

## *The Female Social Structure of Philadelphia in 1775*

WHEN HISTORIANS of early modern England and colonial America describe the social structure of a community, they generally employ a framework that combines status and occupational categories. The agricultural hierarchy—lord, knight, gentleman, yeoman, husbandman and so forth—is mixed with the professions, trades, and crafts to form one scale.<sup>1</sup>

Though often used to represent the entire society, this rendition of the social structure is, of course, only a profile of the male population. Women, if included at all in the schema, are differentiated solely by their marital state. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century men believed that a woman's status as single, married or widowed, rather than her employment, was the most notable fact about her and normally chose to record only that information after her name. Moreover, a married woman in the pre-industrial period has often been viewed by historians as simply her husband's assistant, helping him in his work on the farm or in the shop. The problem is that while in most communities 90-95% of women ultimately wed, nowhere near that proportion were married at any given point in time. Furthermore not all husbands were in an economic position to support or employ their wives. Many married women who contributed to family income worked independently from their spouses as day laborers, peddlers or at by-employments such as spinning and knitting.<sup>2</sup> Rarely, though, did these jobs earn them an occupational title.

\*An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the "Celebration of Colonial Women," a conference sponsored by the National Society of the Colonial Dames in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, April 30, 1982 in Philadelphia.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Lawrence Stone, "Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700," *Past and Present*, no. 33 (1966), 16-55; Peter Lindert, "English Occupations 1670-1811," *Journal of Economic History*, 40 (1980), 685-712; Alice Hanson James, *American Colonial Wealth*, III (New York, 1977), 1933-1937; Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (New York, 1974), and my own "The Determinants of Personal Wealth in Seventeenth-Century England and America," *Journal of Economic History*, 37 (1977), 675-89.

<sup>2</sup> Carole Shammas, "The World Women Knew: The Female Labor Force in late Seventeenth-Century England," in *The World of William Penn* edited by Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn (Philadelphia, forthcoming).

Considering this situation, probably the best way to approach the subject of the female social structure is to investigate women's positions—head, wife, daughter, boarder, servant—in households, and to add to the analysis extant occupational data for unmarried women. Even this task is not easy because very few household censuses for the years prior to 1800 exist and those that do seldom name the female members of a household. In the Philadelphia public record, however, there are the 1775 Constables' Returns covering the households in the ten wards of the city. The Returns for one and a half wards, Chestnut and the eastern portion of Mulberry, furnish occupations for some female household heads and indicate male and female boarders, hired help, indentured servants, and slaves. None of the Returns note the presence of the male household head's spouse or the gender of children, but by making certain assumptions, we can still construct a profile of women's household status and the employment situation of female heads for two diverse sections of Philadelphia on the eve of the Revolution.

Philadelphia in the pre-Revolutionary era has been characterized as a private city ruled by a commercial elite whose religious principles, those of the Society of Friends and a grab bag of other Protestant faiths, and new found prominence in the mercantile world shaped their actions in the community. Distrustful of the public sector, they favored instead the use of private philanthropy to solve the social problems that inevitably surfaced in Anglo-America's largest urban area. Then, as now, cities were magnets for both the richest elements in society and those from the countryside and overseas with the most meagre resources—the indentured servant, the slave, the sailor, and wage laborer. The wars for empire and trade disruptions that constantly plagued the commercial economy of the colonies brought a rise in unemployment and, possibly, a drop in real wages to the working classes of the city during the later eighteenth century. As those in power offered little in the way of a civic remedy, conflict between the classes occurred with some regularity.<sup>3</sup> Historians have provided detailed, and sometimes differ-

<sup>3</sup> Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968); Richard Ryerson, *The Revolution is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765-1776* (Philadelphia, 1978); Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); Billy G. Smith, "The Best Poor Man's Country": Living Standards of the "Lower Sort" in Late Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Working Papers from the Regional Economic History Research Center* vol. 2 no. 4 (1979), 1-70; Smith, "Struggles of the 'Lower Sort' in Late Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Ibid.*, vol. 3 no. 2 (1980) 1-30.

ing, accounts of the male social structure of pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia. What we need to know more about is how women fit or failed to fit into this picture.

