Patterns for Getting By:
Polish Women’s Employment
in Delaware County, 1900-1930

As much of the Eastern United States, the industrial working class of Pennsylvania since the mid-nineteenth century has largely been an immigrant workforce. Understanding the work experience and household strategies of the peoples who inhabited the mill towns and industrial neighborhoods of the state necessarily involves an awareness of both the background experience in the natal country as well as the process of Americanization. By analyzing household patterns in three industrial neighborhoods of suburban Philadelphia, I have found an intersection between immigrant status and working-class needs in the work strategies of Polish-born women in the first three decades of this century.

Since the late 1970s social scientists have explored the ethnic differences among immigrant peoples in the United States. Part of this effort has been tied to an ongoing debate within the social sciences about the nature of ethnicity. Early writers often defined ethnic identity as the continuation of cultural traits from the immigrant’s country of origin in America.\(^1\) Their studies set up a dichotomy between the “traditions” of the home culture and pressures for assimilation in the United States. Life in the country of origin was frequently characterized as having unchanging values regarding family roles. By describing

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past values, these social scientists developed an assumed framework for immigrant behavior in the United States.

Such approaches were presented as correctives to the commonly held view that all Americans "melted" into a single culture. To quote Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "The point about the melting pot . . . is that it did not happen." Historical studies describing immigrant maintenance of former cultural traditions became the data used to prove this point. The literature generated a number of responses, including studies attempting to prove that attributes of American society, particularly class, were greater determinants of immigrant behavior than patterns from the countries of origin. Later literature described ethnicity in the United States as an emergent phenomenon that developed out of the relationship of peoples from varying backgrounds within a particular social and economic context over time. Ethnic groups evolved out of immigrant populations as people with a specific personal history who reinterpreted individual experience and expectations in light of their experience within the larger society. This definition differs from the general assumptions of the assimilationist or pluralist perspectives in that development of ethnic identity involves both assimilation to the general norms and language of the host society and the creation of separate symbols and lifeways which become the markers of a particular subculture.

While much of the literature on women and ethnicity has moved beyond the simple debate of class versus ethnicity, the earlier perspective that the culture of the sending country is a primary factor in

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2 Glazer and Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, v.
6 The works of Glazer and Moynihan, Greeley, and Novak, among others, are commonly referred to as either "pluralist" or "the new ethnicity." See footnote 1.
7 Louise Lamphere, From Working Daughters to Working Mothers: Immigrant Women in a New England Industrial Community (Ithaca, 1977), is a good example of this trend.
newcomer behavior is still prevalent in more popular presentations. Scholarly studies also support this view to a certain degree, through the continued tendency to compare immigrants from different countries. Focusing on Polish immigrant women, I have followed the basic assumptions of the emerging ethnicity literature, in the belief that the immigrant experience is qualitatively different from ethnicity. Ethnic identity involves the conscious creation of boundaries between peoples who are fundamentally at home in the American context. Present-day ethnicity rises out of the historical experience of immigrants, but it is not simply the evolution of traditional culture into modern traits. This perspective casts a different light on the interpretation of household patterns for historic populations. Rather than furthering an understanding of ethnicity, the examination of immigrant behavior implies comprehending ongoing processes of change for individuals in both the sending and receiving society. Family structure, community needs, and the availability of networks for different kinds of work—all are key influences on employment patterns for women. These factors combine with historical lifeways to affect behavior. History is an ongoing process: household patterns for a given group of women at a particular point in time and space reflect values and actions from the past as reformulated to fit current social and economic conditions.

This paper looks at the experience of Polish immigrant women in Sackville, a small textile community, and the larger industrial districts of Clifton Heights and Chester, two industrial communities which provided the textile mill with workers and served as social and commercial centers for the people who lived and worked at Sackville. Concentration on Sackville and its surrounding communities gives an additional, and contrasting, perspective to studies on large mills or company towns. The fluidity of movement between this workplace and the many others in the Delaware County area highlights the choices made by workers when locating employment or developing households. Tracing the paths of immigrant workers and their children between the relatively isolated village of Sackville and specific districts in the more urban locales of Chester and Clifton Heights illustrates the

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8 Jo Anne Schneider, "In the Big Village: Economic Adjustment and Identity Formation for Eastern European Refugees in Philadelphia" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1988), 343-404.
dynamics that created and sustained multiple immigrant communities within a very diverse immigrant and native-born neighborhood. As in many small workplaces throughout the United States, work rules at Sackville were highly informal throughout most of its history. Examining the interplay between work and home in this environment is very different from the dynamic at large companies with routinized work rules and even nominal personnel structures.

