois Historical Anecdotes*, "From Geysers in Illinois," (Chicago, Illinois, 1940) p.1 (accessed via <http://www.mocavo.co.uk/Illinois-Historical-Anecdotes/154485/1>). Since the Blome mine was flooded for 39 years, Bernard probably changed to the grocery business shortly after the accident. 1900 St. Claire County, Belleville, Illinois Census. 1908 St. Claire County, Belleville, Illinois City Directory, p. 38 (accessed via Ancestry.com). In 1908 Catherine was listed as the widow of Bernard Blome, a grocer.

<sup>6</sup> 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 Census, St. Claire County, Belleville, Illinois. *Cannelton Enquirer* 14 July 1888. Bernard died between 1888 and 1900. "Mr. B.H. Blome a former resident of Cannelton, but who is at present in the mercantile business in Bellville, Illinois, is visiting in Cannelton." Catherine Blome death record, 1935, Illinois, Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947 (accessed via Ancestry.com). Catherine Kirst-Blome Obituary, personal correspondence, originally printed in the *Belleville Daily Advocate*, June 18, 1935, pg. 1, Belleville Public Library microfilm.

bridesmaid in Catherine's wedding, while Catherine's brother, John, was a groomsman. Ellen and John Mateling married not long after in 1869. John Mateling and Ellen had multiple connections including their employment in the cotton mill, Ellen's friendship with his sister, and as neighbors. Their courtship provides an interesting view on female operatives' marriage choices in Cannelton. John worked in the cotton mill in 1860 and in November 1861 enlisted in the Union army as a musician in Company K of the 49<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Indiana Volunteer Infantry. He contracted malaria around April 1862 at Cumberland Ford, Kentucky, but re-enlisted for three more years on February 3, 1864, in Indianola, Texas. In September 1865, he was discharged and returned to Cannelton, renewing his acquaintance with Ellen. Based on data found in his pension records, John was very ill for several years after the war and was unable to work while doctors treated him for "head and chest trouble and nervous affection" until 1868. During that period, he was deemed disabled for manual labor at least half the time, and "frequently had sick spells confining him to his bed for a week or more at a time." At the same time, the Cannelton mill where Ellen worked only ran sporadically and economic difficulties in addition to John's frail health may have led the couple to put off their marriage until 1869. John's inability to work sheds light on the fact that his relationship and marriage with Ellen was either for love or affection rather than economic reasons or due to the fact that marriage options in Cannelton at the time proved limited. Family and work connections in addition to pension descriptions of their relationship suggest the prior of these options. Despite these difficulties the couple married in February 1869 in Hamilton County, Ohio, most likely to be near Terresa for a short time.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 1860 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Although Catherine is listed as Metting on a separate page of the 1860 Cannelton census, the other Mateling's are transcribed

By the time the Mateling's second child, Mary Agnes, was born in June 1874, the family was living across the river from Cincinnati in Covington, Kentucky, where John was a grocer. Their third child, Mary Magdalene, was born in July 1875 at which point John's physical health quickly deteriorated. A local doctor diagnosed him with "neuroses" and "contracted rheumatism." "Neighbors and intimate acquaintances" with the family stated that John "was nervous at all times complained of pains in his head and chest and had a way of jerking his head backward, and at times he would seem as if he were not in his right mind for a few moments." He was a "constant sufferer and disabled for the performance of manual labor at least one-half the time by reason of said disabilities, which we believe caused his death aforesaid." For the four months prior to his death in December 1876, John was paralyzed and a physician's affidavit stated his death was caused from exposure during his service in the Civil War. Due to John's long illness, Ellen most likely took an important role in running the grocery while he was alive