Chestnut Ward contains the most complete listing of adult females of any ward in the 1775 Constables' Returns. Bounded by Market Street on the north, Chestnut on the south, Front Street on the east, and Second Street on the west, this 108 household area was one of the smaller wards and one of the more affluent. Approximately 179 adult women, including all daughters fifteen and over and maid servants regardless of age, resided there. About one third (31.2%) were wives of household heads, meaning that two thirds were either widows who headed their own household or females who occupied a subservient position in the family—daughters, servants, slaves, and boarders. Apart from widows, the single woman living on her own or with other young women was practically unknown. Most female boarders were married women and there were very few of them. Less than three and a half percent of the female population in Chestnut Ward, compared to twenty percent of the men, fell into the category of boarder.

TABLE 1  
ADULT POPULATION OF CHESTNUT WARD 1775

<i>Position</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
N =	179	187
Household heads	9.5%	48.7%
Wives of above*	31.2	---
Boarders	3.4	19.8
Hired servants	25.7	1.1
Bound servants	10.6	11.8
Slaves	8.4	8.0
Children 15 and over**	11.1	10.7
	100%	100%

Source: Constable Returns 1775, Philadelphia City Archives, City Hall Annex

\* Estimated by counting all men with children as married. The assumption is that the widowers counted as having wives will balance out the married men without children who were not counted.

\*\* Estimated by assuming that every householder whose eldest child was over 16 and who had more than one child would have both a daughter and son 15 or over. Those households whose eldest child was 15 or 16 or who had only one child: I assumed half had a daughter and half had a son.

It is important to recognize that in this ward most women were *not* mistresses of a household supported by a male income. Often it is assumed that all adult female in the colonial period were married. While it is true that almost all women wed at some point in their lives, they also spent a number of years on either end of their adulthood single. A recent demographic study of early Philadelphia found that in the pre-Revolutionary era forty percent of the women married after the age of twenty-two, one out of five marriages involved a groom who was ten years older than the bride, forty percent of marriages lasted less than ten years, and widowers were twice as likely to remarry as were widows.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that in Chestnut Ward over a quarter of the women were hired servants, 10.6 percent indentured servants, 9.4 percent slaves, and 11.1 percent daughters fifteen years and older. The latter were spinsters or at least women not living with their husbands. Nearly ten percent of the women headed their own households, and they were almost exclusively widows. If their husbands had been affluent and had left them generous portions in their will, then these women might fare well as household heads. For many women, however, widowhood meant poverty.<sup>5</sup>

Chestnut Ward was small and situated in the heart of Philadelphia. It had more wealthy householders and, therefore, more servants and slaves in its population. We cannot automatically assume that the same proportions prevailed throughout the city. Fortunately, one of the other districts in the Constables' Returns that has a good reporting of household members by gender (though not as good as Chestnut's) is the east part of Mulberry Ward, a large jurisdiction on the northern fringe of the city where many poorer householders lived. Table 2 shows what position the women and men who lived in the 608 households of east Mulberry occupied in the family. Families in this ward had much smaller proportions of hired servants and slaves than did the householders in Chestnut and consequently, the estimated percentage of

<sup>4</sup> Susan Edith Klepp, "Philadelphia in Transition: A Demographic History of the City and its Occupational Groups 1720-1830," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Historians have begun to draw attention to the poverty of widows in colonial America: Alexander Keyssar, "Widowhood in 18th-Century Massachusetts: A Problem in the History of the Family," *Perspectives in American History* 8 (1974) 83-119; Nash, *Urban Crucible*, passim; and Susan Grigg, "Towards a Theory of Remarriage: Early Newburyport," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (1977) 183-221.

women who were wives was higher, one half contrasted with about one third. Nevertheless, these figures still mean that 50 percent of the women fell into other household categories: 21 percent were servants and slaves, 15 percent daughters, 3 percent boarders, and 11 percent household heads.