Precisely because of its characteristics as a small mill, the Sackville site invites study. Although such small establishments were prevalent throughout the Delaware Valley region in the nineteenth century, Sackville was one of the few mills remaining in operation under a continuous series of owners in the early 1980s. At that point, however, only finishing and shipping departments remained at the site, and the workforce consisted of twelve people. The availability of older workers from Sackville and the immigrant make-up of its workforce made the mill there an ideal place to look at issues surrounding immigrant adjustment and class formation. In addition, permanent closing of the worker housing at the mill village on January 3, 1934, due to an infestation of anthrax, created a dramatic transition between the nineteenth-century work milieu of close linkages between workplace and home and the twentieth-century pattern of employment being segregated from private life in the minds of the workers, and also in analytic terms. For these reasons, Sackville is both representative of the small mill experience and unique.

Sackville's first-generation immigrants and their children engaged in an adjustment process that occurred between 1900 and 1930. The year 1930 roughly marks the end of Sackville as an independent immigrant community; by then, the American-born children had reached adulthood, and the closure of the housing stock had ended community isolation. The support services in the adjoining immigrant districts also began to shift by 1930. As such, the Sackville experience parallels development in the ongoing transformation of work, the workforce, and neighborhood in the Philadelphia area.9

Sackville Woolen Mills, located approximately two miles above Chester on Ridley Creek in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, was a small mill concern in comparison to companies in Lowell, Massachusetts, or even the Kent Woolen Mills in nearby Clifton Heights, but in its heyday it employed as many as 300 workers. A mill of some sort had existed on the Sackville site since 1791, and a semi-autonomous village grew up, serving as both workplace and home to its workers and their families. The mill community exhibited all the attributes

of the nineteenth-century industrial community described by Anthony Wallace in *Rockdale.* The three-story mill stood at the center of the valley near the river. Worker housing was arranged in rows up the hillside, with larger houses for the skilled workers and foreman located above those of the regular hands. An overseer's house stood near the top of hill, and the mill owner's house sat astride the hill and the community below. By the turn of the century, one of the larger houses had been converted into a boarding house, run by a shop foreman. The village also contained a church used as a school and a small store. The entire mill community was nestled in a wooded valley, providing a rural setting where workers and their children could escape from the sights and sounds of the mill.

From 1900 through the 1950s, all operations involved in the production of heavy wool cloth, from carding to finishing work, were performed at this mill. Departments were largely segregated by sex. Descriptions from the early part of the century report that only men worked in the carding room and in finishing; women did doffing, spinning, and weaving, although men fixed the weaving machines; and drawing was divided, with half women, half men. Overall, the ratio was approximately one-third men to two-thirds women.

The 1910 census indicates the ethnic composition and age of some of this workforce. Sackville straddles two townships, and, unfortunately, census data for worker housing on the right side of the river has been lost. Information from the boarding house and worker houses near the top of the hill on the left-hand side of the creek is available. In the 1910 census the entire population for this site appears as Polish immigrants—from either the Russian or the Austrian sections of Poland—who had arrived between 1902 and 1910. In 1910 the households were comparatively young. In most cases the "head" and "wife" were in their twenties or thirties, and several households included young children. In addition to the twenty-three boarders listed for the boarding house, each of the smaller households also contained unrelated individuals. The boarders were mostly young women between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five, who listed their occupations as "spinners" or "twisters."

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In oral interviews the children of these turn-of-the-century workers recall the mill village as a busy place, with the worker tenements, consisting of a kitchen and living area downstairs, bedrooms upstairs, and an attic, filled. Often workers rented the attic, part of the bedroom space, or both, to boarders. Conditions in the worker tenements remained spartan; indoor plumbing, electricity, and running water were only installed in the bookkeeper’s house. Despite the lack of amenities, the children described Sackville as an idyllic setting. The houses were clean inside, and flowers were planted outside. Sackville’s rural location, amid the fields and trees of a comparatively unpopulated area, also made it a desirable place to work. On hot afternoons the children or young people would swim in the pond beyond the dam. The area was also a prime spot for picnics.13

Up until the 1930s, when worker housing was condemned due to an outbreak of anthrax, the mill village remained a semi-autonomous, semi-isolated community. The store on the hill provided much that the workers needed. Peddlers and butchers would come down to the village occasionally. Living in the mill village, the immigrants spoke Polish and Ukrainian among themselves, often failing to become fluent in English. Given the autonomy of the community, they had neither reason nor opportunity to learn the language or become completely Americanized. Work and immediate household needs were close at hand. The immigrants could walk to Brookhaven and catch a trolley down to the immigrant district of Chester if other goods were required. In Chester they could buy from a Jewish merchant who spoke their language. Trips to Chester were infrequent for many, however, because of transportation difficulties.