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incorrectly as Nutting. Nevertheless, based on the actual census handwriting, birth dates and other data, this is indeed the same family. This particular census enumerator had trouble spelling last names as the Kirsts were incorrectly listed as the Hursts in the same census. John work in the mill in 1860. *Cannelton Reporter*, 6 June 1867. This lists A. Metling (John's brother Adolph) in a list of contributions for the Rock Island Miners. SRTB, FCMC. Catherine Metling (as she is listed in payroll) was present in the spinning room with Ellen Kirst from 1860 to at least 1865. This evidence makes Ellen's marriage to John even more understandable. Obviously the two had some connection either as childhood friends and neighbors, through the cotton mill, or through Ellen's friendship or acquaintance with Catherine Mateling. *Cannelton Enquirer*, 11 November 1916, "The Golden Wedding." The Golden Wedding of "Katherine" Metling and John Snyder, who was a friend and fellow soldier of her brother, John, says they married in St. Michael's Catholic Church in 1866 and lists Ellen and John as bridesmaid and groomsman. John Mateling Form 85D Full Pension File, Civil War, Number 492481, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC., and *Cannelton Enquirer*, 11 November 1916, "The Golden Wedding." Gives evidence on John's marriage to Ellen on 30 January 1869 in St. Philomena Church, Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio, his enlistment, illness, and discharge. John also may have sought treatment in Covington, Kentucky, in 1868. *Cannelton Reporter* 15 August 1867, John "Matteling" (along with Anton Kirst) were in the list of registered voters. *Cannelton Reporter* 30 October 1869, 23 July 1870, 13 August 1870. The mill was running less by October 1869, and closed by 23 July 1870 until August. This may have influenced Catherine's decision to marry, although it does not appear John was able to work until after 1868. Difficulties in research on Ellen exist due to the fact that she also went by the name of Magdalene and Mary. It is unclear why they were married in Ohio, as John is listed as being treated by a doctor in Covington, Kentucky, from 1868 until his death. It is possible that this date is an error due to the fact that the testimonials were recorded years later. The couple may have stayed for a very short time in Ohio or simply married there due to some connection with Terressa.

and she ran the business on her own for several years after his death. Unfortunately, tragedy soon struck again when her seven year old son, Jacob, died on January 27, 1879. In 1880, Ellen was still at work in the grocery and her half-brother, Joseph, had moved in with her and her daughters, helping to supplement Ellen's income by working as a clerk, most likely in the grocery as well.<sup>8</sup> Similarly to Catherine, Ellen's experience displays an example of how women could gain entrance into a traditionally male occupation, such as running a grocery, only as a widow.

At the same time as Terressa and Catherine were experiencing the consequences of the mine accident, widowed Ellen continued to work in the grocery and received a veteran's pension of eight dollars a month starting in December 1876. This was terminated, however, after her remarriage to Ben Bramlage on November 28, 1883. Starting in January 1891, Ellen and her second husband filed several failed attempts to receive compensation for John's death as a result from his military service. Several witnesses, including Cannelton citizens with connections to the cotton mill, gave testimony on the history of John's health because Ellen could not provide medical evidence. One declared in 1892 that they knew "the claimant Mrs. Ellen Bramlage to be a most worthy lady." Their claims were ultimately rejected in April 19, 1894, when the Medical Division, Bureau of Pensions, declared that John's death was due to a brain tumor that was "not susceptible of connection with the service." Shortly after this ruling Ellen became very ill in early 1895, and died in September 1896 in Covington, Kentucky.

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<sup>8</sup> 1874 Kenton County, Covington, Kentucky, City Directory, p. 104 (accessed via Ancestry.com). 1876 Kenton County, Covington, Kentucky, City Directory, p. 149 (accessed via Ancestry.com). The 1876 directory listed his store under grocery and retail. John Mateling Form 85D Full Pension File, Civil War, Number 492481, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. Jacob was listed as suffering from diphtheria for six years and died of heart failure. 1880 Census, Kenton County, Covington, Kentucky (accessed via Ancestry.com). Joseph Kirst undated baptism record, St. Michael's Cannelton, Indiana, copy in German, from personal correspondence with Stella Yamazaki. Ellen sponsored Joseph's baptism.

The death of their younger sister must have saddened Terressa and Catherine, who for many years had been Ellen's mentors and companions in the spinning room.<sup>9</sup>

Although they worked the same jobs as young women, Terressa, Catherine, and Ellen eventually lived in different social classes. At least later in her marriage and early widowhood, Terressa represents a decline in economic standing after her time as a textile operative. Joseph's employment as a coal miner placed the family in a lower-working-class status. After his death, Terressa struggled to support herself and her children and her options for income would have been limited to low paying manual labor. Catherine's fate, on the other hand, appears more fortunate financially. Economically, Catherine and her family moved from coal mining and textile work, to business owners of the coal mine and a grocery store. Even after her husband's death, Catherine was able to maintain her family's upper-working-class status, eventually even owning her own home. Although less is known about Ellen's husband's employment before they owned the grocery store, John's ill health makes it clear that Ellen would have played an important role in supporting her family. After John's death, Ellen's ownership of the grocery store allowed her access to a form of income typically unavailable to other working women. Nevertheless, Ellen relied on the help of her half-brother. Ellen's economic situation seemed to exist between the spectrum of Terressa's and Catherine's.