TABLE 2

## ADULT POPULATION OF MULBERRY WARD—EAST PART, 1775

<i>Position</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
N =	624	887
Household heads	10.9%	60.9%
Wives of above*	50.2	---
Boarders	3.0	16.7
Hired servants	8.7	1.2
Bound servants**	8.7	7.8
Slaves**	3.4	2.7
Children 15 and over	15.2	10.7
	100%	100%

Source: Constable Returns 1775, Philadelphia City Archives, City Hall Annex

\* Method of estimation the same as described in Table I

\*\* In Mulberry Ward the sex of bound servants and slaves was not always noted. For those observations where gender is missing, I counted 60% as male and 40% as female. The entire Constable Returns list gives gender for 10% of the indentured population and the ratio of male to female is 6/4 (Sharon V. Salinger, "Colonial Labor in transition: The Decline of Indentured Servitude in Late Eighteenth Century, Philadelphia," *Labor History* 22 (1981), 169).

Based upon the figures from these two wards, I believe it is safe to state that the majority of adult women in eighteenth-century Philadelphia at any one point of time were not married women who were mistresses of their own households. Just what that meant, though, needs to be explored in more detail by looking at the situation of each of these groups of women. As might be expected, it is much easier to discover how these women were distributed among households than to determine how they interacted with one another and with men and children. Consequently the process of placing women in colonial Philadelphia raises a whole series of questions about household relationships that cannot be fully investigated here.

*Household Heads.* Theoretically, these women should have been the most powerful since they were not under male government or coverture

and supposedly could direct their own lives. The actual situation may have been somewhat different, however. We can tell something about the economic state of female headed households in Philadelphia simply by comparing the total number of them listed on the Constables Returns with the number whom the authorities exempted from paying taxes because of poverty. In Chestnut Ward almost 59% of the female heads were so exempted while only 13% of the men were in that situation. In Mulberry even more women, 70%, paid no taxes. The instructions the City gave to tax assessors stressed that they should give special consideration to widows with children in making their valuations. It is unlikely, however, that they exempted very many female property owners who had regular incomes.

Indeed, the sad plight of female headed households in the urban environment is not a new phenomenon and the question that this discovery provokes is, why were these Philadelphia women so poor? Was it essentially a demographic problem in which women, who were normally younger than their spouses, outlived their husbands and used up the family resources available for "retirement?" The difficulty with that explanation is that it is circular. Basing retirement savings on the life span of the husband indicates a built-in-bias against women in the system.

The unequal property laws of the time is another possible explanation. Most colonies, including Pennsylvania, awarded the widow only a third of her deceased husband's estate in intestacy cases while he acquired all her property when they married. Pennsylvania, moreover, altered the English common law and allowed creditors to take the widow's dower if her husband died in debt.<sup>6</sup> Ideally she received enough from an estate to prevent her from becoming a burden on the community. After that, the economic interests of the lineage took precedence.

Another factor that might account for the poverty of female headed households in colonial Philadelphia was the type of work available for women and the level of remuneration they received for that work. In urban areas, women worked most often as live-in domestic servants, but females with their own households and children could not take these positions. The positions to which they could aspire appear in Table 3.

<sup>6</sup> On the legal situation of women in Pennsylvania see Marylynn Salmon, "Equality or Submersion? Feme Covert Status in Early Pennsylvania," in *Women of America: A History*, eds., Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton (Boston, 1979), 92-111.

TABLE 3  
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD  
Chestnut and East Mulberry Wards 1775

N = 87	%	Mean Assessment
Occupational Status		
Ladies	2.3	£13.0
Prof.: schoolmistress	3.4	0
Retailers: shopkeeper, tavernkeeper, huckster	24.1	27.2
Artisans: mantuamaker, glover	4.6	0
Laborers: washerwoman	2.3	0
No Occupation listed		
Property owners	17.2	40.5
Took in boarders	8.0	0
No visible means of support	37.9	0
	100%	

Source: Constable Returns 1775, Philadelphia City Archives, City Hall Annex

Nearly two-thirds of the 87 female heads of households in Chestnut and East Mulberry wards had no occupational designation and virtually all of them were widows. In only one instance was a householder identified as a singlewoman. Some of these people owned realty and received rents (17.2%), a few more had no property but did take in boarders (8%). Most, however, had no visible means of support (37.9%). Undoubtedly some of the widows had occupations that the constables ignored but others probably depended on poor relief and occasional labor to sustain themselves.