While a large influx of eastern European immigrants to Delaware County did not occur until after 1900, by 1910 these immigrants had

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13 This research comes out of an anthropological study of elderly mill workers at Sackville conducted in fall 1982. The anthropological tradition stresses anonymity for both subjects and research site. Subjects are seldom identified and place names are frequently changed to protect confidentiality. In this spirit, participants in this study were asked if they wanted their names used: most chose to remain anonymous. I decided to withhold names for the remaining subjects because identifying one person in a small community almost guarantees pinpointing the remaining participants by default. All interviews were conducted by me. Transcripts remain in my possession but are also subject to confidentiality rules. The paragraphs on the next few pages are based on interviews with former mill workers. Any references to interviews in the text refer to this body of material.
become a major factor in the industrial communities of the area. The immigrant communities of Chester and Clifton Heights arranged themselves into geographically segregated neighborhoods, with each nationality occupying a few blocks in a given section. The composition of the working-class districts also included native-born industrial workers, both black and white. According to the 1910 manuscript census, Chester wards seven and eight contained a mix of Italian, Scottish, Irish, and English immigrants, a few native-born Americans, and several households of Russian Jews. The ninth ward housed a large percentage of blacks. The tenth ward consisted of native-born, as well as Scottish, Irish, and English, and some eastern European immigrants. More than half of the eleventh ward was eastern European, predominantly Polish, with the rest of the ward housing English, Scottish, Irish, and a few native-born. Clifton Heights resembled Chester's tenth ward with some eastern European, Scottish, Irish, and English immigrants, and a few native-born households.

At Sackville, the workforce was mixed between new immigrants from Poland and the Ukraine and more established immigrants from England and Ireland until the first World War, when the workforce became almost entirely eastern European. During the time that the workforce was mixed between eastern Europeans and immigrants from the British Isles, the more established British immigrants held the better jobs and newer housing on the right-hand side of the creek. Children from the two groups would fight on the bridge. Eastern European immigrants and their children predominated in all levels of the workforce until the Second World War. From 1914 to 1940 Polish was the major language spoken in the mill village, and kinship and ethnic ties were the key avenues for employment and household arrangements.

The immigrants to Sackville and the industrial districts of Chester and Clifton Heights came as part of an increasing tide of Polish immigrants to America. Roughly two-thirds of the annual post-1900 immigration were men and one-third women. An average of 86 percent of the immigrants were between fourteen and forty-five years of age. Few came with families initially, indicating people migrating in search of work. Most immigrants in Sackville came from peasant classes of

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14 Statistics computed from the *Annual Report[s] of the Commissioner-General of Immigration* (Washington, 1900-1915) for the years 1900-1915.
eastern Europe experiencing transformation from peasantry into wage laborers as part of the industrialization in this region.¹⁵

While there is some debate concerning how Poles and Ukrainians first got to Sackville, recruitment patterns for the period from 1910 through 1940 are clear.¹⁶ Two major methods occurred. First, young immigrants, particularly women, were recruited directly from eastern Europe by existing workers. The boardinghouse keeper, Jacob Feyus, was himself a major source of new workers. Feyus came to America around 1900. He performed several jobs, eventually becoming night watchman in addition to running the boardinghouse. He wrote to Poland, offering work to village girls who were willing to emigrate to America. Feyus was known for paying the ship passage for young women recruited to the mill and allowing them to him pay him back from their wages. He also had a reputation as a shrewd businessman, charging his young boarders for every egg. Other workers came to Sackville through their relatives. One woman, for example, reported that her mother was brought to the mill by a brother who had emigrated to America several years before. Another man, who eventually became a foreman, settled in Sackville to join his brother after “grazing cattle for other people” in Europe.¹⁷

Sackville found the second labor recruitment source among the immigrant communities of nearby Clifton Heights and Chester. A suburb of Philadelphia, Clifton Heights had a concentration of industry, particularly textile mills; with an area of only .62 square miles, Clifton Heights had a population of 3,460 in 1916 and offered factory employment for 1,340 people, over one-third of its population. The


¹⁶ Factions within the worker population hold several different opinions as to the major source of workers at the mill. One group states that a loom mechanic recruited in Silesia by then mill owner Samuel Bancroft brought over several groups of Polish workers in the late nineteenth century, thus initiating chain migration to this mill. Another faction holds that the individual in question was not a recruiter at all, but that his brother-in-law, the boardinghouse keeper, did bring new immigrants to the mill.