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<sup>9</sup> 1880 Census, Kenton County, Covington, Kentucky (accessed via Ancestry.com). 1890 Census, Kenton County, Covington, Kentucky (accessed via Ancestry.com). John Mateling Form 85D Full Pension File, Civil War, Number 492481, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC. Magdalena Bramlage death record, 12 September 1896, Kenton County, Kentucky, Death Records, 1852-1953, (accessed via Ancestry.com). The cause of immediate death is illegible as "dropin." At least one of the daughters, Mrs. Mary Schmidt, tried to reopen the rejected claim in 1901 and possibly again in 1903 (these claims then appear to have been abandoned). In 1908, either the same Mary or the other daughter, requested information on the status of the case and the commissioner replied with information as to its initial rejection.

Lizzie Kirst, the youngest daughter, was born in 1864 in America, a generation after her foreign-born older sisters and she experienced life somewhat differently as a married woman. Nevertheless, marriage was still the biggest determinate factor for her later life. Lizzie worked in the cotton mill at least until she was twenty-one years old, though she likely continued her employment until her marriage to J.J. Hildebrand in November 1889. J.J., similarly to his brothers-in-laws, came from a working class family. His father, however, owned a dyeing business that generated enough income to support the whole family and allowed the younger children, including J.J., to go to school. It is unclear what J.J.'s occupation was at the time of his marriage to Lizzie, but shortly after their wedding the couple moved to Owensboro, Kentucky. In 1900, Joseph owned the Planter's House saloon and his home was mortgage free. Lizzie did not work outside the home and her household included her husband and their two children, who both attended school, her brother, who bartended, and her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. The Hildebrands finances and close proximity to Cannelton allowed them to visit back and forth with Lizzie's younger brother, A.J. (Anton, Jr.) Kirst. Since J.J. was an upper-working-class business owner and A.J. a middle class merchant, the newspaper often mentioned their social visits to one another and displays an improvement in social class in comparison to their parents or older siblings who were rarely, if ever, mentioned in the newspaper. By 1910, none of the Hildebrand children were listed in the census as working, but they still most likely helped out in the family business. Compared to the Kirst family who needed as many children to work in the mills as possible to support themselves, it seems that Lizzie's husband was able to support his family without the



official help of his wife's employment. Sadly, J.J. died of stomach trouble in November 1913.<sup>10</sup>

As a widow in 1920, Lizzie's same extended family members continued to live with her including her daughter's husband and their children, who then rented from her. Only two men in the family were recorded as being employed, and Lizzie's sister-in-law worked as a servant, although it is unclear if she was employed outside the family. Along with Lizzie's personal wealth, this was enough to support the entire family of eight people. In 1930, Lizzie still owned her home, which was worth \$4000 and lived with her son, who worked on an oil well, her daughter who was a stenographer in an insurance office, and her sister-in-law. In 1944, she died at 80 years old.<sup>11</sup>

Lizzie's later life shows a considerable increase in social class and her lifestyle changed significantly from her childhood. She, and certainly her children, successfully moved from the working class into at least the lower-middle class. At first Lizzie gained social mobility through her husband, whose family held at an upper-working-class status during J.J.'s childhood. As a business owner, J.J. supported his family without supplemental wages, and after his death Lizzie was widowed long enough that she cultivated and protected her investments herself. The fact that her son-in-law paid her

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<sup>10</sup> In the *Cannelton Reporter* 25 December 1869, Joseph Hildebrand, Sr., advertised a dyeing business. 1870 Census, Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). The family was apparently not living in Cannelton during the 1880 census. Elizabeth Kirst marriage to J.J. Hildebrand, 26 November 1889, Tell City County Clerk's Office, Book 6, p. 483. 1900, 1910, Census, Daviess County, Owensboro, Kentucky (accessed via Ancestry.com). *Cannelton Enquirer*, 17 January and 12 August 1905. Lizzie had recently visited A.J. and his wife. Then A.J. visited family in Owensboro later in August. Other articles show that they visited back and forth quite a lot. *Cannelton Telephone*, 20 November 1913, p. 4, Reel #283299, Indiana State Library. J.J. Hildebrand's obituary states he was the proprietor of the Planter's House for many years and died of stomach troubles when he was only 54 years old.