Few of the women who had an occupation listed after their name were affluent either. Retailing was the most common occupation for female household heads. While several of the shopkeepers owned considerable property, 40% of those in retailing, which included women who were tavernkeepers and "hucksters," had zero assessments. About 20% of the pub licenses issued in the city went to women in this period and as poorer tavern owners sometimes neglected to obtain licenses and women tended to be the proprietresses of these establishments, we may assume the actual percentage was higher. Women seldom surfaced as licensed peddlers which leads one to suspect that most of their huckstering was of small relatively inexpensive items, most often food.<sup>7</sup> Many of the fe-

<sup>7</sup> Licenses for Marriages, Taverns and Pedlars 1761-1776, two volumes, 1761-1776, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), and Frances May Manges, "Women Shopkeepers, Tavernkeepers, and Artisans in Colonial Philadelphia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1958.

male shopkeepers may have been victuallers. The accounts of merchants who supplied retailers with dry goods in the pre-Revolutionary period lends credence to this speculation. Males constituted over 95% of their customers.<sup>8</sup> Female owners of shops with large inventories of imported goods must have been rare.

As for the rest, the schoolmistresses, seamstresses (mantuamakers), and washerwomen had no property to assess. These women were essentially in the business of providing domestic out-services to married women. They taught little girls to read and write, made female—seldom male—clothing, and washed linen. Household accounts reveal that women commonly earned from one-third to one-half the wages of men even for comparable work.<sup>9</sup> Some of these women in Chestnut and Mulberry Wards supplemented their meager income by taking in boarders.

Whatever the full explanation may be for the low economic position of female householders, their material circumstances greatly limited their ability to exercise much power as head of their family.

*Wives.* Having reviewed the situation of the female head of household, it is understandable how marriage might have had its attractions for women. Its advantages for men were perhaps never more succinctly stated than by Henry Muhlenberg, a well-known Lutheran minister in pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia. "As to my marriage," wrote the good Reverend, "it had always been my intention to remain single." Yet only three years after his migration to the colony, thirty-four year old Henry took a seventeen year old bride. What had changed his mind? Two things, he claimed. First, a single pastor provoked gossip. Second, marriage provided Muhlenberg with a solution to what can only be

<sup>8</sup> Mifflin and Massey Ledger, 1760-1763, John and William Moulder Account book 1771-76, HSP. Earlier in the century, the account books show a higher percentage of female customers, 12-15%. See James Bonsall Accounts 1722-29 and Thomas Denham Ledger 1726-29, HSP. Merchants selling metalware, such as Stephen Paschall, had almost no female customers, Ledger B 1752-1776, HSP.

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Morris Account Book, 1759-1769, Norris of Fairhill Family Accounts, 2 volumes 1740-1773, 1774-81, and Samuel Morris Ledger 1740-1765, HSP. I have discussed these issues surrounding women's pre-industrial work in more detail in "The World Women Knew." Billy Smith reports that "the women employed by the Pennsylvania Hospital as nurses, clothes washers, chimney sweeps, potato diggers, cooks, maids, whitewashers, soap makers, and bakers generally received about one-half the wages paid men even when performing the same jobs," "Living Standards of the Lower Sort," 42.



termed the servant problem. "I could not get along without some female servant," he confessed. But, "I would not employ young girls, and old women require servants themselves." Consequently, the answer was to marry a healthy teen-ager, who in addition to her other duties bore eleven children.<sup>10</sup>

The point of this story is that those in colonial society who could afford to marry invariably did so. One measure of a ward's affluence, in fact, was the sex ratio, the ratio of men to women. In Chestnut Ward, the ratio (1.04) indicated near equality between the sexes, while in the poorer east Mulberry, it was much higher, 1.42, even though there were slightly more female household heads there. Chestnut Ward men could afford to marry and have female servants while many Mulberry men could not. A number of single males apparently headed households, sharing space with male boarders and doing without the services of either wife or maid.

Marriage involved a considerable investment because children would soon follow. In pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia, nearly three-fourths of first births occurred within one year of marriage. Depending on age at marriage, which in turn depended largely on socio-economic group, Philadelphian women gave birth to four to seven children on the average, half of whom survived.<sup>11</sup> In Chestnut Ward, families with children had an average of three living with them. When children arrived, so too did a female servant or slave if the family had any resources at all. In Chestnut sixty-two percent of households with children employed at least one female domestic.