¹⁷ Information on migration, Feyus, and all derive from interviews with former Sackville mill workers. See note 13 regarding the nature of the interviews.
industrial concentration in Chester's south wards was no doubt much higher. Chester, a small city approximately fifteen miles south of Philadelphia, had a variety of heavy industry, such as shipyards. \(^{18}\) Immigrants were attracted to employment in both these areas. The neighborhoods surrounding the factories housed both immigrant and native-born workers, and commercial strips that catered to a variety of ethnic groups developed. These two neighborhoods served the social and consumer needs of the immigrants who worked at Sackville. The Polish churches and eastern European food stores were located in these communities; so, too, were the ethnic clubs and Polish language school for the American-born children of workers. New immigrants would come to friends and relatives in these two areas. When looking for work, they were often told to “Go on down to Columbia,” as Sackville was called at the time. One longtime worker, for example, reported that her mother came to “Shultz’s mother,” who lived in Clifton Heights, when she first came from Poland. While her family mostly settled in Chester, members of both households worked at Sackville from time to time. The immigrant sponsor sent this particular newcomer to Sackville. \(^{19}\) Sackville mill was known for giving “green” immigrants a chance to work, although it paid lower wages than the larger mills. In addition, immigrants from peasant areas of eastern Europe considered the rural setting an advantage.

Until the 1940s, hiring at the Sackville mill depended primarily on personal contacts. A prospective worker would inquire about a job through a department foreman. Supervisors would pick out the workers they needed and then inform the office of their decision. No one filled out an application form. Every former worker who has been interviewed for this study described the mill in these early years as a “happy family.” In fact, the “family” atmosphere was reinforced by an intermingling of work and home. Workers who grew up at the mill reported that the owners would frequently allow the children to play in the mill after school when their mothers were working the second shift. Even the children recognized this as a dangerous practice. Still,

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\(^{19}\) Interview with Mrs. L. conducted by Jo Anne Schneider, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, fall, 1982.
former workers perceived this informal child-care strategy as an asset to both worker and owner, with the owner “bending the rules to benefit female workers” while he developed a ready-made workforce as children learned the job by playing around the machines.

Although the workforce at Sackville continued to turn over fairly rapidly throughout its history, a core labor force developed from turn-of-the-century immigrants. Some families continued to live at Sackville, and children eventually joined their parents in the mill. For girls, this was often a two-step process. Around age twelve or thirteen they would quit school and start to manage the household and take care of younger children, so that their mothers could work in the mill. As other children grew older, they would enter the factory themselves. Mrs. F. is a good example. She dropped out of school during the seventh grade in order to help care for her family. At age thirteen, the youngest legal working age at the time, she began working in the mill three days a week and caring for the children the other two days. She eventually worked at Sackville for forty-two years. As the oldest daughter, she was most tied to the mill by family responsibilities. Her younger brothers and sisters found better-paying jobs in other factories, and the youngest completed high school. When asked if she regretted dropping out of school, Mrs. F. replied:

See, when I was young, parents thought the first thing was to get a job, and so you got a job and they thought you had it made. See, I got this job and I thought I couldn’t do nothing else. 20

Another woman reported that she was forced to quit school at age fourteen, because her father was laid off at the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Chester. Slightly younger than Mrs. F., this woman was required to attend “continuation school” in the afternoons until she reached age sixteen. Although she did not live at Sackville, she joined her mother working in the mill and stayed through the 1950s. 21

The 1910 manuscript census data reveal that the labor force at that time in Clifton Heights and the eleventh ward of Chester consisted

20 Interview with Mrs. F. conducted by Jo Anne Schneider, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, fall, 1982.
21 Interview with Mrs. D. conducted by Jo Anne Schneider, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, fall, 1982.
mostly of immigrants from eastern Europe, predominantly Poland, and the British Isles. As documented by William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, Poles tended to immigrate to the United States as young singles in search of short-term employment in order to earn money either to allow themselves to buy land or, in a greater number of cases, to maintain and augment family land holdings. After several years working in this country, they sometimes decided to stay in the United States and form families here. As described below, this process had only begun in the Philadelphia area in 1910. Due to the nature of the labor market in this era, most Poles were employed in low-paid semiskilled positions at the bottom of the labor hierarchy.

British immigrants had been in the United States longer. The major influx of British immigrants occurred between 1840 and 1880. By 1910 they were well-established in America, both financially and in terms of household status. Although most British immigrants in the Sackville sample came to the United States as young people like the Poles and Ukrainians, by 1910 they had been in the United States at least twenty years, giving them time to establish families. In addition, immigrants from this group were older, and they tended to hold better-paying jobs as skilled workers or foremen, than did the eastern European immigrants.