<sup>11</sup> 1920, 1930 Census, Daviess County, Owensboro, Kentucky (accessed via Ancestry.com). In 1930, her son-in-law, who rented from her in 1920, rented a home nearby at \$25 per month. Elizabeth Hildebrand death record, Daviess County, Kentucky Death Records, 1852-1953 (accessed via Ancestry.com).

rent and her personal property was worth a significant amount at the end of her life displays how marriage was a tool for Lizzie to improve her own socio-economic status.

While Lizzie's financial status differed from her sisters, their marriages, not their employment in the textile mill, ultimately provided the most influence on their later social class. On the other hand, the Kirst brothers, specifically the youngest son, A.J., had opportunities for socio-economic mobility through industrial work. As a teenager, A.J. Kirst worked in the cloth room of the Cannelton cotton mill from at least 1880 to 1882. In this specialized area of the mill, employees were typically male. They inspected the finished products and prepared them for shipping. A.J. made a prosperous career out of his textile experience and moved well beyond the wage-based subsistence of his parents. In 1892, he married "up" to the daughter of a Cannelton landlord, and by 1900 worked the skilled trade of a merchant tailor. In 1910, A.J. was a retail merchant and owned his own store, A.J.'s Shoes, Clothes, and Furnishings, which advertised "Good shoes, modest profits. That is the motto at Kirst's." During the Perry County Centennial and Cannelton "Homecoming Week" of 1916, one of the newspaper's special articles was devoted to A.J.'s business, "the only exclusive dealer in Men's Good's." The article provided a drawing of the store and ended by saying that "Mr. Kirst is public spirited and always ready to do his part in any move for the betterment of Cannelton." Indeed, he eventually held the position of Financial Secretary of the Knights of Columbus and became a stockholder and Vice President of the First National Bank of Cannelton. He was so successful that he was able to send his daughter to St. Mary of the Woods, a Catholic college in Terre Haute, Indiana. She later married a doctor, displaying a further rise in

social status, and by 1930, A.J. was retired and living with his daughter and son-in-law in Richmond, Indiana.<sup>12</sup>

Anton's successes highlight the fact that men employed in factories had more opportunities for social mobility than women did. Despite the fact that Terressa, Catherine, Ellen, Lizzie, and A.J. all worked in the cotton mill for several years, A.J.'s achievements showcase the gendered disparity of fates between the Kirst siblings. A.J. became a very successful middle to upper class businessman, widowed Terressa struggled to support her children, Ellen fluctuated around the middle-working-class, Catherine's marriage allowed her to eventually live a comfortable upper-working-class life, and Lizzie's marriage placed her in the upper-working-class and she eventually worked her way into the middle class.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Payroll, ICMC, Lilly Library. I.C.S. Staff, *Fancy Weaving and Cloth Rooms*, (International Textbook Company, Scranton, Pennsylvania: 1905) (accessed via <http://books.google.com/books?id=sZhPAQAIAAJ&pg=RA4-PA1&lpg=RA4-PA1&dq=what+was+a+cloth+room+in+a+cotton+mill?&source=bl&ots=U4DUX3bMFL&sig=hwXeL3-c454bwZX85twpRLu0rX4&hl=en&sa=X&ei=OXptUoeEeibygGhu4HwCQ&ved=0CFAQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=what%20was%20a%20cloth%20room%20in%20a%20cotton%20mill%3F&f=false>). Kirst slogan: *Cannelton Enquirer*, 7 May 1904. Homecoming week: *Cannelton Telephone*, 31 August 1916. St. Mary's: *Cannelton Enquirer*, 18 September 1909. 1900 Census Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). Rutherford, *Perry County, Indiana*, 101. Meeting held about opening the new bank on 4 February 1909. Church: De La Hunt, Thomas, *Perry County A History*, Indianapolis: (The W.K. Stewart Company, 1916), 268. 1930 Census, Wayne County, Richmond, Indiana (accessed via Ancestry.com). *Cannelton Telephone*, 22 April 1920, "A.J. Kirst Sells Out," he sold his stock of shoes, clothes and furnishings in 1920 and began his business as a merchant tailor in 1892.