Wives in the propertied classes considered the absence of a maid servant a true hardship. During the Revolutionary War Eliza Farmer complained that it was impossible to find men and women for domestic service. "I was obliged to get up before day and dress by candle," she wrote to a friend, "while Mr. Farmer as hostler got the chaise ready to go to market," a semi-weekly task that she felt properly belonged to a female servant and not the mistress of the household.<sup>12</sup> Food buying and preparation, childcare, and laundry probably took up the bulk of the housewife's and/or servant's time. What they could not handle could be

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Cunningham, "An Eighteenth-Century View of Femininity as seen through the Journals of Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg," *Pennsylvania History* 43 (1976), 201.

<sup>11</sup> Klepp, "Philadelphia in Transition."

<sup>12</sup> Eliza Farmer Letterbook 1774-1777, October 25, 1783 and December 4, 1783, HSP.

purchased from those female heads of household we discussed above. Often a washerwoman from outside was hired. It was apparently a big job, for the cleaning of one individual's linens often amounted to the same monthly figure (£1-£2) as a maid servant earned.<sup>13</sup> The maid servant, of course, also received room and board.

House cleaning seems to have occupied a less central place in the housework routine than it has come to assume in our century, but in the late eighteenth century the increased use of the home as a sociability center meant some rise in domestic work. A recent study of colonial interiors in Philadelphia and the countryside shows that most city families lived in narrow two and a half story dwellings two rooms deep.<sup>14</sup> The bottom floor was given over to shop, sitting room, and kitchen functions while sleeping usually occurred upstairs. The movement of the principal bed from downstairs to upstairs and the establishment of a parlor solely devoted to sociability, rather than doubling as a bedroom, were primarily eighteenth-century urban developments. The parlor would contain whatever fine furniture—mahogany tea table, clock, and chairs—the family possessed. These rooms would be the scene of the constant visiting and tea-drinking that occurred among city dwellers. If we can trust upper class women's diaries to tell us about the more general experience, most Philadelphia women used these spaces because they did not socialize much in public places—coffee houses, taverns, and so forth—unless they were travelling.<sup>14</sup>

Certainly, *ladies* did not mix freely in crowds or wander about unaccompanied. The diary of Sarah Eve a young woman who lived on the outskirts of Philadelphia in the 1770s is instructive on this point. One day she and two girl friends walked to Philadelphia commons to see a review of the troops. They had expected to overtake some male relatives on the way but missed them. "To our great mortification," Sarah wrote, we "found ourselves on the common without a gentleman to take care of us and surrounded by people of all ranks and denominations." They did

<sup>13</sup> See for example "Sarah Powell's Wash Book," in the Deborah Morris Account Book Collection 1759-1769, HSP.

<sup>14</sup> On housing see Jack Michel, "In a Manner and Fashion Suitable to their Degree: A Preliminary Investigation of the Material Culture of Early Rural Pennsylvania," *Working Papers from the Regional Economic History Research Center* 5 (1981), 32-34. On upper class visiting, see Nancy Tones, "The Quaker Connection: Visiting Patterns among Women in the Philadelphia Society of Friends, 1750-1800," in *Friends and Neighbors: Group Life in America's First Plural Society*, ed. Michael Zuckerman (Philadelphia 1982), 174-195.

soon locate their male guardians who "willingly took us under their protection; we then held up our heads and did not care whom we met, which before was quite the reverse." Miss Eve, however, seemed to have some doubts about the true need for this exhibition of chivalry. "It is certainly more from custom than real service," she decided, "that the gentlemen are so necessary to us Ladies."<sup>15</sup>

Most families had neither the money nor the time to enforce these conventions. Working class wives frequently labored outside the home, but there is no indication that they felt anymore comfortable in public Philadelphia than did the privileged women who wrote diaries. Kitchens, chambers, and if they could afford them, parlors were the most likely places for women to collect.

*Daughters.* Roughly twenty percent of households in both Chestnut and Mulberry Wards had children fifteen and over living with them. As the Constables' Returns do not give the gender of these children, it is difficult to say very much about daughters who stayed with their parents rather than working in another household. Since there was a high turnover rate among maid servants, it may be that, aside from the rich, many young women moved back and forth between work at home and domestic service during their unmarried years and that is what we are observing in these percentages. Were the hired servants of Philadelphia drawn mainly from this pool of daughters? It would be interesting to know.