Examination of household composition and work patterns reveals differences across nationality groups. These differences probably reflect a combination of factors, including the nature of the industry employing residents of a particular district, the place of members of that nationality group within the employment hierarchy of the industry, the arrival date of the immigrants in the group, and culture-based patterns. The influence of one factor over another can be inferred in some cases. The following tables show household statistics on approximately a 40 percent sample of Clifton Heights and Chester's eleventh ward. Table A represents household work patterns, Table B household composition, Table C information on boarders, and Table D households with working wives. Tables A and B are divided into four categories: Polish/Ukrainian, British Isles, American, and Other. The

23 Isaac Hourwich, Immigrants and Labor (New York, 1912), 12.
households in the *Polish/Ukrainian* category include those eastern Europeans of peasant stock who immigrated to America at the turn of the century. The *British Isles* category refers to English, Scottish, and Irish immigrants and their children. Households where members are native-born, but whose parents belonged to this immigrant group, are included in this category. The *American* category represents households where place of birth for all members and their parents is recorded as native-born. The *Other* category includes several Italian, German, and Russian Jewish families, and one household each of French Canadian, Swedish, and Chinese. For Tables A, B, and D statistics are divided into sections for “Chester,” “Clifton Heights,” and “Overall” (an aggregate of the figures for the two areas under study). These tables can be read as follows: the number on the left of the first line of each cell is the number of households in the category; the row percentage

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\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{WORKERS IN HOUSEHOLD} & \textbf{NATIONALITY/ETHNICITY} & \textbf{British Isles} & \textbf{American} & \textbf{Other} & \textbf{Total} \\
\hline
\textbf{Head Only} & Polish/Ukrainian & 28.26\% & 47.45\% & 18.17\% & 13.12\% & 106.100 \% \\
& British Isles & 31\% & 41\% & 47\% & 59\% & 40\% \\
& Other & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% \\
& Total & 46\% & 7\% & 11\% & 0\% & 54.100\% \\
\hline
\textbf{Head & Boarders} & Polish/Ukrainian & 42.78\% & 8.15\% & 4.7\% & 0.0\% & 116.8\% \\
& American & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% \\
& Other & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% \\
& Total & 46\% & 7\% & 11\% & 0\% & 120.100\% \\
\hline
\textbf{Children Only} & Polish/Ukrainian & 0.0\% & 15.79\% & 4.21\% & 0.0\% & 19.100\% \\
& British Isles & 0\% & 13\% & 11\% & 0\% & 7\% \\
& Other & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% \\
& Total & 47\% & 41\% & 46\% & 54\% & 100\% \\
\hline
\textbf{Head & Wife} & Polish/Ukrainian & 11.69\% & 3.19\% & 1.6\% & 1.6\% & 16.100\% \\
& American & 12\% & 3\% & 2\% & 5\% & 6\% \\
& Other & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% \\
& Total & 47\% & 41\% & 46\% & 54\% & 100\% \\
\hline
\textbf{Head, Wife & Children} & Polish/Ukrainian & 2.17\% & 4.33\% & 4.42\% & 1.8\% & 12.100\% \\
& American & 2\% & 3\% & 13\% & 5\% & 5\% \\
& Other & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% \\
& Total & 47\% & 41\% & 46\% & 54\% & 100\% \\
\hline
\textbf{Head & Children} & Polish/Ukrainian & 8.14\% & 38.64\% & 6.10\% & 7.12\% & 59.100\% \\
& American & 9\% & 33\% & 16\% & 31\% & 22\% \\
& Other & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% & 0\% \\
& Total & 47\% & 41\% & 46\% & 54\% & 100\% \\
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### TABLE A (continued)

#### Work Patterns 1910, Clifton Heights

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<th>British Isles</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>Head &amp; Wife</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>9 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head, Wife &amp; Children</td>
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<td>2 22%</td>
<td>3 34%</td>
<td>4 44%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head &amp; Children</td>
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<td>2 072%</td>
<td>4 14%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>60 59%</td>
<td>20 19%</td>
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#### Work Patterns 1910, Chester

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<th>British Isles</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>20 31%</td>
<td>12 18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head Only and Boarders</td>
<td></td>
<td>40 85%</td>
<td>11 1%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>47 100%</td>
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<td>Head &amp; Wife</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head &amp; Children</td>
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<td>6 19%</td>
<td>18 59%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>55 34%</td>
<td>18 11%</td>
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### TABLE B
Household Composition 1910, Overall