<sup>13</sup> 1880 Census Kenton County, Covington, Kentucky (accessed via Ancestry.com.) Further highlighting the spectrum of the Kirst siblings' socio-economic statuses, in 1880, Philomena was employed as a servant before her marriage. According to the *Cannelton Enquirer* 6 April 1907, A.J.'s older brother, Joseph, also became a successful business man though it is not clear if he ever worked in the mill. In 1907 Joseph visited Cannelton from Cincinnati. "Joe is one of the old original Cannelton products, and like Cannelton boys do, he has succeeded in business in Cincinnati and is still doing well." The Kirst daughters who worked in the mill ultimately had a positive influence on their family because they were able to "move up" in social status in Cannelton. For example, in May 1881, the newspaper dedicated an entire paragraph describing the silver wedding anniversary of Anton and Mary Anna Kirst. *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 12 May 1881. By this time it appears that Anton's long residence in town, he and his children's contributions to the mill and specifically his sons' growing influence, meant that the Kirst name was becoming more "respectable" or noteworthy. *Cannelton Enquirer and Reporter*, 16 September 1881, "The Silver Lining." Still, in comparison to an article on the 25th wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Titus Cummings, a prominent business owner in Cannelton, it is obvious to see through the paper's interest and

The variation of later lifestyles between Terressa, Catherine, Ellen, and Lizzie strongly suggests that earning money as working women did not ensure predetermined economic experiences later in life. Depending on the time period, Cannelton's operatives still had some opportunities for social mobility, especially through and after marriage. As part of a family economy, the Kirst sisters earned wages before marriage and continued to labor once they married. The nature of their work as wives, however, was based in large part on their choice of husband and they ultimately experienced a range of family incomes and social statuses. Working in the mill did not necessarily hinder or restrict the future social and economic statuses of these four women; however, they encountered fewer opportunities for economic advancement than their male siblings. Compared to their brother, A.J., it is easy to see that social mobility was more difficult for female wage earners, so their achievements must be measured in smaller increments.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of Cannelton, working women enabled the textile mill to function and a town to operate, despite the fact that these women earned much less than men, lacked bargaining positions for reform, and endured disapproval from society. More case studies in addition to this thesis will allow historians to view the larger picture of the female role in the industrialization of Indiana. Analyzing the role of individual working women in the Midwest is essential for understanding the factors that shape today's current economic industries.

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coverage that class was still very stagnant. The Cummings article was at least four times as long as the Kirst description and provided details of the celebration and well wishes for the couple.

<sup>14</sup> It can also be argued, however, that marriage for any working class person, even males had a significant impact on their later socio-economic status, for example A.J. Kirst's marriage.

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Kenton County, Covington, Kentucky

Perry County, Cannelton, Indiana

St. Clair County, Belleville, Illinois

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Education and Community Engagement Intern: August 2013-December 2013

Exhibitions Graduate Intern: August 2012-May 2013

Program Assistant, Graduate Intern: National Council on Public History, IUPUI,  
Indianapolis, IN: August 2011-July 2012

Collections and Exhibits Intern: Michigan State University Archives and Historical  
Collections, East Lansing, MI: Spring 2011

Campus Archaeology Intern: Michigan State Campus Archaeology Program, East  
Lansing, MI: Spring 2011

Student Library Assistant II: Michigan State University Main Library Copy Center and  
Reserves Desk, East Lansing, MI: August 2007-2011

Collections Intern: Office of the State Archaeologist, Michigan Historical Center,  
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Historical Research Assistant and Departmental Aide IV: Michigan State University  
History Department, East Lansing, MI: July-August 2010

Research Assistant: Ohio State University Isthmia Excavations, Isthmia, Greece: May-  
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Digital Collections Intern: Heritage Foundation of Battle Creek Kimball House Museum,  
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**Presentations:**

April 2013- Poster presentation at National Council on Public History Annual Meeting,  
Ottawa, Canada: "More Than Microfilm: Incorporating Public History into a  
Traditional Thesis"

April 2013- International Graduate Historical Conference, Central Michigan University:  
"To Work and To Wait: The Indiana Cotton Mills Strike of 1884"

February 2013- Annual Meeting of the Indiana Association of Historians, University of  
Indianapolis: "To Work and To Wait: The Indiana Cotton Mills Strike of 1884"

Spring 2011- Poster presentation at Michigan State University's Undergraduate Spring  
Research Forum: "Exploring the Evolution of Energy: A History of Michigan  
State University Energy Use"

Spring 2011- Paper presentation at Michigan State University's Gender, Women, and  
Sexuality Undergraduate Showcase: "Dating Dynamics Courtship in the 1940s  
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**Honors:**

Sam H. Jones Service Learning Assistant Scholarship, IUPUI: August 2013

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Provost Undergraduate Research Initiative Grant-MSU: Summer 2010

College of Social Science Undergraduate Distinguished Scholarship-MSU: Spring 2010

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National Council on Public History 2011-present

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Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi 2010-2012