*Boarders.* It is not necessary to spend too much time with this category because although twenty-five percent of the households in both Chestnut and Mulberry had boarders, a figure higher than that found in nineteenth-century Philadelphia, very few of these inmates, as they were called, were women.<sup>16</sup> Male workers could be employed in one place

<sup>15</sup> Eva Eve Jones ed., "Extracts from the Journal of Miss Sarah Eve," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, V (1881), 203

<sup>16</sup> On nineteenth century boarders in Philadelphia see Michael R. Haines, "Poverty, Economic Stress, and the Family in a Late Nineteenth Century American City Whites in Philadelphia 1880," in *Philadelphia Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century* edited by Theodore Hershberg (New York, 1981), 257 and Claudia Goldin, "Family Strategies and the Family Economy in the Late Nineteenth Century The Role of Secondary Workers," in *Ibid.*, 282 On the subject of boarding in general see John Modell and Tamara K. Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (1973), 467-479 By the later nineteenth century seven to eight percent of females 20-29 lived as boarders in Massachusetts

and live in another but not women. In Chestnut Ward, the female boarders consisted almost entirely of the wives of male inmates while in Mulberry one detects more widows. Male boarders were more likely to be in male headed households than female headed ones, but with these married and widowed female boarders, the reverse situation prevailed. Once again the restrictiveness of colonial women's lives is underscored. Single women could live as daughters in their fathers' households or as maids in their employer's homes, but any other arrangement was not encouraged. The whole process whereby unmarried girls gradually were permitted to live independently is a subject that merits further investigation.

*Hired, Indentured, and Slave Servants.* The use of females as servants was widespread in colonial Philadelphia. In a poor area such as east Mulberry Ward, the number of female domestic workers per thousand households was still double the amount found in the United States in 1900 and over eight times the figures for 1970.<sup>17</sup> The multiple regression in Table 4 shows what type of Chestnut Ward household was most likely to have women employed as hired, indentured and slave servants. As one might expect, wealth and occupation played decisive roles. Holding wealth constant, merchants had a much greater likelihood of having female domestic help than did artisans or laborers, with shopkeepers and professionals falling somewhere in between.<sup>18</sup> The number of children in the household also made a significant difference. These results should be compared with those for male servants and slaves. With the men, wealth was much more important a determinant and number of offspring mattered not at all. Thus it is clear that one of the major reasons for adding a female servant to the household was the presence of children. Childbirth and its attendant illnesses incapacitated women and also greatly increased their workload. The production of

<sup>17</sup> Mulberry Ward had 227 female domestic servants per 1000 families. In 1900 the national figure has been estimated at 100 and for 1970, 25 per 1000. The latter two numbers are given in Joann Vanek, "Housewives as Workers," in *Women Working: Theories and Facts* eds., Ann H. Stromberg and Shirley Harkess (Mayfield Publishing Company, 1978), 396.

<sup>18</sup> I am reluctant to make too much of this occupational effect because the measurement of wealth is rather crude, the assessed value made by the Constables. Many people received a zero valuation and another large group received £8 estimates, the lowest taxpaying category. Consequently, the wealth variable is not a true continuous interval variable and the occupations may be picking up some of the variation that actually belongs to wealth.

heirs might also have enhanced the bargaining power of the housewife in her campaign to obtain domestic help.

TABLE 4  
THE DETERMINANTS OF THE NUMBER OF SERVANTS  
IN A HOUSEHOLD

N = 102 households	No. Female Servants		No. Male Servants	
<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>coefficient</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>coefficient</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
constant	.955		.542	
Household Assessment in £	.002*	.136	.004*	.255
	(.001) <sup>1</sup>		(.001)	
Number of Householder's children	.088*	.072	-.009	.001
	(.033)		(.027)	
Female Household Head <sup>2</sup>	-.164	.008	-.364	.034
	(.242)		(.200)	
Occupation <sup>3</sup>		.132		.039
Professionals	-.490		-.124	
	(.335)		(.277)	
Shopkeepers	-.295		-.130	
	(.222)		(.183)	
Artisans	-.806*		-.418*	
	(.215)		(.178)	
Laborers	-1.033*		-.425	
	(.336)		(.277)	
Total R <sup>2</sup>		.348		.329

Source: Constable Returns 1775, Philadelphia City Archives, City Hall Annex, Chestnut Ward

\*Significant at the .05 level or better

<sup>1</sup>Standard error in parentheses

<sup>2</sup>Dummy variable: 1,0 codes. Reference category is male head

<sup>3</sup>Dummy variable: 1,0 codes for each occupational category. Reference category is merchant.