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<th>HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION</th>
<th>NATIONALITY/ETHNICITY</th>
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<th>British Isles</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>68 51%</td>
<td>23 17%</td>
<td>19 14%</td>
<td>134 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarders</td>
<td></td>
<td>46 63%</td>
<td>21 29%</td>
<td>5 7%</td>
<td>1 1%</td>
<td>73 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>7 17%</td>
<td>24 57%</td>
<td>9 21%</td>
<td>2 5%</td>
<td>42 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boarders &amp; Relatives</td>
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<td>14 82%</td>
<td>2 12%</td>
<td>1 6%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>17 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>91 34%</td>
<td>115 44%</td>
<td>38 14%</td>
<td>22 8%</td>
<td>266 100%</td>
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Household Composition 1910, Clifton Heights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION</th>
<th>NATIONALITY/ETHNICITY</th>
<th>Polish/ Ukrainian</th>
<th>British Isles</th>
<th>American</th>
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<td></td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>39 66%</td>
<td>13 23%</td>
<td>4 6%</td>
<td>59 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarders</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 48%</td>
<td>10 43%</td>
<td>2 9%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>23 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 11%</td>
<td>10 56%</td>
<td>5 28%</td>
<td>1 5%</td>
<td>18 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarders &amp; Relatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 50%</td>
<td>1 50%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>2 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>17 17%</td>
<td>60 59%</td>
<td>20 19%</td>
<td>5 5%</td>
<td>102 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Household Composition 1910, Chester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION</th>
<th>NATIONALITY/ETHNICITY</th>
<th>Polish/ Ukrainian</th>
<th>British Isles</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Only</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 28%</td>
<td>29 39%</td>
<td>10 13%</td>
<td>15 20%</td>
<td>75 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarders</td>
<td></td>
<td>35 70%</td>
<td>11 22%</td>
<td>3 6%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 21%</td>
<td>14 58%</td>
<td>4 17%</td>
<td>1 4%</td>
<td>24 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarders &amp; Relatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>13 86%</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>15 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>74 45%</td>
<td>55 34%</td>
<td>18 11%</td>
<td>17 10%</td>
<td>164 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE C
Total Number of Boarders by Sex and Locality 1910 and Per Household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton Heights</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only row percentages are listed.

BOARDERS PER HOUSEHOLD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Polish/Ukrainian</th>
<th>British Isles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Clifton Heights</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Chester</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Overall</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

is on the same line, to the right of the N; the column percentage is on the line below the N.

Overall, these tables indicate different patterns for each group. Eastern European households were less likely than any other group to rely on only the income of the male head of household. They also were more likely to contain boarders, and they kept more boarders per household than any other group. While wives worked outside the home in only 11 percent of households overall, women in the eastern European and American categories were employed more often than immigrants from the British Isles or Other categories. In comparison to other categories, children in the British Isles group were more likely to work. Polish households at this time showed the opposite tendency.

Interpretation of these statistics requires information beyond raw numbers. The first anomaly in these tables is the contrast between the oral history statements that eastern European women worked after
marriage, and the small number of households with working wives reported in the census. This problem is clarified by analyzing the age and family composition structure within the household. In 1910 adults in most of the eastern European households were in their twenties, and the majority of children in these households were under the age of five. Few older children or "grandmothers" were available to provide child care. Unless a young mother could find another person to care for her children, factory work was difficult to manage. Given these structural attributes, eastern European women in this time period could not work outside the home because family commitments made it impossible.
The oral histories largely present the memories of first-generation children starting from around 1915. These are the young children represented in the 1910 census material. Their recollections that their mothers returned to factory work after they were old enough to help out at home support the view that family commitments prevented women in this group from working outside the home. Caroline Golab also reports a similar pattern of Polish women returning to factory work after their children became old enough to assume child-care and housekeeping chores.\textsuperscript{24} The linkage between child-care problems and work schedules is highlighted by the practice of allowing children to play in the factory while their parents worked at Sackville. Several workers mentioned that they came to the factory when their mothers had to work overtime, perhaps indicating that fathers may have been helping to watch children or that other neighborhood women who would normally share child-care tasks also may have been working during a high-volume period.

Despite their time commitments to small children, eastern European households needed to supplement their incomes. The occupations listed in the census for eastern European immigrants are mostly at the bottom of the economic hierarchy—e.g., many men are only identified as ‘laborers.’ Because such work was low paying and highly unstable, eastern European households often relied on income from every member possible and from any source. In contrast, heads of households in the \textit{British Isles} and \textit{American} categories were more likely to hold skilled or supervisory positions which provided a much higher and steadier income. This, in part, explains why more of these households relied on only the income of the head of the household, and fewer wives in these households worked outside the home.

Another source of income for households was boarders. Sixty-six percent of the eastern European households kept boarders, compared to 20 percent for the next largest group, immigrants from the British Isles. Furthermore, eastern Europeans kept three times as many boarders as households in the \textit{British Isles} category. A study of Pittsburgh immigrants also reports a high number of boarders per household for Poles. Data from Pittsburgh indicate that young households particu-

\textsuperscript{24} Golab, \textit{Immigrant Destinations}, 24.
larly used boarders to supplement income. Between 1900 and 1930 the average number of boarders in young families was 4.9 for Russian Poles and 4.0 for German Poles, but dropped to 3.5 for Russian Poles in mid-stage families and 1.0 for German Poles. Louise Lamphere also discovered the prevalence of boarders in Polish households with young families in Central Falls, Massachusetts. Married women in her sample either maintained their own households and took in boarders or worked in factories themselves while boarding with another family.

Keeping boarders suggests an economic motivation, but this may not be the only reason for the high number of boarders in eastern European households. Seventy-four percent of eastern European households in the Sackville-area sample included some individual external to the nuclear family. In all, 275 eastern European boarders appear in this sample, nine times as many as for the next largest group. Boarders tended to stay with families from their country of origin. The large influx of eastern European immigrants in the early twentieth century and the often-reported fact that most of these immigrants were drawn to particular communities through friends and relatives imply that boarders were a social obligation as well as an economic necessity. Oral history data support this view. To cite one example, Mrs. K. moved into her aunt's house in Sackville from the family home in Chester when she began working at the mill full time. She continued to board with relatives until she married. Another child and grandchild of Sackville workers reported that "everyone was some kind of distant cousin." One man reported boarding with family friends in Chester when he took a job outside of Sackville as a young man. When describing all the boarders who lived at Sackville during the first two decades of the century, Mrs. F. exclaimed that "there were just so many people!" Simply put, the eastern European immigrant community included a number of people who needed to be boarded, and households contributed their part.

Industrial requirements also influenced when and where women worked outside their homes. Clifton Heights, as a center for the textile

27 Interviews with Mrs. K., Mr. S., and Mrs. F. conducted by Jo Anne Schneider, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, fall, 1982.
industry, offered a large number of jobs for women, but the heavy industries located in Chester did not. Differences in employment possibilities were reflected in the statistics on working wives and boarders in the census material. While wives worked in only a few households in this sample, 64 percent of those were in Clifton Heights. Married women worked in 18 percent of the households in Clifton Heights compared to only 6 percent in Chester. Even though more wives worked in factories in Clifton Heights, the average number of boarders for this community was higher, 5.3 compared to 3.8 for Chester. In addition, 82 percent of households in Clifton Heights contained boarders, compared to 72 percent for Chester. This would indicate that boarders were not just substitutes for factory work for women. In her study of Amoskeag, Tamara Hareven corroborates this view, stating that:

Nor was the presence of boarders and lodgers in the household a substitute for the work of wives and children. Those households that depended on the wages of wives and children also needed additional income from boarders. (There was no statistically significant correlation between the presence of boarders in the household and the labor-force participation of other family members.) In fact, wives in male-headed households with boarders were more likely to work outside the home than wives in households without boarders.\textsuperscript{28}

The data on boarders are even more revealing. These figures indicate that the number of women working depended on the availability of jobs. While there were more male boarders overall, and many more eastern Europeans listed as boarders, the percentage of boarders per sex was virtually identical across ethnic groups. Thirty-five to 36 percent of boarders in Clifton Heights were female, compared to 22 to 25 percent in Chester. The effect of industry needs on employment for young women is most obvious in Sackville, where boarders were predominantly female. The immigration patterns from the oral history material confirm this view. Many of the workers reported their mothers emigrating to friends or relatives in Clifton Heights or Sackville, while men more often either started out in Chester or came directly to Sackville from the port in Philadelphia.

Thus, four factors combined to determine women's work habits and household structure: family life cycle needs, household economic needs, the social requirements of the immigrant community, and the nature of the local labor market. Married women were more likely to work if their children were old enough to care for themselves or another relative or friend was available to baby-sit, if household income required multiple wage earners, and if jobs were available. Boarders were kept by households with little income in an immigrant community with large numbers of single individuals requiring housing.

The discussion thus far has concentrated on social and economic factors in the United States which affected the behavior of immigrant women. In order to comprehend fully the context for household strategies, it is equally important to understand conditions in the immigrants' countries of origin. This process does not require documenting a set of Old World values which motivated immigrant behavior in the new country, but defining the framework of the historical and social environment which fueled the immigration process on both sides of the Atlantic.

Writing in the early twentieth century, Thomas and Znaniecki documented social change for Polish peasants in both Europe and America. They described an agriculturally based family system in Europe, where a family group was a corporate entity with extended kin obligations primarily concerned with maintenance and development of group landholdings. Each member of the household was obligated to participate in the maintenance of the whole. In addition, extended family and village ties implied mutual support for a large number of individuals outside of the nuclear family.29

Even while documenting longstanding patterns, the authors described a period of rapid change. Polish peasants had only been granted freedom from feudal obligations one or two generations prior to the period portrayed in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*.30 Freedom included granting peasants formal title to their land for the first time. Thus, the raison d'être of the "traditional" corporate family unit

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30 Thomas and Znaniecki used the "ethnographic present" in their study, most likely having collected their information in the first decade of the twentieth century. Their book was first published in Polish before coming out in an English edition in 1918.
had itself evolved to fit a recent situation. Ownership of property meant an obligation to pay taxes, which were due in cash, as well as the ability to buy more land or lose current holdings due to financial hardship. At least for the section of Poland owned by Russia at that time, the burden of taxes was described as "in inverse ratio to the means of the taxpayer."