Female hired servants and slaves more often found their way into the homes of the rich while more modest households used indentured women. If the ages for indentured servants in the Constables' Returns are to be believed, over one in five was under fifteen and in Chestnut Ward about one-third of both the females and males were that young. Almost all bound servants were under twenty-one. The youth of these women suggests that some were not immigrants but orphans or young native born girls who had been placed in servitude by their parents. As

Sharon Salinger has noted, contemporary comments about female indentured servants from abroad were not very complimentary.<sup>19</sup> Merchants, fearing that illness, pregnancy, or crime had prompted their emigration, labelled them troublesome cargo and set their value at one fourth to one third less than their male counterparts. The wealthy preferred hired servants but the high turnover suggests dissatisfaction on the part of employer or employee or both. The rich also purchased slaves; however, Jean Soderlund has found that the number per capita was declining in the pre-Revolutionary period.<sup>20</sup>

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This analysis of the 1775 female social structure in Philadelphia raises certain issues concerning gender differences. For instance, it draws attention to the geographical distribution of the sexes. An important feature distinguishing more affluent areas and households of the city from poorer ones was the former's concentration of women. This imbalance came not because women were necessarily richer than men, in fact the reverse was true, but as the consequence of earlier marriage among the wealthy and their hiring of female domestic workers. Although we have no firm evidence until the 1790 federal census, women probably constituted a higher percentage of Philadelphia's general population than they did in the rural areas, and if we can draw inferences from the wards studied here, it seems that many of the women who migrated in were either single or widowed. At least in Chestnut and east Mulberry half or more were unmarried.

Second, there is the matter of women's confinement to certain slots and spaces in urban life. The female equivalent to the young male laborer or journeyman was the hired or bound household servant. Unlike the men, however, who boarded in one place and usually worked in another, a young woman's employer was also head of the household in which she lived. Only a very small percentage of women boarded and most of them were married or widowed. While the young men could be viewed as a footloose and potentially rebellious element in society, the women were much too closely supervised for that. The

<sup>19</sup> Sharon V. Salinger, "Colonial Labor in Transition: The Decline of Indentured Servitude in Late Eighteenth Century Philadelphia," *Labor History* 22 (1981), 165-192.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, Power: The Development of Slavery Among Quakers in the Delaware Valley, 1688-1780," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1981.

custom of housing women with their employers was part of the general cloistering of women which also entailed excluding them from many public places and attaching social disapprobation to their appearance in others without a male companion.

Finally, the issue of differences between the economic status of men and women over the life-cycle is important. Among men, it was generally the young who experienced the most economic instability and distress, for women it was the more mature. The occupational, wage, and property rights discrimination borne by women affected widows most heavily because they headed their own households. The state offered tax exemptions and poor relief to assuage the economic problems of these women and, perhaps, to insure that they suffered in silence. To what degree they actually did keep their peace is a question that needs further exploration.

For a woman, being head of a household was so often coupled with poverty that it might be argued that the wives of household heads, who as married women had no legal rights at all, actually possessed the most power. Wives had authority over daughters, maids, and slaves and also hired the services of female heads of household for domestic out-work. An important class difference likely to separate one group of married women from the other was the presence of domestic help in the household. As a young woman could not live on her own or even as a boarder, her options came down to domestic service as a daughter, maid, or wife. Marriage, regardless of the partner, almost automatically brought upward mobility in the female social structure. The percentage of women married in an early modern community, therefore, indicates something about the level of women's economic well-being and one suspects that by that measure the women of Philadelphia were not exactly flourishing in 1775. An urban area, however, cannot be treated in isolation from its surrounding economy. Just as Philadelphia seemed to attract more than its share of disadvantaged males so perhaps did the system direct women with few resources to the city.

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