These additional obligations changed the objective of farming from simply supplying family needs to production for profit. This trend also drew peasants into wage labor as limited ability to grow surplus crops necessitated finding additional sources of income. Sending younger members of the family group out to work, first in the neighborhood and then eventually to America, became a strategy to maintain the family unit and its landholdings. Families created in the United States became an extension of the European system as immigrants provided housing for related individuals and sent money back to Europe to sustain the family farm. American-based Polish immigrant households also echoed the sense of corporate unity as all members of the household old enough to work, either in the house or for money wages outside of the home, contributed to family upkeep. Peasants also strove to buy property in America in an approximation of European patterns. In Poland and the United States, household strategies represented both continuity and change.

While immigrant behavior in both countries reflected larger social and economic conditions, peasants did not simply confront the national context as undifferentiated members of American or Polish society. Like immigrants from other countries, Poles came to the United States through social networks and settled within socially bounded immigrant communities. Interaction with the American system was thus mediated through the immigrant context. Polish immigrant neighborhoods in Chester and Clifton Heights contained any number of co-immigrants to provide information, advice, and material resources to newcomers. Community patterns reinforced individual household strategies. The presence of Jewish merchants in both areas even allowed the Polish peasants to maintain familiar economic relationships in their home language while living in the United States. To quote Thomas and Znaniecki: "The fundamental process which has been going on during

this period is the formation of a new Polish-American society out of those fragments separated from Polish society and embedded in American society.\textsuperscript{33}

Taken together, these contexts indicate the dynamic between historical tendencies and current structural exigencies as they affected immigrant behavior. Household strategies fit the needs of young working-class families existing within the United States and these particular social communities. As people and information shuttled from Poland to the United States, patterns in both countries reinforced each other. Economic behavior for Polish women sometimes differed from that of other immigrants or native-born workers because of the specific conditions in these communities. European patterns were not simply recreated in the United States, nor were the values of the home country immune from change.

These self-contained immigrant communities did not survive beyond one generation. As American-born children responded to the social and economic conditions of their own context, different expectations and strategies developed. The transition from immigrant to "ethnic" was necessarily a process of continuation as the first generation grew up within the American context. Children in the Sackville community might not have spoken English until they reached school age, but they ultimately grew up as part of the American system. Eventually, ethnic identities formed out of current social conditions that reflected historical circumstances. One woman described the first-generation transition from immigrant to ethnic while trying to define "American":

I'm an American citizen because I was born here, but my people were immigrants. But you see, Americans, they don't know another nationality. They only have one nationality, that's it.\textsuperscript{34}

Her response attests to her multiple experience growing up in an immigrant community. She does not consider herself "plain Ameri-
can,” but she would not describe herself as Polish, either. This self-definition reinforces the idea of immigrant and ethnic communities as “transformational” entities.35

Descriptions of immigrant behavior by elderly immigrants or the second generation reveal yet another layer of interpretation of past events. The fifty- or sixty-year time span between the events and data collection allows plenty of opportunity for reinterpretation of events and elliptical memory. For example, a number of workers commented that women usually quit work and stayed home after they married. The same people reported that both the second-generation women in their own families and their mothers worked throughout their lives with short lapses due to child-raising considerations. This contradiction between personal experience and interpretation reflects post-World War II ideology that married women should remain at home with their children. Labeling household patterns simply as ethnic behavior also implies interpreting immigrant experience in light of existing group formations and expectations.

It is important to remember that the separation of home from workplace, the redefinition of home as a private place away from the public economic sphere, and the reinterpretation of women’s work inside the home as intrinsically different from tasks performed outside the physical household for money wages—all are relatively recent phenomena.36 Interpretation of early twentieth-century strategies in terms of a home/workplace dichotomy mirrors current ideology. It is entirely possible that immigrant women did not classify work according to private or public spheres or the presence of the pay envelope. The blurring of home and work at Sackville, where family life in the home was determined by the factory bell and children played in the factory, underlines the difference in expectations. Thus, the choice to work inside or outside the home likely depended on other factors of their

35 “Transformational,” as used here, implies that ethnic communities come out of the interaction between past heritage and present circumstances. The concept relies on theories of imagery presented in W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986), 38; and the understanding of history developed by Eric Wolf in *Europe: The People Without History* (Berkeley, 1982).

36 See, for example, Karen Sacks, “Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property,” in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford, 1974), 207-22.
daily lives than established cultural patterns from the country of origin. To summarize, Polish immigrant women were probably too busy maintaining their families' needs in any way possible, although the few choices available may have been framed by past experience. Like their counterparts in Poland, they were undergoing a process of cultural change—in this case from Polish peasant to Polish-American immigrant worker.

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